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# Is the **BIBLE** really the **WORD** of **GOD**?



**Isaac Boaheng (PhD)**

Foreword by: Prof. Frederick Mawusi Amevenku

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# **IS THE BIBLE REALLY THE WORD OF GOD?**

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ISAAC BOAHENG  
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## **DEDICATION**

To my mother: Mad. Mary Ampomah

To my wife: Mrs. Gloria Boaheng

To my five adorable children: Christian, Benedict, Julia, Kalix  
and Myjiloy.

It is my prayer that you grow to become spiritual intellectuals  
for the Church, the family, the nation and the world at large.

Amen!

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The leaderships of The Most Reverends Dr. Robert K. Aboagyee-Mensah, Prof. Emmanuel K. Asante, (both Past Presiding Bishops, Methodist Church Ghana [MCG]), Titus Awotwe Pratt (the Immediate Past Presiding Bishop, MCG), and Dr. Paul K. Bofo (current Presiding Bishop, MCG) have contributed to my Christian, ministerial, intellectual and leadership development in various ways. I salute you all. I am also grateful to the Rt. Rev. Daniel K. Tannor (immediate past Bishop of Sunyani Diocese) for his fatherly role and encouragement throughout my ministry. I also thank the Very Rev. Prof. John D. K. Ekem for his encouragement and support towards my ministerial and academic endeavours.

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***Soli Deo Gloria!* — To God alone be the glory!**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	v
FOREWORD .....	ix
PREFACE.....	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	xiv
PONDER THESE WORDS .....	xv
INTRODUCTION .....	xvi
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
INTRODUCING CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS.....	1
Defining Christian Apologetics .....	1
Biblical foundations of Christian Apologetics .....	2
Functions of Christian Apologetics .....	5
Christian Apologetics and Evangelism .....	7
CHAPTER TWO.....	15
WHAT IS THE BIBLE? .....	15
The Bible as Divine Revelation.....	15
The Dual Nature of the Bible .....	16
The Inspiration of the Bible.....	19
The Inerrancy of the Bible.....	24
The Four Attributes of the Bible .....	31
What makes the Bible a unique book? .....	36
Conclusion.....	41



CHAPTER THREE .....	42
DOES THE BIBLE CONTAIN THE RIGHT BOOKS? .....	42
What is the Biblical Canon? .....	42
Canonization of the Old Testament .....	44
Official recognition of the canon at Jumnia .....	49
How were the books of the Old Testament selected?.....	50
Canonization of the New Testament .....	52
How were the books of the New Testament selected? .....	59
What about the so-called Old Testament missing books? ..	60
What about the so-called New Testament missing books? ..	65
Conclusion .....	67
CHAPTER FOUR .....	69
IS THE OLD TESTAMENT HISTORICALLY ACCURATE? .....	69
.....	69
Accuracy in Manuscript Transmission .....	69
Copyist errors .....	73
The Testimony of Abundant Hebrew Manuscripts .....	77
The Testimony of Ancient Versions.....	79
The Testimony of Archeology.....	82
Conclusion .....	87
CHAPTER FIVE .....	89
IS THE NEW TESTAMENT HISTORICALLY ACCURATE?.....	89
The Testimony of Abundant Greek Manuscripts .....	89
The Testimony of the Church Fathers .....	95

The Testimony of Archeology.....	96
Conclusion.....	102
CHAPTER SIX .....	104
WHAT ABOUT “APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS” IN THE BIBLE? .....	104
Cases from the Old Testament .....	104
Are there two contradictory creation accounts? .....	104
Where did Cain get his wife? .....	105
How could God condemn human sacrifice and yet command it? .....	107
Was God known by His name Yahweh before Moses’ time? .....	109
How could God harden Pharaoh’s heart and yet hold Pharaoh responsible? .....	111
How could God “give” Saul’s wives to David without endorsing polygamy?.....	113
Cases from the New Testament.....	115
Why are the Gospel accounts sometimes different?.....	115
Why was Jesus not called Immanuel? .....	116
Was Jesus interred for three days? .....	118
What inscription was written on Jesus’ cross? .....	120
Was Jesus crucified in the third hour or the sixth hour? .....	121
How many angels were at Jesus’ tomb?.....	124
How could Jesus be God and yet be tempted when the Bible says God cannot be tempted?.....	125
Did Judas hang himself or did he fall headlong? .....	126

Is justification by faith or works (Paul vs. James)?.....	128
Before concluding that there are errors in the Bible .....	129
Conclusion.....	131
CHAPTER SEVEN .....	132
ARE MODERN TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE TRUSTWORTHY? .....	132
What is Bible Translation? .....	132
Philosophies of Bible Translation .....	133
Why are there so many versions of the Bible? .....	135
Are Revised Editions of the Bible watering down God’s word? .....	137
Are there Bible verses missing in our modern Bibles? ....	141
For what reasons are these verses “missing”? .....	143
What do the “missing” verses really say? .....	145
Are these verses really missing?.....	147
Conclusion.....	148
CONCLUDING ISSUES .....	149
Is the “Ancient Book” still relevant today? .....	149
So, is the Bible really the word of God? .....	151
How are we to interpret the Bible?.....	152
What next?.....	155
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	157
SUBJECT INDEX.....	164
ABOUT AUTHOR.....	168

## FOREWORD

In the book, “Is the Bible Really the Word of God?”, Rev. Dr. Isaac Boaheng, a young, upcoming and enterprising theologian gathers valuable data to explain why the Bible must be accepted as the ONLY inspired Word of God. This well-researched and yet accessible book is the author’s contribution to a lofty goal of seeing a vibrant Christian Apologetic Movement in Ghana to defend the Bible against unjustified attacks. One key feature of the book is the author’s attempt to respond to wild allegations against the Bible in an objective and open-minded manner. In doing this, the author is generous enough to even address certain ignorant allegations against some specific versions of the Bible by some Christian leaders who should have known better. The honest inquirer has a lot to reflect upon as offered by this book.

I heartily recommend this book to anyone desirous of understanding what it means to say that the Bible is the Word of God. Besides, those who are seeking answers regarding how to explain some of the so-called “apparent contradictions” in the Bible will find the book most helpful. It is noteworthy that the book further attempts to enlist and encourage every believer as an ardent Christian Apologist, defending the faith

everywhere. Rev. Dr. Boaheng deserves much commendation for his bold effort.

**Rev. Prof. Frederick Mawusi Ameenku**  
*Associate Professor in New Testament Studies*  
*Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Ghana*



## PREFACE

I have had the dream to publish a book on Apologetics for several years now. However, the immediate impetus for writing this book came from the experience of delivering a paper on the topic “The Bible: Fiction, Fable or Fact?” to the Brong-Ahafo Regional Scripture Union during their maiden “Holiday Bible School” program held in Sunyani, Ghana. As I delivered the paper, I became aware, on the one hand, of the immediate relevance of this material for the reading public, and, on the other hand, the lack of an adequate, recent, easy-to-read study to put in their hands. This book is my modest attempt to present a concise, systematic, logical and practical treatment of key questions related to the authenticity of the Christian Bible.

The book is organized into seven main chapters aside from the general introduction and conclusion. After a general introduction to the study, the first chapter highlights key aspects of Christian Apologetics. The second chapter deals with major features of the Bible, including the inspiration, inerrancy, authority, sufficiency, clarity, necessity and uniqueness of Scripture. The third chapter focuses on how the sixty-six (66) books of the Bible were recognized and accepted as Scripture. The study notes that the writing and selection of the books of the Bible was a divine act whereby God led the church to

recognize His inspired books as Scripture from among so many other writings.

In the fourth chapter, the study contends for the reliability of the Old Testament based on the accuracy of Hebrew manuscript transmission, evidence from abundant manuscripts available today as well as witnesses of the Dead Sea Scrolls, ancient versions and Archeology. The authenticity of the New Testament is also substantiated in the fifth chapter based on the testimonies of abundant Greek manuscripts, of the Church Fathers, and Archeological discoveries.

The sixth chapter considers cases of alleged errors and contradictions in the Bible. The claim that the Bible has been corrupted through various translations and revisions as well as allegations of missing New Testament verses are considered in chapter seven. The book concludes by looking at the applicability of the “ancient book” to contemporary situations and then draws vital conclusions from the entire study. Putting all the chapters together, the book contends that the Bible is the **ONLY** authoritative and inspired word of God, and as such, must have the final authority in matters related to faith and practice.

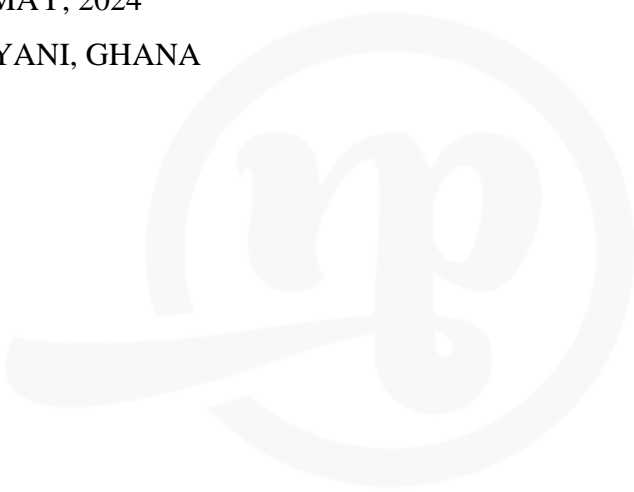
In preparing this book, I tried as much as possible to avoid the use of technical terms but where they have been used, explanations have been provided for each of them. The use of

simple, straightforward language makes this study accessible to Christians who want to firm up their faith in God's word, the Bible. I am very hopeful that a critical engagement with the book will increase one's confidence in the Bible more than ever before.

**ISAAC BOAHENG (PhD)**

1ST MAY, 2024

SUNYANI, GHANA





## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### **Bible Translations and others**

AD	In the year of the Lord
BC	Before Christ
cf	confer
LXX	Septuagint
NIV	New International Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

### **Books of the Bible**

#### **Old Testament books**

Gen, Exod, Lev, Num, Deut, Josh, Judg, Ruth, 1-2 Sam, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chron, Ezra, Neh, Est, Job, Psa, Prov, Eccles, Song, Isa, Jer, Lam, Ezek, Dan, Hos, Joel, Amos, Obad, Jonah, Mic, Nah, Hab, Zeph, Hag, Zech, Mal

#### **New Testament books**

Matt, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Rom, 1-2 Cor, Gal, Eph, Phil, Col, 1-2 Thess, 1-2 Tim, Titus, Philem, Heb, James, 1-2 Pet, 1-3 John, Jude, Rev

#### **Deuterocanonical books**

Tob, Sir, 1&2 Macc

## **PONDER THESE WORDS**

What then, are you God, if not the Lord? For who is Lord but the Lord? Or who is God save our God? Highest and best, powerful, almighty, most merciful and just, deeply hidden and yet omnipresent, beautiful, strong, stable yet incomprehensible, renewing all things while you yourself endure; neither new nor old, but making everything new; bringing the proud to decay without their realizing it; ever active and yet at rest, ever gathering, yet not in want.

You uphold, satisfy, protect, create, nourish and bring perfection. You seek what you do not need. You love, but with no passionate feeling; you are jealous, but without anxiety or fear, you repent, but do not grieve; in anger you are calm; you change your actions but not your plans; you take back what you find without having ever lost it; never needy, yet you are content with gain; never greedy, you demand excess profit from your loans. You are overpaid, and yet who has anything not yours already?

And what have we actually said, my God, my holy sweetness and life? What can anyone succeed in saying when attempting to talk about you? Yet, woe to those who fail to speak of you altogether. Even the dumb speak of you.

**(St. Augustine of Hippo, 354-430 AD)**

## INTRODUCTION

(by Rev. Dr. Kwaku Boamah)

Religious pluralism (that is, the existence of diverse religious faiths in a given society) has prompted various religions to intensify efforts geared toward making converts. Consequently, there are so many voices from different religious groups—Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, African Traditional Religion and others—appealing to people day in, and day out. In the process of presenting their message, some religions resort to attacks on others. The Christian faith has suffered such attacks throughout its history, but more so in the 21st century. There are numerous attacks on the Bible. Critics allege that the Bible is full of contradictions, errors and fabricated stories. Consequently, there are many Christians whose confidence in the Bible as the word of God keeps reducing. The need for a study that investigates critics' claims about the Bible is therefore a key theological concern, especially in Ghana/Africa where literature dealing with alleged contradictions and errors (among others) is lacking.

*Is the Bible Really the Word of God?* presents to us and generations to be born, questions that have plagued many minds in Christianity from its origin to today and will most surely afflict future generations. In this book, one can find a critical treatment of the central issues of Christian development, particularly around the development of scriptures. The text

skillfully unravels the many arguments, contests and issues round the Christian Holy Book, the Bible; from its formation to acceptance, giving credence to its contents and intent in the building of Christian theology.

The book is an exercise in Christian Apologetics aimed at investigating key questions raised by critics about the Christian view that the Bible as the only inspired and authoritative word of God to humanity. The key question of investigation is: “On what basis should we trust the Bible as the only authoritative and inspired Word of God?” To answer this question fully, the study attempts to answer subsidiary questions like: What is the Bible? How did we get the Bible? Has the Bible been preserved accurately for thousands of years as a unique revelation from God till today? Are there really factual mistakes and contradictions in the Bible? Have the different translations of the Bible not compromised the original message of the Bible? Are there verses missing in our Bibles? Is the Bible vital and relevant today?

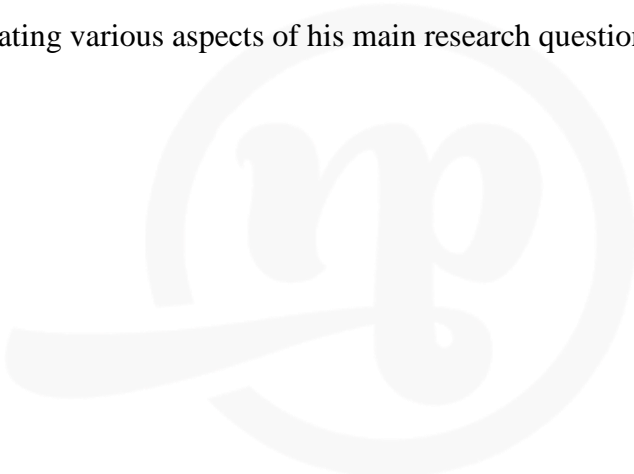
The author has organized his study into seven chapters as follows: Chapter One, “Introducing Christian Apologetics” deals with introductory issues to the subject of Apologetics in order to prepare the reader for the chapters that follow. In Chapter Two, “What is the Bible”, the author highlights key elements of the Bible, including the inspiration, inerrancy, authority, sufficiency, clarity, necessity and uniqueness of

Scripture. Chapter three answers the question of how the sixty-six (66) books of the Bible were recognized and accepted as Scripture while the fourth and fifth chapters consider the historical trustworthiness of the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible. These chapters establish the accuracy of the Bible based on the accuracy of text transmission, archaeological discoveries, witnesses from abundant manuscript copies and other factors. The sixth chapter then considers so-called “contradictions” in the Bible by examining sample texts from both the Old and the New Testaments. The claim that the Bible has been corrupted through various translations and revisions as well as allegations of missing New Testament verses are considered in chapter seven. Finally, the book concludes by looking at the applicability of the “ancient book” to contemporary situations and then draws vital conclusions from the entire study. Throughout the book, the author contends that the Bible is the **ONLY** authoritative and inspired word of God, and as such must have the final authority in matters related to faith and practice.

The study has the potential of equipping Christians to respond to objections raised against their faith, particularly in relation to the authenticity of the Bible. This text is extremely useful to theologians, Biblicists, Historians and the Religious community in general. Though the subject it deals with is technical, the book is in an enviably unsophisticated manner

without losing any essence makes an impact on the life of targeted readers- educated and uneducated, believers and unbelievers all alike. This text is equally useful for the pulpit and the classroom, no one is left out. It must be found on every bookshelf and under the pillows of all mankind irrespective of race, education, spirituality and age. It is a desirable text.

The introductory matters examined briefly have set the agenda for the book. In the chapters that follow, the author will be treating various aspects of his main research question.



## CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCING CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

### Defining Christian Apologetics

From the Greek noun *apologia*, the word Apologetics refers to a judicial term implying a reasoned argument, vindication, or defense. It appears eight times in the New Testament in reference to a legal defense given in response to an accusation in the courtroom. Apologetics does not mean apologizing, as if Christians should say sorry for believing in Christ. According to Douglas Groothuis, Christian Apologetics is “the rational defense of the Christian worldview as objectively true, rationally compelling and existentially or subjectively engaging.”<sup>1</sup> For William Lane Craig, “Apologetics is that branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith.”<sup>2</sup> Based on these definitions, I define Christian Apologetics as the task of developing and sharing arguments for the trustworthiness and rationality of the Christian worldview and against the untrustworthiness and irrationality of alternative worldviews

---

<sup>1</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 24.

<sup>2</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 15. (pdf)

with the objective of provoking unbelievers to consider Christ and strengthening the faith of believers.

## **Biblical foundations of Christian Apologetics**

Both the Old and the New Testaments repeatedly emphasize that the defense of faith is an important part of the spiritual life of a Christian. It is for this reason that both Testaments contain several examples of apologetic conversations. The Mt. Carmel Contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18) could be considered a form of apologetic ministry in which Elijah sought to prove the uniqueness and validity of the religious beliefs of Israel as against that of Baal worshippers. In his battle with Goliath, David sought to prove to all the earth “that there is a God in Israel” (1 Sam 17:46). Daniel defended his faith against the pagan religion of Babylon when he was taken into exile.

In the New Testament, we find several apologetic encounters and appeals (cf. Luke 1:1-4; John 20:19-29; John 21:24-25). Though not an apologist or a philosophy (in the strict sense), Jesus defended the truthfulness of the word of God. His apologetic and philosophic abilities made him respond accurately to the intellectual challenges he faced during his ministry. For example, the Sadducees attempted to trap Jesus by questioning him about the afterlife. They did not believe in life after death as the Pharisees did. Belief in angels and spirits



or any other books than the Pentateuch was also not entertained by the Sadducees. Therefore, they asked Jesus, “Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him” (Matt 22:24). They moved on to find out about what would happen after the resurrection for a woman who is married to and then widowed by seven brothers, none of whom she had any child for (verse 28). The Sadducees had a very brilliant argument. In response, Jesus told them there would be no marriages after the resurrection because people would be like angels (verses 30-32). Jesus’ response not only challenged the Sadducees’ disbelief in the resurrection, but it also affirmed the existence of angels. This is a complete apologetic response.

Paul also demonstrates the use of Apologetics in evangelism when he met the Athenians (Acts 17). Athens in the days of Paul had many intellectuals and philosophers. Paul was distressed because the city was full of idols (verse 16). Paul adopts a strategy of not condemning them but to reason with them (in the Synagogue). He encountered “a group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers” (verse 18). Paul begins his defense by noting that they were “very religious,” given their many “objects of worship” (verses 22-23). He uses the ideal of the many gods they serve to introduce to them the Almighty God, who created the entire universe and sustains it (verses 24-25; cf. Heb 1:3). In so doing, Paul sets up a sharp antithesis

between Christianity and the philosophical thoughts of the two groups he encountered. The Stoics believed in an impersonal “world soul” while the Epicureans believed in many gods who had no interest in human affairs. Paul makes a case for the Creator who is personal, transcendent, immanent and relational. He continues to make contact with their worldview by citing Greek poets, “‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring’” (verse 28). Paul acknowledges that though the Greeks had a wrong view of God, they had some sense of human dependence on the divine. He uses this as a common ground to make his point and to appeal to them. In making his case, Paul points out that in the past God overlooked human ignorance about Himself, but now “He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed.” God has proven this by raising Christ from the dead (verses 30-31). In all Paul’s defense of the Christian faith makes people thirst more for more of his speech, some even becoming his followers (verses 32-34).

The Lord, through the apostle Peter, the first apologist at Pentecost, commands all believers to be ever ready to defend the Christian faith “with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet 3:15-16). Since the letter of 1 Peter is addressed to the Church, the command to give an apology is not given to a handful of carefully selected specialists but to all believers. Jude also

encourages his readers to contend for the faith against those who would like to distort the Christian message (see Jude 3). In short, making a defense to those who question the Christian faith is part of our spiritual duty. No Christian can excuse himself/herself.

## **Functions of Christian Apologetics**

Apologetics has many functions which may be categorized into four.<sup>3</sup> The first function is vindication or proof (that is, positive Apologetics) which involves the use of philosophical arguments and evidence from science, archaeology, and history to make a positive case for the Christian faith as a belief system that must be accepted. It provides historical, evidential, and logical arguments in support of the truth of the Christian faith.

The second function is defense (negative Apologetics), which involves defending Christianity against the numerous attacks made against it in every generation by critics of different religions or even atheists. It focuses on such areas as claims of contradictions in the Bible, alternative interpretations of historical and scientific evidence and misconceptions about Christian belief. By so doing, defensive Apologetics provides people with reasons not to disbelieve that Christianity is true.

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<sup>3</sup> What follows has been gleaned from Kenneth D. Boa, “What is Apologetics” in Ted Cabal (ed.), *CSB Apologetics Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007), xxv.

Thirdly, Apologetics refutes belief systems that oppose the Christian belief system. In this regard, it shows that non-Christian belief systems are unreasonable or irrational. Here, the focus is not on specific attacks against Christianity but on responding to arguments that non-Christians make in support of their own beliefs.

Furthermore, Apologetics has a persuasive role, which includes not merely convincing people about the truth of the Christian faith but also persuading them to apply this truth to their lives. Apologetics therefore has a practical application. All Christians must involve themselves in Apologetics so that they may be well grounded in the faith and help others to overcome doubt. The content of this book is more of the first and second functions of Apologetics than the third and fourth.

In addition to these four well-known functions of Apologetics, I add “cultural” Apologetics which focuses on two major intellectual fronts. The first aspect addresses the ideas or ideological influences common to a given culture. These ideas surreptitiously shape the worldview of people in a community in an osmotic fashion. These factors which secretly inform people’s worldview are like the air we breathe; we scarcely give them a thought. The second aspect pertains to social issues and their underlying worldview, mostly expressed in the cultural debates over moral and ethical questions like abortion, surrogacy, and homosexuality, to name but a few. The

respective positions often represent opposing views of reality and the nature of humankind; yet whichever moral perspective—and its underlying worldview—gains social acceptance, this tends to form the consensus view of reality.

## **Christian Apologetics and Evangelism**

Besides the general roles of Apologetics outlined above, I want to consider how Apologetics can facilitate evangelism. Groothuis asserts that “The defense of the Christian faith as objectively true, rationally compelling and subjectively engaging ... plays a leading role in evangelism.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, ministerial training must aim at producing apologetic evangelists who can evangelize apologetically because apologetic evangelism is very much appropriate in our postmodern world. Apologetics can be very useful before, during and after evangelism. Sharing this view, Frame asserts that Christian Apologetics and evangelism are “perspectively related” — that is, “godly reasoning based on Scripture” is perspectively related to “the conversion of sinners.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, apologetic persuasions have an evangelistic end.

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<sup>4</sup> Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 28.

<sup>5</sup> Frame as quoted in Max H. Sotak, *Apologetic evangelism and personal rectitude: The existential perspective in Francis Schaeffer's trilogy* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: North-West University, 2012), 57. (pdf)

First of all, Christian Apologetics can be used as a pre-evangelism tool to bridge intellectual barriers— which include misunderstanding of the concept of God, the Gospel and sin, worldview clashes, not hearing the gospel, misunderstanding of evidence for God, pluralism and relativism (philosophical & religious)— that “hinder people from embracing Christ as Lord...”<sup>6</sup>, as Groothuis puts it. Groothuis further notes that in a highly academic setting “where unbelief has become second nature for so many”, philosophical Apologetics is required to prepare grounds “for evangelism to become even a possibility.”<sup>7</sup> In this case, Apologetics can be used in a pragmatic way to substantiate the truth of Christianity and to prepare the minds of unbelievers to believe. This may involve arguments from History, Philosophy, Archaeology, Logic, Science, Culture and so on, to remove intellectual stumbling blocks and make a reasonable case to persuade the unbeliever. As Gordon R. Lewis points out, “Apologetic argument may not create belief, but it creates the atmosphere in which belief can come to life.”<sup>8</sup> J. Gresham Machen confirmed this point when he wrote:

God usually exerts power [for conversion] in connection with certain prior conditions of the human mind, and it

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<sup>6</sup> Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 28.

<sup>7</sup> Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 28.

<sup>8</sup> Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), 23.

should be ours to create, so far as we can, with the help of God, those favorable conditions for the reception of the gospel. False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel. We may preach with all the fervour of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, permit Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion.<sup>9</sup>

To this end, Apologetics provides the best answer to the question, “Why should I believe that Christianity is true?” And in so doing, Apologetics convinces and persuades “the questioner of the truthfulness of Christianity. Apologetics provides reasons to believe, both in defending the Gospel and in proclaiming it.”<sup>10</sup> That is bridge-building. That Christian Apologetics is used today in building bridges or points of contact is carefully expounded by McGrath who contends that “The chief goal of Christian Apologetics is to create an intellectual and imaginative climate conducive to the birth and nurture of faith.”<sup>11</sup> William Lane Craig argues further, saying,

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<sup>9</sup>Machen as cited in Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 28.

<sup>10</sup> Brian Auten, A case for Apologetics accessed at [www.apologetics315.com](http://www.apologetics315.com) on June 21, 2015, 9.

<sup>11</sup>Alister McGrath, *Bridge Building* (Leicester: IVP, 1994), 9.

“[...] Apologetics specifically serves to show to unbelievers the truth of the Christian faith, to confirm that faith to believers, and to reveal and explore the connections between Christian doctrine and other truths.<sup>12</sup> When factors that hinder the acceptance of the Christian message are removed, it helps sincere inquirers to take a leap of faith and accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. The point so far is that Apologetics, as Wilkinson notes, **bridges the gap** “between contemporary culture and the Christian faith.”<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, Apologetics is used during evangelism or even after evangelism to defend the gospel message against criticism or attacks. The evangelist must discern the state of the questioner and provide an answer to questions raised. It takes an apologetic evangelist to do evangelism this way. Hence the use of Apologetics— what Paul calls “the defense and confirmation of the Gospel” — may be valuable. The apologetic evangelist does well to defend the faith by providing a rational and reasonable basis for belief, contending for the truth, and supporting it with every bit of evidence at hand to verify the Scriptures. Questions of the “supernatural”, the evidence of archaeology to verify much of what is written in Scripture, and the innate nature of the gospel which fits the functional needs

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<sup>12</sup>William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 15.

<sup>13</sup> David Wilkinson, “The Art of Apologetics in the Twenty-First Century” *ANVIL* Vol. 19 No 1 2002, 5-17 at 9.



of man, may all be used as ammunition in pressing the claims of the gospel. Biblical Apologetics serves to show that the evangelist is interested in the state of mind of the questioner. On this point, Alister McGrath opines that:

Apologetically the question that arises in the postmodern context is ...: How can Christianity's claims to truth be taken seriously when there are so many rival alternatives and when "truth" itself has become a devalued notion? No one can lay claim to possession of the truth. It is all a question of perspective. All claims to truth are equally valid. There is no universal or privileged vantage point that allows anyone to decide what is right and what is wrong.<sup>14</sup>

Obviously, attacks on and criticisms of rival alternatives must be dealt with through apologetic conversation in order for evangelism to be successful. Presenting the gospel to the lost involves answering the questions and objections of the unbeliever. The core message proclaimed by the early church included at least seven components, namely, the sinfulness of humanity and the need for repentance, prophecies about the coming Messiah, the miracles and teaching of Jesus, the Christ,

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<sup>14</sup> McGrath, as cited in Gary Jennings, *Overcoming Christian Pluralism Book 1 Breaking the Deception of Religious* (Np: Lulu.com, nd), 35.

the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross of Calvary, Jesus' physical resurrection, the sending of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of the *Parousia*. In presenting these propositions, the evangelist is sometimes confronted with difficult questions during evangelism. Imagine that an unbeliever, while being evangelized contends, "For me, belief in a creator God solves nothing, since one is still left with the question, "Who created God?" One may ask: "What is the proof that God really exists?" Another person may criticize the historicity of the Gospels and hence the credibility of Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection. Because of the religiously pluralistic culture of our societies, such attacks or criticisms are common. Once such attacks are launched, evangelism becomes ineffective because the credibility of its core message is in dispute.

No matter how difficult or irrelevant these questions may seem, it may be useful to accept them so that the questioner may feel accepted. Questions that come in the form of accusations must also be dealt with. However, I must hasten to concede that "detailed Apologetics is not always necessary in evangelism – some come to faith with little persuasion, and others will believe the moment the Christian reveals the good news."<sup>15</sup> In addition to demonstrating or proving the truth of the Christian faith, Christian Apologetics exposes the

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<sup>15</sup> Vincent Cheung, *Apologetics in Conversation* (Boston: Reformation Ministries International, 2002), 35. (pdf)

untruthfulness and untenableness, “yes, the folly of unbelief, of objections and opposition to scriptural truth. Reu speaks of this as allocution, which he defines as “the formulation and refutation of objections,” a device by which “the actual or possible objections and the divergent viewpoint of the hearer are fairly met and overcome.”<sup>16</sup> Even though the refutation of unsound viewpoints does not establish the truth of one’s own, it is vital to remove all false hopes which often keep non-Christians from even considering the case for Christianity. Apologetics can be used to establish the uniqueness of the Bible (1 Peter 3:15). The point is that merely preaching the good news or announcing hope is never enough. Every believer must always give a reason for the Christian hope (or faith).

According to Wilkinson, “Apologetics is important not just in evangelism but also in the nurture of Christians.”<sup>17</sup> Nurturing involves strengthening the faith of believers. Therefore, Wilkinson’s point is that for those who are already saved, Apologetics helps them to develop a deeper commitment to Christ. For a believer to be able to love God with all his strength, mind and heart, he/she must not doubt the faith. More so, for a believer to be able to be an effective witness, he/she must not doubt his/her faith. Unfortunately, we live in an era

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<sup>16</sup> Gerald Hoenecke, “The Role of Apologetics and Polemics in the Pulpit” report to The Metro-North Pastoral Conference, Wisconsin, March 20, 1978. (pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Wilkinson, *The Art of Apologetics in the Twenty-First Century*, 9.

where many believers are not sure of their faith. Just as there are attacks upon the gospel itself, there are times when the faith of individual believers is tested and tried. This may come from voices of doubt, worldly influences, or personal crises. Apologetics can play a leading role in anchoring the faith of Christians who find themselves in such challenging moments. This anchoring leads the Christian to be a bolder witness to the world and to answer common objections from unbelievers.

## **Conclusion**

Having provided a concise overview of Christian Apologetics in this chapter, it becomes evident that this discipline serves as a cornerstone in defending and explaining the faith. As we transition to the next chapter, our focus shifts towards delving into the fundamental aspects of the Christian Bible. Understanding the nature of the Bible is paramount, as it forms the basis of Christian belief and practice. In the forthcoming chapter, I will explore key questions surrounding the Bible, including its authority, inspiration, and interpretation.

## CHAPTER TWO

### WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

The word “Bible” refers to the canonical collections of sacred writings of Judaism and Christianity. The Christian Bible is divided into two. The first part is the Old Testament (which corresponds to the Hebrew Bible, referred to as the *Tanak*). The Hebrew Bible consists of twenty-four books composed between 1400 and 400 BC and put into three major categories, namely, the Law (*Torah*), the Prophets (*Nevi'im*) and the Writings or Hagiographa (*Kethubhim*). The second major division of the Bible is the New Testament which is made up of twenty-seven (27) books written in the first century AD. My focus in this chapter includes the inspiration, inerrancy, authority, necessity, clarity, sufficiency and uniqueness of the Bible.

#### **The Bible as Divine Revelation**

Without God revealing Himself to humanity, no one can know Him. There are two ways by which God has revealed Himself to humankind. These are through general revelation and special revelation. General revelation refers to the general truths that can be known about God through nature. In other words, general revelation is the revelation of God to all people, at all times, and in all places through nature, history, and the constitution of the human person. The Bible refers to this kind

of revelation when it says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge” (Psa 19:1-2). God’s existence and power can be clearly seen by observing the universe (see also Rom 1:20). The major limitation of this kind of revelation is that it is not sufficient to save humankind. Also, this kind of revelation has been blurred by the Fall of humanity and so it may lead people to worship creatures rather than the Creator (Rom 1:21-23, 25).

Special revelation, on the other hand, refers to the manifestation of God to a particular people at particular times and places as a means of bringing salvation to them. Special revelation includes physical appearances of God (Gen 15:17; 16:7-13; 18:1; 32:24-30; Judg 2:1-4), the manifestation of God in dreams (Gen 28:12; 37:5) and visions (Gen 15:1; Ezk 8:3-4), the manifestation of God through miracles (Exod 4:2-9), through prophets (Deut 18:15-22), through angels (Dan 9:20-21; Luke 2:10-11), through the written Word of God (the Bible), and most importantly and perfectly through Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Jn. 1:1, 14).

## **The Dual Nature of the Bible**

Just as Jesus Christ has both the human and the divine natures, and yet, he is without, so the Bible also has a dual nature, that is, divine nature and human nature, and yet without error.

Human nature includes the fact that the Bible was composed by human beings to be understood by human beings. God did not write the Bible and drop it to the earth for human use; rather, He used human beings for its composition. Except for small sections (such as the Ten Commandments which were “inscribed by the finger of God” [Exod 31:18]), the Bible was not verbally dictated by God. Each biblical text was written to specific hearers or readers in a specific historical-geographical situation for a specific purpose. Every biblical text was couched in the cultural setting of the times in which it was written.

The biblical authors used everyday language and followed normal grammatical meanings, including figurative language. This explains why the Bible contains every literary genre that was present in ancient Israel and the Greco-Roman world (including similes, metaphors, poetry, proverbs, narratives, laws, prophecy, wisdom literature, epistles, and others). For this reason, each biblical text must be understood according to the basic principles of logic and human communication.

The second aspect of the nature of the Bible is its divine nature. As a divine book, the Bible contains mystery. Certain aspects of the Bible are plain, others are just mysteries (Deut 29:29). Since the Bible comes from one source (that is, from God), it contains unity and cannot contradict itself. Each part is expected to complement the other. Unfortunately, people

sometimes conclude that the Bible contradicts itself based on their wrong interpretation of biblical text(s). One has to re-examine his/her interpretative framework whenever biblical texts seem contradictory.

Finally, the Bible is a progression, meaning, it was progressively revealed by God. Consequently, certain commands of God may change as later revelations are given. That is why it is important to consider the entire teaching of the Bible on a particular issue before concluding. Critics sometimes forget the progressive nature of the Bible and then accuse God of contradicting Himself. They also confuse a change of revelation with an error. A change in revelation is part of the human experience. For instance, parents may allow their child to eat with the fingers then tell him/her later (after the child is grown) that he/she needs to eat with a spoon, not the hand. The change in instruction should not be considered a contradiction because the two different instructions were given at different times under different circumstances. In the same way, when God's command that the blood of animals should be used to cleanse human sin changed after the perfect sacrifice of Christ (Heb 10:11–14), He is not contradicting Himself. Rather, a new and better revelation is given through the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Similarly, God did not contradict Himself when He commanded that humans should eat only fruit and vegetables (Gen 1:29) but later allowed humankind to eat meat



(Gen 9:3) because the change from herbivorous to omnivorous status was given to different people at different times. In God's progressive revelation, later revelations usually supersede earlier ones. I must be quick to add that God cannot change commands that have to do with His unchangeable nature (cf. Mal 3:6; Heb 6:18). For example, God's essential nature of holiness, love, all-knowing, all-present and others cannot change. A complete discussion of the divine nature cannot be done without referring to the doctrine of inspiration in the Bible. The next chapter will examine this aspect of the Bible.

### **The Inspiration of the Bible**

The doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture refers to the fact that the books of the Bible were written under the influence of the Holy Spirit (see Job 32:8 and 2 Tim 3:16). The sense in which the Bible is inspired must be differentiated from the sense in which people are inspired in performing everyday life activities. For example, what we mean by "the artist is inspired" is quite different from what we mean when we say, "the Bible is inspired." The Greek word *theopneustos* translated as "inspired" actually means "God-breathed". Therefore, the doctrine of inspiration means the Bible is the breath of God; it has come from the mouth of God; it has God's fingerprint. Inspiration differs from revelation in that revelation deals with

how God is disclosed while inspiration has to do with how the content of God's revelation was recorded.

Josh McDowell (paraphrasing Geisler) defines inspiration as “the mysterious process by which God worked through human writers, employing their individual personalities and styles to produce divinely authoritative and inerrant writings.”<sup>18</sup> This means that God allowed the biblical authors to use their literary styles and peculiarities. The authors were influenced by their backgrounds and specific human interests. For example, David, a former shepherd, perceived God as a Shepherd (Psa 23:1); Hosea (based on his rural background) had a rural interest; Luke (a medical officer) recorded more healing stories than any other Gospel writer and Paul (a lawyer) employed legal terms such as condemnation, justification and others in his writings. Some authors used other sources for their material (Josh 10:13; Luke 1:1-4; Titus 1:12).<sup>19</sup> Scripture also shows human thought patterns such as memory lapses (1 Cor 1:14–16) and human emotions (Gal 4:14).<sup>20</sup>

The process of inspiration was not a mechanical one whereby God treated the biblical authors as dictating machines or tape recorders. Thus, the biblical texts were not dictated by

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<sup>18</sup> Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 334.

<sup>19</sup> Isaac Boaheng, *An African Background to the Old Testament* (Accra: Noyam Publishers, 2021), 9.

<sup>20</sup> Boaheng, *An African Background to the Old Testament*, 10.

the Holy Spirit for his “secretaries” (the biblical authors) to write. God used the human authors as living and responsible beings. Some of them received their message in dreams, others in visions, sometimes through audible voices, other times through angels. In the case of Luke, it was through careful research into the Jesus story (Luke 1:1-4). As mentioned earlier, God made full use of the personality, temperament, experience and background of the authors to give humanity a suitable and distinctive message. Therefore, inspiration means the act of God whereby He revealed His truth to be recorded by humans, preserving the human agents from error without violating their personality.

Furthermore, inspiration can only be predicated on the original autographs (in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic), not on every copy or translation (whether ancient or modern).<sup>21</sup> Inspiration does not guarantee that every copy or every translation of the original is without error. Except by miracle, there was no way people could copy a whole book (be it secular or sacred) without making mistakes. There may be minor errors in manuscript<sup>22</sup> copies or translations. The original manuscripts were however without any scribal errors. God inspired the authors of Scripture and safeguarded their words from error. He

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<sup>21</sup> Boaheng, *An African Background to the Old Testament*, 10.

<sup>22</sup> A manuscript is any surviving hand-written copy of an ancient document that predates the invention of the printing press in 1455.

did not, however, prevent the thousands of copyists across the ages from making mistakes as they copied the manuscripts! Consequently, there are some variant readings of some texts. Textual variants are the different readings of the same text that have resulted from differences between the wording of two or more manuscripts due to (but not limited to) “changes in a letter, a word, a phrase or even additions and omissions of whole sentences or paragraphs.”<sup>23</sup> If only one manuscript of the Old and New Testaments had survived, there would have been zero variants, yet, this single manuscript would probably have become some sort of “idol”. This might be the reason why God did not preserve just a single manuscript. In spite of the existence of variants, we can be very sure that we have God’s original word with us today which can be obtained from the numerous manuscripts available to us.

I once had the privilege of viewing a five-hundred-year-old manuscript of the book of Genesis, an experience that underscored the reverence and meticulous care with which ancient texts are regarded.<sup>24</sup> Upon entering the library where the manuscript was housed, visitors were required to surrender their phones and were strictly forbidden from touching the delicate

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<sup>23</sup> Craig L. Bloomberg and Jennifer Foutz Markley, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 5

<sup>24</sup> I had this experience during my training as a Bible Translator. I have shared this experience also in Boaheng, *An African Background to the Old Testament*, 11.

artifact. The stringent security measures in place served as a stark reminder of the potential for idolization that would accompany the existence of a singular, error-free manuscript.

Further still, it is crucial to recognize that the divine inspiration of the Bible does not imply that every statement within its pages is a direct command from God or prescriptive in nature. Rather, the Bible contains a diverse array of genres and literary styles, including historical narratives, poetry, parables, and letters. While some passages offer explicit moral teachings or commands, others serve primarily as descriptions of historical events, cultural practices, or individual experiences. These descriptive passages provide valuable insight into the context and worldview of the biblical authors and their audiences but may not necessarily serve as direct instructions for contemporary believers. Therefore, discerning the intent and significance of each passage requires careful interpretation and consideration of its genre, historical context, and theological themes.

While all Scripture is considered inspired by God and profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16), not every word or narrative serves as a direct mandate for action or belief. For example, the fact that the Bible records polygamy (Gen 4:23; 1 Kings 11:3), lies (Satan's [Gen 3:4; cf. John 8:44], Abraham's (Gen 20:2), and Rahab's (Josh 2:4), atheism (Psa 14:1) and other sins do not

mean we should emulate them.<sup>25</sup> Ignorance of this fact may lead people to claim that the Bible teaches immorality, lies, atheism, and others. The point is that while the whole Bible is true (John 17:17), this truth is “found in what the Bible *reveals*, not in everything it *records*.”<sup>26</sup> All that is contained in the Bible constitutes what it records. The lessons we derive from the Bible constitute what it reveals.

Finally, the inspiration of the Bible is not only related to issues it explicitly teaches; it also relates to those it simply touches (be it History, Science, Psychology, or Mathematics, whether a major issue or a minor one).<sup>27</sup> From the doctrine of Inspiration comes the idea of biblical inerrancy, an issue I consider in the next section.

## **The Inerrancy of the Bible**

Paul Feinberg defines inerrancy as the belief that “when all the facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs, properly interpreted, will be shown to be wholly true in everything they affirm, whether this has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical or life sciences.”<sup>28</sup> That is,

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<sup>25</sup> Boaheng, *An African Background to the Old Testament*, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), np. Emphasis original.

<sup>27</sup> Geisler and Howe, *When Critics Ask*, np.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Feinberg, *Inerrancy*, edited by Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 294.

to talk meaningfully about the inerrancy of a biblical text, all facts about the issue contained in the text have to be known and the text has to be interpreted properly. Biblical inerrancy therefore means the Bible (in its original autographs) is without any error in all that it teaches **provided** the text is interpreted correctly and all facts about the issue the text talks about are **correctly** known or the Bible, in the original manuscripts, affirms nothing contrary to fact. Truth (in this context) refers to any statement that corresponds to reality. What does not correspond to reality is an error, a mistake. Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe assert that “Truth is telling it like it is. Error is not telling it like it is.”<sup>29</sup> They further argue that “nothing mistaken can be true, even if the author intended his mistake to be true. An error is a mistake, not simply something misleading. Otherwise, every sincere utterance ever made is true, even those that were grossly mistaken.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore, unintentional mistakes are also errors (cf. Lev 4:2). The inerrancy of Scripture does not contradict the human factors that contributed to the writing of Scriptures. As stated earlier, the divine influence did not remove the human nature of the authors; rather it complemented the human nature and made sure the message received from God was accurately transcribed.<sup>31</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>29</sup> Geisler and Howe, *When Critics Ask*, np.

<sup>30</sup> Geisler and Howe, *When Critics Ask*, np.

<sup>31</sup> As cited in Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 1991), 33.

people freely used their background and experience in the way they wrote.

Three important principles may establish the inerrancy of Scripture. First and foremost, God cannot err. The Author of the Bible is a perfect God and what He reveals is without error. The Bible clearly teaches that “it is impossible for God to lie” (Heb 6:18), He “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2), He is truth (John 14:6) and so is His Word (Psa 119:160; John 17:17). He used human beings to document exactly what He wanted to be documented for all human generations.<sup>32</sup> The second fact is that the Bible is the word of God (see my earlier discussion on this). Paul’s statement that “All Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16), his reference to the Scripture as “the Word of God” (Rom 9:6), Peter’s assertion that “prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21), Jesus’ assertion that “until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matt 5:18), as well as his charge against the religious leaders of his day that they nullify the word of God by their tradition (Mark 7:13) are all meant to teach us that Scripture is the word of God.

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<sup>32</sup> McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 338.



From the above two facts comes the inevitable conclusion that the Bible is the unerring word of God. The Bible contains no mistakes; if it does, then it is not the word of God because God cannot make mistakes. Indeed, God's perfection and absolute truthfulness (Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18) make it impossible to conceive of the Bible as divinely inspired and at the same time untruthful. Deceit and ignorance are the sources of error. God does not lie, neither is He ignorant. The perfect truthfulness of Scripture extends not only to matters of doctrine but also to matters of historical reliability. Anything less would call into question the very character of God.

Biblical inerrancy does not mean that there cannot be divergent accounts of the same event. The fact that multiple accounts of the same incidence differ does not mean that these accounts are mutually exclusive. One day, I was at a restaurant with a friend when a woman entered. My friend remarked that the woman likes long earrings. His reason was that the woman wears long earrings wherever she goes, even to the restaurant just as she was wearing that day. I looked at the woman and she was not wearing an earring, so I told my friend that the woman was not wearing any earring. This generated an argument between us. The lady had entered another room within the restaurant. The argument became very heated as to whether she was wearing earrings or not. Later, when she came, we both realized that she was wearing one earring. I saw the ear that was

without a ring while my friend saw the other one with a long earring. Both of us were right based on the perspective from which we saw the woman. We gave partial reports but we were not wrong in doing so. We needed each other's view/report to have a full view/report about the woman (in terms of whether she was wearing earrings or not). Reports of this nature abound in the Bible, especially in the Gospels. They are not contradictory but rather complementary.

In addition, biblical inerrancy does not require the use of scholarly, technical, or scientific language. The reason is that the Bible was written to be understood by the common people of biblical times and by extension, to be understood by the common people of all times and all places. It was written in the pre-scientific era, so we should not expect it to have a scientific tone. I even believe that if it were written today, it would not have had so much scientific tone because it is intended to be a book of faith rather than a scientific textbook. Therefore, when the Bible uses observational and non-scientific language, it is not being unscientific; rather, it is being pre-scientific.<sup>33</sup> Critics are therefore not right to describe the Bible as scientifically incorrect. The language the Bible uses was the standard language of the time it was written. It is therefore unfair to superimpose modern scientific standards upon the biblical text.

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<sup>33</sup> McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 341.

It is no more unscientific to speak of the Sun as standing (Josh 10:12) than it is to describe it as rising (Josh 1:6). The people of biblical times had no scientific knowledge to know that the Sun is stationary and that it neither rises nor sets. God allowed the writers to use the knowledge they had acquired from observing nature to write His word because it was by using such common language that people could easily understand God's word. Today, scientific knowledge abounds and yet, meteorologists still speak of "sunrise" and "sunset." In this respect, 21st-century meteorologists are still using observational language in their description of the Sun as rising and setting rather than scientific language. Yet, no one tells them they are wrong. In the same way, the use of observational knowledge by the biblical writers does not make the Bible wrong.

According to McDowell, Arabian tradition in biblical times held that "the ends of the earth was only several miles away."<sup>34</sup> This belief, which seems to have come merely from observation of nature, informed the assertion that the Queen of Sheba "came from the ends of the earth" (Matt 12:42). Similarly when the Bible says that on the Day of Pentecost, the whole world was represented in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5) and yet in the list

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<sup>34</sup> This belief exists in our days too. By observing the sky, one is tempted to believe that the earth ends some few miles away from the point of observation.

of nations we do not see all nations in the world today (Acts 2:9-11), it simply means the writer used a universal language (the whole world) to mean “the then-known world.”<sup>35</sup> The fact is that each nation of the then-known world was present in Jerusalem.

In discussing biblical inerrancy, the issue of context is very important. One can prove anything from the Bible if contextual issues are ignored. A popular saying is that “A text out of context is a pretext.” For example, one may prove that the Bible says “there is no God” (Psa 14:1) simply by ignoring the immediately preceding context, “The fool has said in his heart.” The full statement is, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psa 14:1). Similarly, one may teach that Christians must give a gun to a small child who asks for it, or nuclear weapons to a member of Boko Haram just because he/she asks for it because Jesus has commanded us to “Give to the one who asks you” (Matt 5:42a). Such a meaning is however not warranted by the context of the text.

Another example can be taken from the Book of Job. The first 37 chapters record Job’s suffering and his dialogue with his three friends. God only reveals Himself to Job in chapters 38 to 42. In the course of conversing with God, Job admits that he had uttered what he did not understand and that

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<sup>35</sup> McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 341.

God is right (Job 42:3, 7). Obviously, some of the assertions Job and his friends make about suffering in the first 37 chapters are mistaken. For this reason, it is not every word in these chapters (1-37) that one can take and say “This is what God says”, because it may not. Not every word in these chapters may be God’s word in the sense that it may be one of those mistaken notions by Job and his friends. In other words, not every word in the first 37 chapters may be literally true because it may be one of the mistaken assertions made by Job and his friends. The point therefore is that while the whole book of Job is God’s word, the first 37 chapters should be read only in the light of chapters 38—42. Reading the first 37 chapters of Job isolated from its context may lead to wrong conclusions.

The foregoing discussions underline the fact that a biblical text (or every word of God) is literally true only when it is placed in its right context. Therefore, a biblical word may be quite untrue when read in isolation from its context. One major mistake that critics of the Bible usually make is that they read texts out of their context and make conclusions from such readings. That is certainly unfair. Isn’t it?

### **The Four Attributes of the Bible**

The Bible reveals four main attributes about itself though it does not give a systematic treatment of these attributes. They include the authority, clarity, necessity and sufficiency of

Scripture. To say that the Bible has authority means that whatever the Bible contains is God's word such that disbelieving or disobeying any command of the Bible amounts to disbelieving or disobeying God, the author of Scripture. One must, however, read each text in its context before knowing exactly what God is saying. The authority of the Bible is guaranteed by its inspiration. The Bible itself claims authority in many places. The introductory formula "Thus says the LORD" (see for example Isa 44:2, 6; Jer 9:7, 15, 17) or any other similar formula and instances where God is said to have spoken to prophets (1 Kings 14:18; 16:12, 34; 2 Kings 9:36; 14:25; Jer 37:2; Zech. 7:7, 12) attest to the authority of the Bible. By saying that the Lord spoke to them or that the word of the Lord came to them, the ancient prophets were making the point that what they said was exactly what God asked them to say. This is what we should expect because ancient Israelite prophets were people who spoke on behalf of God.

The New Testament writers attest to the authority of the Old Testament. To this end, they used formulas such as "God says", "the Holy Spirit says" and "Scripture says" when referring to Old Testament texts (cf. Acts 3:24, 25; 2 Cor 6:16; Acts 1:16). What "the Scripture says" and what "God says" are alternative expressions referring to the same thing - God's word. There are even instances where the Scripture is personified as if it were God Himself (see Gal 3:8; Rom 9:17).

The New Testament writers attached the same authority to themselves as heralds, witnesses, ambassadors of God and Christ (Rom 1:1, 5; 1 Tim 2:7; Gal 1:8, 9; 1 Thess 2:13). They also attached the same authority to their writings and words (1 Cor 15:1ff; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:14). The extent of divine authority in Scripture includes all that is written in the Bible (2 Tim 3:16), the very words (Matt 22:43; 1 Cor 2:13), tenses of verbs (Matt 22:32; Gal 3:16) and even the smallest parts of words (Matt 5:17–18). Biblical authority and the purpose of Scripture are inseparable. That is why Paul says Scripture “was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope” (Rom 15:4).

Another attribute of the Bible is clarity (or perspicuity), which means the idea that the message of the Scriptures can be understood by all who desire to understand it. As God’s message for the whole world, the Bible is written in such a way as to make its content clear enough for the comprehension of ordinary people. God’s Word was never intended to be esoteric, dark, enigmatic, obscure, inscrutable, ambiguous, or vague. Nonetheless, time, geographical, language, and cultural gaps make it necessary for contemporary readers to apply certain rules in order to interpret the Bible correctly and apply its message appropriately. The original readers of the Bible did not need these rules because these gaps (which hinder our understanding today) were absent or (even if present) did not

pose so much difficulty to them because the readers were familiar with the contextual issues of the texts. The clarity of the Bible should serve as a huge motivation for Christians to study and apply the Scriptures to their lives because they can be rest assured that they can understand what God is saying to them. Moses taught the clarity and comprehensibility of Scripture when he told the Israelites that God's word is not far from them and that they have it and can obey it as well (see Deut 30:11-14). The apostle Paul also taught this fact when he told the Corinthian church that his letters were straight-forward, and there was nothing written between the lines which they could not understand (2 Cor 1:13-14; see also Phil 3:15-16; 2 Tim 3:14-17) and therefore apply to their lives.

Though not unclear, the word of God cannot be understood without the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Hermeneutical principles are meant to aid the process of interpretation; they are not a substitute for the role of the Spirit in biblical interpretation. Christians are therefore encouraged to seek the illumination of the Holy Spirit and to study seriously in order to understand the Scriptures properly. Though Scripture is clear, it is however not clear to everybody. One's level of illumination and ability to apply the rules of interpretation may determine the level of understanding of the Bible. Since God communicated His word to people in a particular context, contemporary readers need to familiarize



themselves with the original context of the biblical text before they can correctly understand it and apply it to their lives. Concerning interpretation, the difficult parts of the Bible can and should be understood in the light of the clearer parts.

The next attribute of the Bible is necessity which means Scripture is necessary for the proper acquisition of a true knowledge of God, His gospel, and His plan of salvation, and that knowledge about these things cannot be obtained through the general revelation of nature and conscience. As moral and social beings, human beings exist to relate to God and live according to His will and purpose. To know God's will and purpose, one has to search the Scriptures because it is in them that He has specially revealed Himself. Jesus taught the necessity of Scripture when he said, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4; cf. Deut 8:3). Above all, Scripture is necessary to deal with the major problem of humanity, that is, sin.

The sufficiency of Scripture is the fourth attribute of the Bible. By sufficiency of the Bible, we mean what God has revealed in the Bible is enough for a proper understanding of who God is, who we are, how God has acted in the past, and what God expects from us. Simply put, humanity needs no extra-biblical revelation for their salvation; the Bible is enough. Since God has given us sufficient information in the Bible, all we need to do is search the Scriptures for God's will for us and

apply what we learn to our lives. God's revelation ended with Christ who is the final and complete revelation of God. The Holy Spirit is here with us to give insight into what has already been revealed to us.

### **What makes the Bible a unique book?**

Some people keep the Bible in their library and consider it as one of the "great" books such as Homer's *Odyssey* or Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Others make degrading comments about the Bible and consider it as fiction or fable. For such people, though the Bible teaches some moral lessons, it is wrong to consider it as a fact. Contrary to such claims, Christians contend that the Bible is a special book, a true word of God based on facts. Again, Christians contend that the Bible is the greatest book ever written. These contentions raise the question: What really makes the Bible so outstanding among all books of human history?

There are numerous ways in which the Bible distinguishes itself from other literature. What I present below are just a few of them. Firstly, the Bible is unique in that unlike other ancient books, it was written over a long period (about 1500 years, from 1400 BC to 100 AD). It therefore covers an exceptionally vast number of generations as compared to other

ancient books like the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*<sup>36</sup> (3150 BC) or *The Epic of Gilgamesh*<sup>37</sup> (2100 BC).

Secondly, the Bible is unique in that, unlike most other literary works, the composition and transmission of the biblical books did not emerge from a homogeneous community located in a single region of the ancient world. Rather, biblical books were written by people in diverse places like Rome (in Europe), Egypt (in Africa), and Mesopotamia (in Asia). The specific places from which the authors wrote the Bible also varied. For example, Moses wrote part of the Bible in the wilderness, Jeremiah, in a dungeon, Paul, inside the prison walls, Luke, while travelling, and John, while in exile on the island of Patmos.

In the third place, the Bible is unique in its authorship. The Bible was authored by approximately 40 different people, and edited and preserved by countless scribal schools and communities. It therefore preserves for us the writings of a vast array of different persons from widely divergent social circumstances and backgrounds. Among these authors are Moses (a political leader and judge educated in Egypt), David (a king, poet, warrior, shepherd, and musician), Amos (a

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<sup>36</sup> The Book of the Dead is an ancient Egyptian funerary text generally written on papyrus and used from the beginning of the New Kingdom to around 50 BC.

<sup>37</sup> The Epic of Gilgamesh is an epic poem from ancient Mesopotamia usually regarded as the earliest surviving great work of literature.

herdsman), Daniel (a prime minister), Nehemiah (a cupbearer to a pagan king), Solomon (a king and philosopher), Joshua (a military general), Luke (a medical doctor and historian), Peter (a fisherman), Matthew (a tax collector), and Paul ( a rabbi, lawyer and philosopher).

Fourthly, the Bible is unique in that it includes many distinct literary forms and genres, including history, law, poetry, parables, hymns, biographies, personal correspondence, and even personal memoirs and diaries. It differs from other books which are homogenous in terms of genre. As such, it is important to determine the genre of a particular biblical text before attempting to make meaning out of it because different genres have different rules of interpretation.

Again, the Bible is unique in that unlike other books, it was written in three different languages (Aramaic, Greek and Hebrew). Hebrew is the language of the Israelites and was used particularly for documenting the Old Testament. It is referred to as “the language of Judah” (cf. 2 Kings 18:26-28; Neh 13:24) or “the language of Canaan” (Is. 19:18). Aramaic was the common language of the Ancient Near East until the reign of Alexander the Great who through the spread of Hellenism made Greek an international language. Aramaic was the language of post-exilic Israelites. Texts such as Daniel 2 through 7 and most of Ezra 4 through 7 were originally written in Aramaic. Aramaic expressions are also used occasionally in the New

Testament, including, “*Eli Eli, lama sabachthani*,” which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27: 46). Greek, the language of almost all of the New Testament, was the international language at the time of the documentation of the New Testament books, just as the English language is used today internationally. Therefore, even though Jesus spoke Aramaic language, what he said was recorded by the gospel writers in Greek.

Further still, the Bible differs from other books with regards to three main teachings: The Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement, and salvation by faith rather than by works (or by human efforts). These teachings found only in the Bible, set Christianity apart from all other religions. The concept of the Trinity, which asserts the existence of one God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is a central tenet of Christian faith. This complex yet foundational teaching is derived from various passages throughout the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, and forms the basis for understanding the nature of God as both unity and diversity. The doctrine of the Incarnation and Atonement represents the belief that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took on human flesh (Incarnation) and sacrificed himself to atone for humanity's sins (Atonement). This profound theological concept underscores the unique role of Jesus as both fully divine and fully human, bridging the gap between God and humanity and offering

redemption and reconciliation through his sacrificial death and resurrection. Also, Christianity emphasizes salvation by faith rather than by works or human efforts alone. This teaching, prominently expounded upon in the New Testament epistles, emphasizes that salvation is a gift of grace received through faith in Jesus Christ, rather than something earned through good deeds or religious observance. This doctrine highlights the transformative power of faith in Christ and underscores the importance of a personal relationship with God as the basis for salvation.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the profound impact and enduring resilience of the Bible, which further underscores its uniqueness. Throughout human history and civilization, the Bible has wielded an extraordinary influence, shaping cultures, societies, and individuals in profound ways. Its status as the word of God imbues it with unparalleled transformative power, capable of touching hearts, changing lives, and inspiring movements of social and spiritual renewal. The enduring relevance and timeless truths contained within its pages continue to resonate across generations, affirming the Bible's status as not just a book, but a living and dynamic force for spiritual enlightenment and societal transformation.

## **Conclusion**

Among other things, this chapter has stated that the Bible is a collection of books that exhibits complete unity. The Bible is God's word which reveals His action in the world, and His purpose for humanity and other creation. However, contemporary readers may not appreciate the message of the Bible because of the time gap, language gap, geographical gap and other gaps between the biblical world and ours. In our struggles to decipher what message the Bible has for us, we must trust and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DOES THE BIBLE CONTAIN THE RIGHT BOOKS?

God is the author of the Bible and it is He who knows which books belong to the sacred writings. Ancient Israel and the surrounding nations had lots of writings. Some of these writings were very important for gaining knowledge about the ancient world and its culture. Others were for religious purposes and so on. It was out of a lot of writings that God selected what He had commissioned people to write as Scripture. This raises questions like: Why are there only 66 books in the Bible? Are there no other inspired books apart from what we have in our Bibles? In response to these questions, this chapter examines how God led people to collect together His inspired books. The main contention of the chapter is that the perfect God did not mistakenly add any uninspired books or take away any inspired books from the biblical canon. What we have in our Bibles are the only books God inspired His people to write and collect together.

#### **What is the Biblical Canon?**

The English word “canon” derives from the Greek *kanon*, which also comes from the Hebrew *kaneh*, meaning “standard,” “rule” or “measuring rod.” When applied to the Bible, the canon is the set or collection of books that are



considered the inspired Word of God, and hence the final source of authority for determining the beliefs and practices of Christianity. The process by which the church recognized and collected each book of the Bible as divinely inspired or God's authoritative word is referred to as **canonization**. The process was not an act of humans but God's activity executed through His people.

No consensus has been reached between Protestants and Catholics or Protestants and Orthodox Christians as to the number of books that make up the Old Testament canon. In addition to thirty-nine (39) books which both Protestants and Catholics agree on as Scripture, Catholics recognize seven other books (Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus [Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach], Baruch), as well as extra materials in Esther and Daniel as part of their authoritative books. These additional books are referred to as Apocryphal (hidden) or Deuterocanonical (second-canon) books.<sup>38</sup> The Protestant canon contains sixty-six (66) books, the Catholic canon holds seventy-three (73) books, and the Ethiopic Orthodox canon has eighty-three (83) books. The twenty-seven (27) books of the New Testament are, however, agreed upon by all Christians. I now proceed to consider how the Old Testament and New Testament books were canonized.

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<sup>38</sup> Protestants refer to these books as Apocrypha while Catholics refer to them as Deuterocanonical.

## Canonization of the Old Testament

As mentioned earlier, the Hebrew Bible consists of twenty-four (24) books composed between 1400 and 400 BC and put into three major categories, namely, the Law (*Torah*), the Prophets (*Nevi'im*) and the Writings or Hagiographa (*Kethubhim*). The Law or the Pentateuch includes Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Prophets (*Nevi'im*) are subdivided into Former Prophets including Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings and Latter Prophets including Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve (Hosea-Malachi). The Writings are further divided into the Poetical Books such as Job, Psalms, Proverbs, the Five Rolls including Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Songs of Songs, Lamentations, and The Historical Books including Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and 1 & 2 Chronicles.

The formal canonization of Scripture followed a period during which God's interactions with the Israelites were recorded. Unlike contemporary recording methods, biblical events were not immediately documented as they occurred. Similar to customary practices in many traditional African societies, the ancient Israelites predominantly relied on oral tradition to transmit their history. Typically, when significant events unfolded, they were verbally recounted and passed down through generations before being committed to writing. For instance, the creation narrative circulated orally for a period

before being committed to writing. Moses' directive to the Israelites to diligently impart the laws and statutes of God to their children and future generations (Deut. 11:19) underscores the significance of oral tradition in ancient Israel. These orally transmitted traditions were eventually transcribed into written form to ensure the accurate preservation of the sacred message.

Though oral tradition was key in transmitting information trans-generationally, evidence of the documentation of God's dealings with the people of Israel at the early stages of the nation's history is not lacking in the Old Testament. For example, the Hexateuch (that is, the Pentateuch and Joshua, or the first six books of the Bible) provides us with some clear references to an encoded body of law. Some of the earliest compositions include Miriam's song (Exod 15:1-18) and the Decalogue which was written not later than the 12th to 11th century BC. God Himself wrote His commandments on two tablets of stone (Exod 31:18). Later, Moses' composition (which was to be placed beside the Ark of the Covenant; see Deut 31:24-26) was added to the earlier writings. Joshua, Moses' successor, also added to the collection of written words of God (Josh 24:26). In the promised land God raised people who also wrote events that took place. Deborah's song (Judg 5) was written probably not later than the 12th century BC. People like Samuel, David, Solomon and others also wrote part of Israel's history. In both exilic and post-exilic periods God

continued to inspire His people to document His dealings with them.

The preparation of the Hebrew canon took place in three stages. The first stage was the collection of the *Torah* (at least by the 4th century BC).<sup>39</sup> The Jews accepted the Decalogue and all the legislative materials as authoritative immediately after they were received through Moses. Thus, the first stage involved the preservation of the Hebrew law codes in the Pentateuch including the Decalogue (Exod. 20:1-17), and the expansion of the Covenant Code (Exod 20:22—23:19), and religious Code (Exod 34:11-26) to include the creation stories, stories of the Patriarchs and early history and origins of people.

In 622 BC, Hilkiah the High Priest found a law book (which probably forms the core of Deut 12—26) in the Temple during its renovation (2 Kings 22:8ff). This document was revised and accepted officially as God's word for the nation which Ezra and his contemporaries read and explained to the post-exilic community in 444 BC (Neh 8:1—10:39). Ezra's presentation made so much impact that the people wept when they heard him read the Law (Neh 8:9-18). Thus, this document formed the basis for the renewal of the covenant between the post-exilic Jews and Yahweh (2 Kings 22:3—23:3).

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<sup>39</sup> Werner H. Schmidt, *Old Testament Introduction* Translated by Matthew J. O'connell (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 6

The next part of the process was the division of the *Torah* into five (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) to form the Pentateuch. Most modern Old Testament scholars agree that the Pentateuch was essentially completed by about 1000 BC but was revised in minor ways until the time of Ezra who fixed the completed Pentateuch as the basis of the life of the nation around 400 BC.<sup>40</sup>

The second stage of the canonization process was the collection of the writings of the Prophets and the history of the period in which they lived and ministered.<sup>41</sup> The Torah served as the nucleus to which separate prophetic books were added. Not all prophets documented events that took place during their time. Among those who documented events were Samuel (who wrote down the rights of the people and duties of the kingship in a book) (1 Sam 10:25), Nathan, and Gad (1 Chron 29:29), Hosea, Isaiah, Amos, and others. The prophetic literature had a very close connection with the Torah and this made them to be held as inspired and authoritative. The books of the latter prophets were written from the late 9th century BC into the 8th century BC and onwards. The prophecies about the fall of Jerusalem and its fulfillment in 586/7 BC vindicated the truth

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<sup>40</sup> See Raymond F. Collins, "The Canon of the Old Testament" in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2011), 1037.

<sup>41</sup> Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1948), 58.

of their prophetic utterances. In addition to what the prophets wrote, the records of events in the lives of other leaders were documented and kept in the Temple. The content of the Old Testament canon continued to grow until the latest books such as Daniel and Esther were written.<sup>42</sup>

The third and final stage of the canonization of the Old Testament was the collection of miscellaneous Writings which include books from Psalm to Chronicles. The Writings were made up of ten literary works which had to achieve independent canonical status through circulation and wide acceptance by the people of God.<sup>43</sup> This makes them different from the Law and the Prophets which consisted of final editions of particular literary genres, presumably meant for canonization. The Apocryphal book Ecclesiasticus (the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach), a second-century BC book, gives evidence of three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures that existed at that time, including, the Law and the Prophets and “the other books of our fathers”, comprising, the “Former prophets” or Deuteronomistic history (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) and the “Latter Prophets” (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve [Minor Prophets]). One may deduce from the above assertion that, at the time of writing the book of Ecclesiasticus, the Hebrew canon was likely to have been closed. Yet, the official

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<sup>42</sup> Collins, “The Canon of the Old Testament,” 1037.

<sup>43</sup> Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 62.

recognition of the canon would take place later, even after the death of Christ.

### **Official recognition of the canon at Jumnia**

Scholars used to argue that the Old Testament canon was fixed at a Council held in Jumnia in about 90 AD.<sup>44</sup> The preceding paragraphs have, however, demonstrated that the Hebrew canon existed before even the birth of Christ. In reality, the scholars' task at the Council of Jumnia was to prevent unauthorized books from entering the list of books that the people of God already recognized as sacred and authoritative. They only had to put together books already acknowledged as sacred among the Jews. This meeting of Jewish scholars was necessitated by (at least) three factors, namely, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD, the threatened extinction of Judaism, and the rise of Christianity with a literature that was regarded by some Jewish leaders as heretical. At that time the Jews felt that without bringing their sacred writings together, these writings could be lost or mixed up with others. Since Christianity (which emerged from Judaism, had begun to document the ministry of Jesus Christ and other events), the Jews felt the need to distinguish their sacred writings from those of Christians.

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<sup>44</sup> Boaheng, *An African Background to the Old Testament*, 13.

At this meeting (at Jumnia), books which had been in existence for several centuries and had gained status as authoritative writings were recognized and accepted as inspired without debates. However, the authenticity of certain books, especially such books as Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon were debated. After Jumnia, debates about the status of Esther and parts of Ezekiel continued among Jewish scholars. By the middle of the second century AD, these books were accepted as canonical. Thereafter, the canon was fixed permanently. In all the processes, God was actively present. Canonicity is determined by God, not human beings. God inspired certain writings and guided human beings to recognize them as such.

### **How were the books of the Old Testament selected?**

How did God's people know that only 39 books were inspired by God to be part of the Old Testament canon? The process of identifying which books have God's authority on them was guided by some questions/criteria. One key question was: Was the book written by God's prophet (such as Moses [Exod 4:1-9])? Prophets were the spokespersons of God; therefore, if a book was written, edited, or endorsed by a prophet, it was accepted as God's word.

The second issue that was considered was the time at which the book was written. A canonical book was expected to have been written before the silent period of Israel. The silent



period refers to the last four centuries before the birth of Christ in which God did not raise prophets among the Jews. Books written after 400 BC were mostly not accepted by the Jews as inspired.

The next criterion is related to the content of the book. A canonical book was expected to give some internal pieces of evidence of its unique character, as inspired and authoritative and to teach nothing contrary to known truths about God (cf. Deut 13:1-3; 18:20-22) because God can neither contradict Himself (2 Cor 1:17-18) nor utter falsehood (Heb 6:18). Such a book needed to come with the power of God because the word of God is “living and active” (Heb 4:12).

The fourth factor for canonicity was whether God’s people accepted the book under consideration or not. A book needed to have wide acceptance among God’s people in order to be accepted for canonization. Evidence of acceptance of a book by God’s people included (but was not limited to) the production of many copies and distribution over a wide geographical area. The existence of many copies of a text ensured the survival of the text, even after the exile.

To conclude the process, books that were accepted as canonical were well scrutinized according to the above and other guidelines. There were other books such as Odes of Solomon, 1, 2, 3, and 4th Esdras, Revelation of Moses, 2 and 3 Baruch, The Book of Adam and many more which are referred

to as Pseudepigrapha. These were also rejected for certain reasons. First of all, they were written under false names. Also, they contain anachronisms and historical errors. For example, in the Apocalypse of Baruch, the fall of Jerusalem occurs “in the 25th year of Jeconiah, king of Judah” and this cannot be reconciled with the fact that Jeconiah was 18 years old when he began to reign, and he only reigned 3 months (2 Kings 24:8). I now continue to consider how the New Testament books became part of the biblical canon.

### **Canonization of the New Testament**

The New Testament canon consists of the 27 books recognized by the Church as divinely inspired. The early Christians did not have any books contained in our New Testament. In this sense, the early church refers to the church that existed from the Day of Pentecost till the time that New Testament documents began to appear. Their source of Scripture was the Old Testament, oral traditions about Jesus Christ, and the proclamation of the apostles.<sup>45</sup> It was later that the documentation of the New Testament document began.

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<sup>45</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 102; See also Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1910), 571.

In the first 100 years of the existence of the Christian faith, a number of documents began to circulate among the churches, including epistles, Gospels, memoirs, apocalypses, homilies, and collections of teachings. Pauline epistles were the earliest Christian literature to go into circulation among the Christians as early as the late 40s or so. Several years were to pass before the first Gospel, probably that according to Mark, was to be composed. Mark's Gospel is dated around 65 AD.

The Apostles attested to the inspiration of the writing by encouraging public reading in the Church (Col 4:16; 1 Thess 5:27; 1 Tim 4:13; Rev 22:18) and attributing to them an authoritative power (2 Thess 2:6; 1 Tim 4:1–6; Rev 22:19). Peter (2 Pet 3:15-6) places the Pauline epistles in significant connection with “the rest of the Scriptures.” Soon after their circulation, the Pauline epistles and the Gospels were recognized as Holy Scripture, of equal importance (or more, in the eyes of some people) as the Hebrew Scriptures. They became known as the *homologoumena*, meaning “confessed.” The apostolic Fathers quoted these texts in their writings. For example, Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, quoted some of Pauline materials around 115 AD, meaning these texts had been in circulation for quite some years before that date. In the mid-2nd century, Justin Martyr mentioned “memoirs of the apostles” as

being read on “the day called that of the sun” (Sunday) alongside “the writings of the prophets.”<sup>46</sup>

The canonization of the New Testament was prompted by several factors, the first, being the desire to combat heresies which spread wide in the second century AD. A classic example of such heresies was that of Marcion (a gnostic) who (around 140 AD) taught that the God of the Old Testament was wrathful and inferior to the God of the New Testament who was the loving and merciful Father of Jesus Christ.<sup>47</sup> He argued that the Old Testament was contradictory and barbaric. Hence, he rejected the Old Testament and some portions of the New Testament which according to him were infected with Judaism. He taught that Jewish ideas had been imported into New Testament texts by interpolators, and only Paul’s teachings and some portions of the Gospels were true. Marcion published a canon that included a shortened version of the Lukan Gospel and 10 Pauline letters.<sup>48</sup> His teachings were condemned and he was excommunicated in 144 AD.

The persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire also contributed to the need to define the New Testament canon.

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<sup>46</sup> As cited in Hal Seed, *The Bible Questions: Shedding Light on the World’s Most Important Book* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2012), 35.

<sup>47</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1960), 12.

<sup>48</sup> Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 52.

Christians were persecuted for expressing Christian beliefs and possessing Scriptures. This situation raised the question: Which texts are Scripture and hence are worth dying for? The Church needed the canon in order to prevent the loss of Scripture and to make it publicly known as to which books were worth dying for.

Another crucial factor that necessitated the formal canonization of the New Testament was the proliferation of new literature emerging in the second century, much of which claimed authorship by the Apostles despite their passing in the first century.<sup>49</sup> As Christianity expanded and diversified, numerous texts purportedly authored by the Apostles began circulating within Christian communities. However, the authenticity and apostolic connection of these writings were often questionable. In order to maintain the integrity of the apostolic tradition and ensure doctrinal consistency within the burgeoning Christian movement, the early Church faced the pressing need to discern which texts were genuinely linked to the teachings of the Apostles. This process of discernment involved careful scrutiny and evaluation of each text's historical origins, theological coherence, and alignment with apostolic doctrine. Given the imperative to uphold the apostolic legacy and preserve the purity of Christian teaching, texts that

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<sup>49</sup> Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 53.

could not be reliably traced back to apostolic sources were deemed ineligible for inclusion in the New Testament canon. The criteria for inclusion typically required a direct connection to the Apostles or individuals closely associated with them, ensuring that only authentic apostolic writings would be recognized as authoritative scripture.

The first formal list of New Testament books is the Muratorian Canon, which was written in Rome around 170 AD.<sup>50</sup> This list includes the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (and no other gospels), Acts, the 13 letters of Paul, and Jude, two epistles of John, and Revelation as Scripture.<sup>51</sup> Another attempt at canonization was made in the early 3rd century, by Origen who used the same 27 books as in the Catholic New Testament canon, though there were still unsettled issues about Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Revelation.

Eusebius observed that by the fourth century, all the New Testament books were accepted except James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, which he says were disputed by some people, but recognized by the majority.<sup>52</sup> Questions were raised about the epistle of James because of its apparent contradiction

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<sup>50</sup> Charles J. Ellicott, *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible Volume VI: The Four Gospels* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), xiii.

<sup>51</sup> Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, 12.

<sup>52</sup> Eusebius, *The Church History: A New Translation with Commentary* translated by Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999), 115.

(see esp. James 2:18-26) with Paul's emphasis on salvation by grace through faith apart from works of the law (see esp. Gal 3:1-18; Rom 3:28; 4:1-12). Second Peter is written in a dramatically different style than 1 Peter, so ancient Christians wondered if one writer could have written both letters. The epistles of 2 and 3 John as well as Jude were so short that questions were asked about their timeless, enduring value. Based on this, Eusebius divided New literature associated with Christianity into three classes: *Homologoumena*, or compositions universally accepted as sacred (including the four Gospels, thirteen Pauline epistles, Hebrews, Acts, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Apocalypse), *antilegomena*, or contested writings; these, in turn, are of the superior (including epistles of James and Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John) and inferior sort (including Barnabas, the Didache, the Gospel of the Hebrews, the Acts of Paul, the Shepherd, the Apocalypse of Peter), and the third group, all the rest are spurious (*notha*).

The first list that includes all 27 books of the New Testament as the only canonical books was compiled by Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, in 367 AD. In his Easter letter, Bishop Athanasius presented a list of exactly the same books as what would become the 27-book New Testament canon. Finally, in Carthage (in 397 AD), the Church in the West approved the 27 documents alone as authoritative and inspired.

After this official declaration, the Church considered the biblical canon as closed. This means that “we cannot expect any more books to be discovered or written that would open the canon again and add to its sixty-six books.”<sup>53</sup> Even if a letter of Paul were discovered, it would not be canonical because God in His wisdom led the Church through the process that brought the canon to a close. God does not give new revelation today. What He does is illuminate the revelation He has already given so that we can understand it well. The Bible teaches the finality of God’s revelation in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1). Christ qualifies as the final revelation of God because he is the exact imprint (Greek=*charakter*) of the Father’s being (Heb 1:3-4) and the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15).

Therefore, any claim to new Christian revelation which contradicts the Bible must be categorically rejected. The so-called new revelations are expected to be illuminations rather than entirely new revelations. Strictly speaking, no new revelation is given; rather it is illumination that we receive from God to enhance our understanding of his word.

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<sup>53</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 120.



## How were the books of the New Testament selected?

Like the Old Testament canon, the New Testament canon was guided by some criteria, some of which I outline below. The first consideration was the identity of the writer. Apostolicity was a key test for New Testament canonicity. A book had to be written or endorsed by an apostle in order to be recognized as sacred. The apostles were the people who knew Christ personally and had been commissioned to make disciples. Therefore, they spoke God's word, just as the Old Testament prophets acted as spokespersons of God.

Another test for the canonicity of a book was cross-referencing (also known as "the rule of faith"). By cross-referencing I mean a sacred book had to have a close connection with the teachings about Jesus found in other sacred books.<sup>54</sup> Early Church Fathers like Irenaeus argued for the necessity of "the rule of faith" as a criterion for differentiating true teachings from false ones. Paul taught this principle when he said, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed!" (Gal 1:8). Therefore, only teachings that were in line with the tradition of what Jesus taught, or those communicated by the apostles, and that which is contained in the Old Testament were suitable for canonization.

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<sup>54</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Scripture Alone* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2005), 48.

The third test was the edifying power of the book under consideration. A book could not be canonized if it could not transform people's lives. God's word has a life-changing power and as such a document that was to be part of a collection of God's sacred documents was to have this feature.

The fourth test was universality or corporate acceptance, by which I mean, a canonized book needed to have general acceptance among members of the early Church. A book must have stood the test of time and continued to be used widely by the Church to qualify for canonization. Thus, the initial acceptance of a book by the people to whom it was addressed was a key factor in making decisions about its canonicity<sup>55</sup> (see 1 Thess 2:13).

### **What about the so-called Old Testament missing books?**

Critics have argued that there are lost books of the Bible. These are books that are purported to be inspired but did not find their way into the Bible. Contrary to this opinion I opine that the so-called "lost books" were never lost. They were books which existed side by side with the canonical books but were never at any point in time considered by Jews or Christians as inspired.

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<sup>55</sup> Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (revised edition) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986), 229.

These books (as I explain below) did not pass the test for canonicity and so had to be excluded from the canon.

Catholics and Protestants have not reached a consensus regarding the exact number of books that belong to the Old Testament canon (as mentioned earlier). In addition to the 39 books in the Protestant Bible Catholics have seven more books in their Bible. Some of the reasons for which the Apocryphal books were rejected by Protestants are outlined below. Firstly, the Apocryphal books were not a part of the Hebrew canon and as such, many ancient Jews rejected them as Scripture. Josephus explicitly rejected the Apocrypha and listed the Hebrew Canon to be 22 books.<sup>56</sup> Philo, a Jewish philosopher of Alexandria, who had much literature to his credit quoted the Old Testament many times without ever quoting from the Apocrypha.

Secondly, there is no clear and definite New Testament quotation from the Apocrypha, even though the New Testament writers often quoted from the LXX which also contained the Apocryphal books. Consequently, Judaism which produced these books has never accepted them into its Bible (that is the Hebrew Bible).

More so, there are a lot of unbiblical teachings including, the command to use magic (Tob 6:5-7), the idea of

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<sup>56</sup> Flavius Josephus, "Against Apion" in *The Complete Works* translated by William Whiston (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1998), 929. These 22 books correspond to the 39 books of the Protestant canon.

giving alms as a means of receiving forgiveness of sins (Tob 4:11, 12:9; Sir. 3:30), and praying for the dead (2 Macc 12:43-46) contained in the Apocrypha. These teachings directly contradict the New Testament teachings that salvation is by grace, not by works (Eph 2:8-9) and that after death comes judgment (Heb 9:27).

In addition, the Apocryphal books are not prophetic, meaning, they were written at the time that Israel had no prophets (see 1 Macc 9:27, 14:41), and hence could not have contained any new Messianic truth. Judeo-Christian tradition holds that prophecy ceased in Israel around 400 BC after the death of the last prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) when the Holy Spirit ceased to communicate to Israel directly through the prophets. During this period, usually referred to as the silent period, no further books were added to the sacred ones. Josephus declared, “From Artaxerxes [fourth century BC] until our time everything has been recorded, but has not been deemed worthy of like credit with what preceded, because the exact succession of the prophets ceased.”<sup>57</sup> The Jewish Talmud adds, “With the death of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi the latter prophets, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel.”<sup>58</sup> The

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<sup>57</sup> Josephus, “Against Apion”, 38-41.

<sup>58</sup> As cited in Jeffrey D. Breshears, *Introduction to Bibliology: What Every Christian Should Know About the Origins, Composition, Inspiration, Interpretation, Canonicity, and Transmission of the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), 169.

Apocryphal books were written between 250 BC and the first century AD, a period in which (as noted earlier) the Spirit of prophecy had departed from Israel. Therefore, Francis Turretin remarks, “The authors were neither prophets and inspired men, since they wrote after Malachi (the last of the prophets); nor were their books written in the Hebrew language (as those of the Old Testament) but in Greek.”<sup>59</sup>

Moreover, these books contain errors in the areas of geography and history. For example, the book of Judith (1:5) incorrectly says that Nebuchadnezzar was the king of the Assyrians when (in reality) he was the king of the Babylonians. Baruch (6:2) also says Jews would serve in Babylon for seven generations while Jeremiah (25:11) says it was for 70 years.

Lastly, these books were not held as canonical until the Roman Catholic Council of Trent in 1546 announced them as part of their canon and condemned anyone who disagreed. This decision came after over a millennium and a half years after the books were written. The decision to accept these books was a reaction to the Protestant Reformation. Until 1546, no general Church Council had endorsed these books as canonical. Church fathers such as Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Origen, and Jerome strongly opposed the acceptance of these books as Scripture, though others like Augustine accepted them. It must

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<sup>59</sup> Sproul, *Scripture Alone*, 51-52.

however be noted that Augustine was not a Hebrew scholar. Therefore, he was not in the position to study the Hebrew texts and hence make a good judgment as to which ones were really Scripture. The two best scholars of Hebrew among the Church Fathers were Origen and Jerome, and both of them rejected the Apocrypha.

The Catholic decision to include these books in their canon (in my opinion) is unjustified for at least three reasons. In the first place, the determination of the canon of the Old Testament is the prerogative of the Jews, not Christians. Christians adopted the Hebrew Bible as the Old Testament after Christianity was born out of Judaism. Therefore, the Catholics were the wrong people to decide the canonicity of these books, knowing very well that the Jews did not consider those books as Scripture. In addition, the decision took place in the sixteenth century AD, several centuries after the close of the canon, which was too late. Further still, the intention was wrong in that the decision to canonize the Apocrypha was fueled by the Catholics' desire to defend their doctrines such as praying for the dead<sup>60</sup> (see 2 Macc. 12:43-46), in response to the Protestant position that prayer for the dead cannot change their eternal destiny of dead people (see Heb 9:27).

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<sup>60</sup> In my candid opinion, the claim for support from biblical texts like Ex 32:11-12; 1 Sam 7:9; Ps 99:6; Jer 15:1 and 2 Tim 1:16-18 by Catholic scholars is not convincing.

## What about the so-called New Testament missing books?

The Church rejected a number of spurious books that appeared as early as the second century. These books were usually linked with the writings of the gnostic heretics who sought to undermine the authority of the New Testament Apostles. The gnostic heretics were a group of people “who claimed to have a special elite knowledge (*gnosis*) that transcended the knowledge imparted by the Apostles.”<sup>61</sup> Yet, they sought to associate their writings with the Apostles. The gnostic gospels and other books did not qualify for canonization for the following reasons.

First and foremost, they were actually written much later, in the late second and third centuries—far too late to have any association with the real Apostles of Christ. By this time, the Gospels of the New Testament canon had already been composed during the lifetimes of the Apostles. These books therefore were unapostolic.<sup>62</sup> Origen contends strongly that “The church receives only four Gospels; heretics have many, such as the Gospel of the Egyptians, the Gospel of Thomas, etc. These we read, that we may not seem to be ignorant to those

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<sup>61</sup> Sproul, *Scripture Alone*, 49.

<sup>62</sup> Sproul, *Scripture Alone*, 48.

who think they know something extraordinary [the gnostic heretics] if they are acquainted with those things which are recorded in these books.”<sup>63</sup> Origen also quotes Ambrose as saying, “We read these [the gnostic gospels] that we may not seem ignorant; we read them, not that we receive them, but that we may reject them; and may know what those things are, of which they make such a boast.”<sup>64</sup> The above quotes by the two Church Fathers clearly point to the non-canonical status of the gnostic Gospels (and by extension other similar works).

In addition, the gnostic Gospels did not adhere to “the rule of faith” in that they were not consistent with the rest of the Bible. The Gospel of Thomas, for instance, contains many alleged sayings of Jesus, some of which clearly endorse secret knowledge as the key to salvation. The Gospel of Mary (which was popularized by Dan Brown’s novel *The Da Vinci Code*) depicts Jesus as marrying Mary Magdalene and having children with her. The Gospel of Judas portrays Judas as being among the “perfect,” and being given a fuller picture of God’s plan. Judas, according to this Gospel, was acting under the command of Jesus when he betrayed him. Therefore, the Jesus these books depict is not recognizable as the Jesus known from the canonical Gospels.

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<sup>63</sup> As cited in Sproul, *Scripture Alone*, 49.

<sup>64</sup> As cited in Sproul, *Scripture Alone*, 49.



Finally, despite garnering some limited favor from certain individuals or groups on the fringes of early Christianity, these texts never gained widespread acceptance within the early churches. One of the primary reasons for their exclusion lies in their divergence from orthodox Christian teachings. These texts contain significant errors and deviations from essential Christian doctrines, such as the nature of sin, the concept of holiness, ethical principles, and the theology of redemption. Within the early Christian communities, doctrinal fidelity and theological coherence were paramount concerns. Texts that deviated from established beliefs or introduced erroneous teachings were met with skepticism and scrutiny. The inclusion of such texts in the authoritative canon would have posed a threat to the integrity and unity of Christian doctrine. Moreover, the rejection of these texts was not merely a matter of theological disagreement but also reflected practical considerations. The early churches relied on authoritative texts to guide their beliefs, practices, and communal life. Embracing texts that contained errors or diverged from orthodox teachings would have compromised the spiritual health and doctrinal unity of the Christian community.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to answer the question of the number of books that make up the Bible. The difference in

canon between Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic churches was highlighted. The various tests for canonicity were outlined. One thing that was emphasized is that while other writings, books and epistles may teach us about history, they do not have the authority of Scripture, nor are they equal to Scripture. In the next chapter, I examine the historical reliability of the Old Testament.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **IS THE OLD TESTAMENT HISTORICALLY ACCURATE?**

The focus of this chapter is to explore the question of the reliability of the Old Testament text. The term “reliability” (as used in this study) refers to the quality of being dependable and truthful. The question I seek to answer in this chapter is, “Is the Old Testament reliable in what it says about God’s dealings with humanity (especially with ancient Israel) in the Ancient Near East?” I shall present a case for the reliability and truthfulness of the Old Testament based on the accuracy of manuscript transmission, evidence from abundant manuscripts available today, the witness of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Samaritan Pentateuch, and archeological evidence.

#### **Accuracy in Manuscript Transmission**

Evidence supporting the reliability of the Old Testament text can be obtained partly by considering the textual transmission from the original writings to what we have today in printed form. Before investigating the issues related to manuscript transmission, it is important to note that none of the original autographs of the Old Testament exist today. What we have are hand-written copies of the original texts. Jewish rabbinical tradition had two key principles, namely, the use of the Hebrew

Scriptures to their fullest spiritual potential and the accurate preservation of the text. The Jewish community held great reverence for the Scripture. Consequently, they exercised extreme care in making new copies of the Hebrew Scriptures. The accuracy of the work of the Hebrew scribes who made copies of the Hebrew texts is overwhelming when the Scriptures are compared to other ancient literature. On this, Gleason Archer has stated “It should be clearly understood that in this respect, the Old Testament differs from all other pre-Christian works of literature of which we have any knowledge. To be sure, we do not possess ordinarily so many different manuscripts of pagan productions, coming from such widely separated eras, as we do in the case of the Old Testament.”<sup>65</sup>

The entire scribal process was specified in meticulous detail to minimize the possibility of even the slightest error. At a point in time (probably after the exile), priests (Deut 31:24-26) and scribes (called *Sopherim*) were appointed to carefully and meticulously copy the sacred text. The scribes developed a number of strict measures to ensure that every new copy was a reliable reproduction of the original. They established tedious procedures to protect the text against changes:<sup>66</sup> First of all,

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<sup>65</sup> Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 23.

<sup>66</sup> These measures have been adopted with slight modifications from J. Warner Wallace, *Establishing the Reliability of the Old Testament: A Trustworthy Process of Transmission*, 2018.

From <https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/establishing-the-reliability-of-the-old-testament-a-trustworthy-process-of-transmission/>

worn out or spoiled copies were removed and stored in a store room (called *geniza*<sup>67</sup>) to be disposed of properly later. This ensured that the good copies were not mixed with bad ones.

Secondly, in the process of making new copies, the Masoretes strictly controlled the materials used, including the quality (and types) of inks and skins used to produce the scrolls. The condition of the room in which the copies were made was also strictly controlled, in addition to the cleanliness of the copyist. The color of the ink used was to be black; neither red, blue, or any other color was to be used in writing, and the ink was to be prepared according to a specific recipe.

Thirdly, the length of text permitted within each column was to be carefully regulated. It was prescribed that the number of lines in each column should fall within the range of 48 to 60 lines, ensuring that sections were neither excessively lengthy nor overly brief. Attention was paid to the width of each column, with a specified limit of no more than 30 letters across. By adhering to these formatting standards, the document achieved a harmonious layout that facilitated ease of reading and comprehension for its intended audience.

More so, though the copyists had great ability to memorize text, they were not allowed to write any word or letter (not even a *yod*) from memory. Each line was to be copied letter for letter

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<sup>67</sup> Geniza refers to a store room where faulty and worn out manuscripts are stored until they were properly disposed of.

from a reliable written source (known today as *Vorlage*).<sup>68</sup> This rule was strictly enforced and it was never to be broken.

Again, when observable errors were detected in the text (like those inadvertently made by a scribe or copyist) they were marked and retained in the body of the text. The corrected word was placed in the margin, called *qere*, (meaning “to be read”). The word written in the text was labelled *kethibh* (meaning “to be written”).

Furthermore, copyists were required to read the Hebrew texts aloud as they wrote them down.<sup>69</sup> Not only did this practice ensure that copyists had sufficient knowledge of both a tradition of meaning to be written and meaning to be read, but it also helped them to check their work in other various ways.

In addition, a word identified as incorrect (for grammatical, textual, or exegetical reasons) had dots placed above it so as to make it easily identifiable for thorough examination and correction.

Further still, scribes also kept detailed statistics on the text to guard against errors. As an example, Leviticus 8:8 (in the Hebrew structure of the Bible) was identified as the middle verse of the Torah. A single word in Leviticus 10:16 was

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<sup>68</sup> Norman Geisler and Joseph M. Holden, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 50.

<sup>69</sup> Geisler and Holden, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, 50.

identified as the middle word of the Torah (called the *darash*) and a single letter in Leviticus 10:42 was identified as the middle letter of the Torah (called the *waw*). With this information, any copy of the text could be counted and assessed to make sure these verses, words and letters were still where they should be (at the center of the document).

Additionally, consonants were separated by a hair or thread, *parashahs* or sections were separated by the breath of nine consonants, and three lines separated books.

Finally, scribes and copyists also listed important statistics at the end of each book. As an example, the total number of verses in Deuteronomy is 955, the total in the entire Torah is 5,845; the total number of words is 97,856, and the total number of letters is 400,945. By assembling statistics such as these, each book could be measured mathematically to detect any copyist errors. Despite these measures, there could still be minor errors in the copies. I consider the issue of copyist errors in the next section.

## **Copyist errors**

Copyist errors in manuscript transmission refer to inaccuracies introduced during the process of copying ancient texts by hand. As noted earlier, before the invention of printing presses in 1455, manuscripts were reproduced manually by scribes, a meticulous and labor-intensive task that was prone to human

error. Copyist errors could arise from various factors, including fatigue, distractions, unfamiliarity with the text, or simply inadvertent slips of the pen.

A few things need to be noted about copyist errors. First, they are in the copies, not the original manuscripts. Second, they are minor errors (usually related to proper names [especially unfamiliar ones] or numbers<sup>70</sup>) which do not affect any doctrine of the Christian faith. Third, these copyist errors are relatively few. Fourth, most of these errors can usually be known by the context, or by another Scripture. They do not affect the validity of the message. Assume that you receive a letter that reads: #ou have won a prize. Though there is a mistake in the first word, the message is clear “you have won a prize.” Assume further that you receive another letter the following day that reads: “Y#u have won prize.” This even makes the message clearer, though it also has a mistake in it. Apparently, the more mistakes of this kind there are (each in a different place), the more easily the original message can be known. Most scribal errors in manuscript copies are like this; they do not affect the basic message of the Bible. Therefore, the manuscripts we have today may be imperfect, but their imperfection does not affect the overall message of the Bible.

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<sup>70</sup> Gleason Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 206.



Another example of copyist error is putting words together when they are supposed to stand individually or separating words which are supposed to be put together. An example of this kind of error is say copying NOWHERE as NOW HERE, or vice versa. In many cases, the correct word/expression is known from the immediate or larger context of the text. A case in point is the age at which Ahaziah became a king. 2 Kings 8:26 gives the age of king Ahaziah as twenty-two, whereas 2 Chronicles 22:2 says forty-two. We, however, learn from 2 Kings 8:17 that Ahaziah's father Joram ben Ahab was thirty-two when he became king, and he died eight years later, at age forty. This means that the correct age of Ahaziah when he was enstooled is twenty-two.

However, the issue of copyist error is not peculiar to the Bible; other ancient documents showed copyist errors. For instance, "in the Behistun Rock inscription set up by Darius I, around 510 BC, we find that line 38 gives the figure for the slain of the army of Frada as 55,243, with 6,572 prisoners—according to the Babylonian column. In a duplicate copy of this inscription found at Babylon itself, the number of prisoners was 6,973."<sup>71</sup> However, "in the Aramaic translation of this inscription (which was discovered at the Elephantine in Egypt),

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<sup>71</sup> E. W. König, *Relief und Inschrift des Königs Dareios I am Felsen von Bagistan* (Leiden: Brill, 1938), 48.

the number of prisoners was only 6,972.”<sup>72</sup> A similar discrepancy can be found in the comparison of Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7.

During translation, alternative readings of a text are not left out but placed in footnotes. Footnotes indicate significant differences among manuscripts and are normally indicated in one of three ways: “Other manuscripts read ...”, “Other manuscripts add ...” or “Other manuscripts omit ....” For example, the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) text of Psalm 12:7 reads: You will protect us<sup>a</sup> from this generation forever. The textual footnote for this verse reads: <sup>a</sup>12:7 Some Hb [Hebrew] manuscripts, Septuagint (LXX); other Hb manuscripts read *him*. In this example, the textual note indicates that there are two different readings found in the Hebrew manuscripts: some manuscripts read *us* and others read *him*. The Holman CSB translators chose the reading *us*, which is also found in the LXX, and placed the other Hebrew reading, *him* in the footnote. We can therefore be sure that the original message is among the various readings given by our Bibles. In any case, the original reading is almost certainly one of the options recorded in the existing manuscripts somewhere. Therefore, we can say that the manuscripts we have today have been copied with the greatest possible care.

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<sup>72</sup> König, *Relief und Inschrift des Königs Dareios I am Felsen von Bagistan*, 48.

## The Testimony of Abundant Hebrew Manuscripts

Another factor that attests to the reliability of the Old Testament is the large quantity of manuscripts available to us as compared to other ancient texts. The Old Testament does not have as many manuscripts available to us as the New Testament because of antiquity and destructibility. The time interval from the period they were written and now is very long (at least two thousand years) and the materials used for writing could easily perish. Yet, the number of manuscripts that have survived till today is highly remarkable. There are important collections of Old Testament manuscripts available today for examination. Benjamin Kennicott (1776-1780) made the first collection comprising 615 manuscripts and Giovanni de Rossi (1784-1788) compiled a list of 731 manuscripts.<sup>73</sup> However, the discoveries of manuscripts in Cairo Geniza (1890s) and the Dead Sea caves (1947 and subsequent years) are the most outstanding discoveries in modern times. About 200,000 manuscripts were found from the Geniza, of which about 10,000 were biblical (dating from the fifth century AD).<sup>74</sup>

Aside from these, there are many other Old Testament manuscripts discoveries. Contrary to the abundant manuscripts of the Old Testament available to us, most works from antiquity

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<sup>73</sup> McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 72.

<sup>74</sup> McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 72.

survive on only a handful of manuscripts; “only 7 for Plato, 8 for Thucydides, 8 for Herodotus, 10 for Caesar’s *Gallic Wars*, and 20 for Tacitus.”<sup>75</sup> Demosthenes and Homer are the only ancient documents that have hundreds of manuscripts.

According to Norman Geisler and Joseph M. Holden, “The Dead Sea Scrolls provide the best test of how accurately the Old Testament was copied over the centuries since they provide a comparison of what the text was like about a thousand years earlier than the ones we had before the scrolls were discovered.”<sup>76</sup> These Scrolls date from the mid-second century BC and the late first century AD, approximately just before and during the formative period of Christianity. Most scholars attribute these texts to the Essenes, a Jewish ascetic group that existed from about 140 BC. The manuscripts discovered at this site (totaling more than 870 scrolls or fragments) fall into four categories. There are copies of texts of the Hebrew Bible, some of which are the oldest copies of the available books (dating to the second century BC). For example, one of the scrolls of Isaiah found in the Qumran cave (labelled as 1QISa<sup>a</sup>) predates any previous copy available by nine hundred years.<sup>77</sup> There is another group of the Dead Sea Scrolls containing copies of

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<sup>75</sup> Ted Cabal (ed.), *CSB Apologetics Study Bible*, 468.

<sup>76</sup> Geisler and Holden, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, 51.

<sup>77</sup> W. Randolph Tate, *Handbook for Biblical Interpretation: An Essential Guide to Methods, Terms, and Concepts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 104.

Apocrypha and pseudepigrapha (such as Tobit, 1 Enoch, and Jubilees). Another group contains commentaries on books such as Habakkuk and Isaiah prepared by the Essenes community. The last category of manuscripts found in the Qumran caves are those produced for the Essenes community touching on the religious and social life of the people. All these numerous manuscripts testify to the reliability of the Old Testament text in that they offer biblical scholars the opportunity to compare the many manuscripts to arrive at the original text.

### **The Testimony of Ancient Versions**

Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest existing complete Hebrew Bible was the Aleppo codex, one of the Masoretic texts, which was written in the 10th Century AD, almost a thousand years after the Dead Sea Scrolls were prepared. Modern translations were based on this text (that is, Aleppo codex). The significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls to the present study has to do with the detailed closeness of the Isaiah scroll (dated 125 BC) to the Masoretic Text of Isaiah (dated 916 AD). The Dead Sea Scrolls show that the Old Testament text has been transmitted accurately for over 2000 years up till now. According to Archer, the Isaiah copies of the Qumran community “proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The five percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of

pen and variation in spelling.”<sup>78</sup> He continues, “Even those Dead Sea fragments of Deuteronomy and Samuel which point to a different manuscript family from that which underlies our received Hebrew text do not indicate any differences in doctrine or teaching. They do not affect the message of revelation in the slightest.”<sup>79</sup> Burrows also observes that:

Of the 166 words in Isaiah 53, there are only 17 letters in question. Ten of these letters are simply a matter of spelling, which does not affect the sense. Four more letters are minor stylistic changes, such as conjunctions. The three remaining letters comprise the word LIGHT, which is added in verse 11 and which does not affect the meaning greatly. Furthermore, this word is supported by the LXX. Thus, in one chapter of 166 words, there is only one word (three letters) in question after a thousand years of transmission - and this word does not significantly change the meaning of the passage.<sup>80</sup>

Besides, the authenticity of the Old Testament manuscripts has been verified by the Samaritan Pentateuch. The Samaritans separated from the Jews around the 4th or 5th century BC due to religious and cultural struggle, and probably prepared their

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<sup>78</sup> Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 19.

<sup>79</sup> Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 19.

<sup>80</sup> Burrows as cited in McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 79.

manuscript of the Pentateuch from the Hebrew text they had taken during the division.<sup>81</sup> The Samaritan Pentateuch is a version of the first five books of the Old Testament that was recognized as the authoritative Scripture of the Samaritans. Scholars date the manuscript to as early as the 3rd century BC. This popular version of the Torah, which was in use before the rabbinic tradition, provides scholars with yet another witness to the earlier forms of the Pentateuchal texts. The Samaritan Pentateuch shows substantial agreement with the Masoretic Text, though there are also areas (about 6000 instances) where it deviates from the Masoretic Text.<sup>82</sup> It agrees with the LXX in about 1900 instances. Some of the variants were intentionally introduced by the Samaritans to preserve their religious traditions.<sup>83</sup>

The testimony of the LXX is also very important in discussing the accuracy of Old Testament manuscript transmission. The LXX was the very first translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. The LXX later became the received text of the Old Testament in the early church and the basis of its canon.

Another ancient translation that was made for the Jews was the Targums. Targums were ancient Aramaic paraphrases

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<sup>81</sup> McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 84.

<sup>82</sup> Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 382.

<sup>83</sup> McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 85.

or interpretations of all the books of the Hebrew Bible (except Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel). The situation that necessitated this translation was that the post-exilic Jews became so familiar with Aramaic that they needed this version for their study of God's word. The Targums were read in the synagogue.

These and other ancient versions of the Old Testament attest remarkably to the accuracy in the transmission of the Old Testament text to date.

### **The Testimony of Archeology**

Archeology is the scientific study of past human lives and activities through the recovery and analysis of material remains (including fossils, relics, artifacts, and monuments). Archeology confirms the historicity of the Bible rather than proving it.<sup>84</sup> Some archeological discoveries in support of the reliability of the Old Testament text can be noted and examined. Archeologists have discovered the Black Obelisk (a 6 1/2 feet tall four-sided pillar made of black limestone) of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III. It was A.H. Layard who (in 1846) discovered this monument in the Central Palace of King Shalmaneser III (not to be confused with Assyrian king Shalmaneser V, mentioned in 2 Kings 17:3-6) at the ruins of Nimrud, known in the Bible as Calah (and known in ancient

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<sup>84</sup> McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 92.



Assyrian inscriptions as Kalhu).<sup>85</sup> The monument commemorated (among other things), the payment of tribute from Jehu (son of Omri) to Shalmaneser in 841 BC (2 Kings 8-10). The inscription reads, “Tribute of Yaua (Jehu or Joram), house of Omri, I received silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden vase with pointed bottom, golden tumblers, golden buckets, tin, a staff for a king, spears.”<sup>86</sup>

A. H. Layard also discovered Assyrian king Sennacherib’s palace wall relief in Nineveh, portraying the siege of Lachish by Sennacherib (Isa 36:1-2).<sup>87</sup> Archeological excavations of the biblical city of Beth Shan have revealed an occupation beginning from approximately 4500 BC. It was in this city that the bodies of King Saul and his sons were fastened on the city walls (1 Sam 31:8-13) after they died in a battle between Israel and the Philistines. A temple was also discovered at the same site which could probably be the Temple of Ashtaroth, where Saul and Jonathan’s armor and heads were exhibited (1 Chron 10:10).<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Geisler and Holden, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, 82.

<sup>86</sup> Geisler and Holden, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, 82.

<sup>87</sup> Geisler and Holden, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, 81.

<sup>88</sup> Geisler and Holden, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, 81.

Biblical archeology has discovered the city of Beth Shan (Shean) where the Philistines impaled the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan (Shean). Later the people of Jabesh-Gilead heard about it marched to Beth-Shan, removed the bodies and brought them to Jabesh to burn them (see 1 Sam 31:8–13; cf. 1 Chron 10:8–12). Beth Shan was also one of the ten cities of the Decapolis in the first century Greco-Roman world (Matt 4:25; Mark 5:20; 7:31).<sup>89</sup> Nine of the cities that made up the Decapolis have been identified in Jordan and they include Philadelphia, Scythopolis (another name for Beth Shan), Damascus, Hippos, Raphana, Gadara, Pella, Abila, and Gerasa.<sup>90</sup> The identification of the tenth city is in dispute.

The credibility of the biblical accounts of Sargon (mentioned only once in the Old Testament, cf. Isa 20:1) was questioned because the name Sargon is not mentioned in any extra-biblical text. Excavation work done at what is now known as Sargon's Palace at Khorsabad (in 1843) led to the discovery of a massive sculpture which had the head of Sargon II (722–705 BC).<sup>91</sup> The sculpture had texts about Sargon's besiege and capture of Samaria (Isa 20:6) and his title, ancestry, and achievements as a king. The Assyrians deported the Israelites

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<sup>89</sup> George A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (Frankfurt am Main: Books on Demand, 2019), 205.

<sup>90</sup> Geisler and Holden, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, 81.

<sup>91</sup> Geisler and Holden, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, 81.

and brought other people into their land along with their religions. The consequence of the Assyrian conquest of Samaria was that they (the Samaritans) became a mixed race and later became enemies of the Jews who claimed to be pure (see John 4:9) in terms of both race and religious heritage. The archeological records about Sargon confirm that the biblical records about Sargon's dealings with Samaria are trustworthy.

In 1924, Sir Leonard Woolley found the remains of a massive ziggurat located in the biblical city of Ur (present-day Tell al-Muqayyar).<sup>92</sup> Aside from validating Abraham's story (Gen 11:1-9, 27-29), this discovery also supports the likelihood of events about the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9).

In addition, J. E. Taylor also discovered four clay cuneiform cylinders in the ancient ruins and ziggurat of Ur in 1854. Written by Babylonian king Nabonidus (sixth century BC), these texts contain Nabonidus' prayer for himself and his son Belshazzar. It is this Belshazzar who saw the handwriting on the wall that spelled his doom (Dan 5). Before this discovery, critics argued that the biblical reference to Belshazzar as "king" (Dan 5:1) was in error because there is no extrabiblical source which lists him among Babylonian kings.<sup>93</sup> The discovery confirms the biblical record by making it clear that Belshazzar

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<sup>92</sup> Geisler and Holden, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, 82.

<sup>93</sup> Geisler and Holden, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, 82.

was Nabonidus's son who was left in Babylon as a co-regent king since Nabonidus was mostly away from his land.<sup>94</sup>

More so, excavations at Tel (Tell) Dan have led to the discovery of many items connected to the Old Testament, including, the oldest intact mud-brick gate structure yet found, which dates the patriarchal period to the Middle Bronze Age; and one of two altars built by Jeroboam I in Dan and Bethel as well as a golden calf.<sup>95</sup> This discovery attests to the credibility of the biblical account that Jeroboam made these two cities places of worship for the northern ten tribes of Israel (after the division of the kingdom of Israel) in order to prevent them from going to Jerusalem (the southern kingdom) for worship (1 Kings 12:25- 33).

Furthermore, there are about 26 names of kings found in the Old Testament whose names are also written on monuments or documents of kings of the Ancient Near East in the same way they are found in the Old Testament.<sup>96</sup> Others are spelled differently from how they appear in the Old Testament due to changes in phonetic laws which took place at the time

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<sup>94</sup> Geisler and Holden, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, 82.

<sup>95</sup> Geisler and Holden, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, 84.

<sup>96</sup> Wilson as cited in McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 70.

that the Old Testament texts were documented.<sup>97</sup> There are Assyrian documents containing the names of the kings of Judah and Israel with the same spelling as we have in the Old Testament.<sup>98</sup> Wilson also gives evidence of an unequalled accuracy with which proper names in the Old Testament have been transmitted through a period of more than two centuries.<sup>99</sup> This kind of transmission accuracy is neither easy nor usual. Wilson concludes that “The proof that the copies of the original documents have been handed down with substantial correctness for more than 2,000 years cannot be denied.”<sup>100</sup> The overwhelming evidence in support of the reliability of the Old Testament leads to the inevitable conclusion that the Hebrew Bible is historically accurate.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined key supports for the credibility of the Old Testament text. It was argued that the Old Testament possesses credentials of historicity that put it in a category by itself with respect to ancient literature. First, it has been

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<sup>97</sup> Wilson as cited in McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 70.

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<sup>100</sup> Wilson as cited in McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 70.

accurately transmitted over time through accurate copying. Second, the wealth and antiquity of the documents establish the trustworthiness of their transmission. Third, ancient versions are attesting to the reliability of the Old Testament manuscripts. Further, archeology has given strong support to the belief that the Old Testament manuscripts are reliable. The obvious conclusion is that no work of antiquity compares the Old Testament in terms of the accuracy with which it has been transmitted. We now proceed to the next chapter to examine the authenticity of the New Testament.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **IS THE NEW TESTAMENT HISTORICALLY ACCURATE?**

The New Testament has suffered many attacks regarding its authenticity relating to its claim of the virgin birth of Christ, crucifixion and resurrection as well as the many miracles of Christ. The need to examine the historical reliability of the New Testament is obvious. If the New Testament is historically not true, Christianity is a false religion and must be rejected. If, on the other hand, it is trustworthy, then we need to obey it faithfully. The purpose of this chapter is to examine what proofs exist in support of the historical reliability of the New Testament. The discussion is organized according to the testimony of abundant Greek manuscripts, the testimony of the Church Fathers, and the testimony of Archeology.

#### **The Testimony of Abundant Greek Manuscripts**

The reliability of the New Testament text is supported by the large number of manuscripts available to us today and their closeness to the original. This amount of manuscript evidence for the New Testament text far exceeds any classical texts, such as those written by Herodotus, Thucydides, Julius Caesar, Tacitus, and Livy. There are about 5656 partial and complete manuscripts of the Greek New Testament that were copied by

hand from the second through the fifteenth centuries before the invention of the printing press. Comparatively, Homer's *Iliad* is second, with only 643 manuscripts that have survived till now. The vast number of New Testament manuscripts available to us today underlines the fact that the New Testament was the most frequently copied and widely circulated book of antiquity. By comparing these many copies, scholars can weed out many possible copying mistakes. In addition, there are over 10,000 Latin Vulgate and at least 9,300 other early versions in existence today.

It is also important to note that the interval of time between the originals and the earliest copies (available to us today) is much shorter for the New Testament than for other classical texts. The New Testament was written between 45–90 AD. Some fragments of Greek texts exist that date back to 120 and 150 AD. That's only 35-100 years after the originals that Paul, John, Luke and others wrote. The following table compares the New Testament textual evidence with other Greek literature (considered accurate by historians) from the same era.<sup>101</sup>

<b>Author</b>	<b>Book</b>	<b>Date written</b>	<b>Earliest copy</b>	<b>Time gap</b>	<b>No. of copies</b>
Homer	<i>Iliad</i>	800 BC	c. 400 BC	c. 400	643
Herodotus	<i>History</i>	480 - 425 BC	c. 900 AD	1,350 years	8

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<sup>101</sup> McDowell, *The New Evidence the Demands a Verdict*, 38.



Thucydides	<i>History</i>	460 - 400 BC	c. 900 AD	1,300 years	8
Plato		400 BC	c. 900 AD	1300 years	7
Demosthenes		300 BC	c. 1100 AD	1400 years	200
Caesar	<i>Gallic Wars</i>	100-44 BC	c. 900 AD	c. 1000 years	10
Livy	<i>History of Rome</i>	59 B.C.- A.D. 17	4th cent (partial) mostly 10th cent.	c. 400 yrs. c. 1,000 yrs.	1 partial 19 copies
Tacitus	<i>Annals</i>	100 AD	1,100 AD	1,000 years	20
Pliny Secundus	<i>Natural History</i>	61 - 113 AD	850 AD	750 years	7
New Testament		50—100 AD	c. 114 (fragment) c. 200 (books) c. 250 (most of N.T.) c. 325 (complete N.T.)	+ 50 yrs. 100 yrs. 150 yrs. 225 yrs.	5366

Two deductions can be made from the above table to confirm the accuracy of the manuscripts we have today. First and foremost, we have copies of the New Testament dated closely to the time of the original writing. Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, who was the director and principal librarian of the British Museum and second to none in authority for issuing statements about manuscripts, explains the time interval

comparison between the New Testament document and other ancient literature in the following way:

besides number, the manuscripts of the New Testament differ from those of the classical authors.... In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest extant manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament. The books of the New Testament were written in the latter part of the first century; the earliest extant manuscripts (trifling scraps excepted) are of the fourth century—say from 250 to 300 years later. This may sound like a considerable interval, but it is nothing to that which parts most of the great classical authors from their earliest manuscripts. We believe that we have in all essentials an accurate text of the seven extant plays of Sophocles, yet the earliest substantial manuscript upon which it is based was written more than 1400 years after the poet's death. Aeschylus, Aristophanes, and Thucydides are in the same state; while with Euripides the interval increased to 1600 years. For Plato, it may be put at 1300 years, for Demosthenes as low as 1200.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Kenyon as quoted by Kerry D. McRoberts, *A Letter from Christ: Apologetics in Cultural Transition* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2012), 97.

Despite the length of time between the original writings and the earliest copies of the non-sacred books listed in the table above, no one questions their accuracy or authenticity. I believe it is only out of hatred for Christianity that people would trust these documents and not trust the New Testament.

Secondly, we have lots of copies of the New Testament as compared to the other documents. W. F. Albright confidently informs us: “No other work from Graeco-Roman antiquity is so well attested by manuscript tradition as the New Testament. There are many more early manuscripts of the New Testament than there are of any classical author, and the oldest extensive remains of its date only about two centuries after their original composition.”<sup>103</sup> John Warwick Montgomery says that “to be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of the classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament.”<sup>104</sup> The abundant manuscript is a useful tool for the reconstruction of the original text. By comparing various manuscripts scholars are in a position of determining the original text.

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<sup>103</sup> Kenyon as quoted by R.W. Davis, *Christology: The Study of Christ from a Kingdom Perspective* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2012), 15.

<sup>104</sup> As cited in David A. Noebel, Chuck Edwards, *Thinking Like a Christian: Understanding and Living a Biblical Worldview* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2002) 47.

Additionally, the New Testament was copied in different languages (including, Latin, Ethiopian, Slavic, Armenian, Syriac, etc.) and these ancient copies total over 19,000 additional manuscripts. Thus, today, in total, we have about 25,000 complete or partial New Testament manuscripts. New Testament textual critics rely basically on three main sources to reconstruct the New Testament text: (1) Greek manuscripts such as papyri, majuscules (or uncials), and minuscules.<sup>105</sup> I present below the details of the available New Testament manuscripts.

### **Extant Greek manuscripts**

Uncials	307
Minuscules	2860
Lectionaries	2410
Papyri	109
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>5,686<sup>106</sup></b>

### **Manuscripts in Other Languages**

Latin Vulgate	10 000+
Ethiopic	2, 000+
Salvic	4, 101

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<sup>105</sup> Manuscripts are divided into the conventional categories, *papyri*, *majuscules (uncials)*, *minuscules (cursives)* and lectionaries.

<sup>106</sup> There are slight variations in counts may occur, depending on how small fragments were to be considered manuscripts.

Armenian	2, 587
Syriac Pashetta	350+
Bohairic	100
Arabic	75
Old Latin	50
Anglo Saxon	7
Gothic	6
Sogdian	3
Old Syriac	2
Persian	2
Frankish	1
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>19284+</b>
<b>Total of all manuscripts</b>	<b>24970+</b>

### **The Testimony of the Church Fathers**

The Church Fathers lived during the early centuries of the Church and used the New Testament in their writings in both loose (sometimes used without verbal accuracy) and accurate ways. The quotations by the Church Fathers do not serve as primary witness to the New Testament. They, however, provide us with important evidence for the existence of the New Testament canon. These quotations are so numerous and widespread that they could be used to reconstruct the New

Testament if none of its manuscripts was extant.<sup>107</sup> The table below shows the statistics of early patristic quotations from the New Testament (collected from their surviving works).<sup>108</sup>

Writer	Gospel	Acts of Apostles	Pauline Epistles	Catholic Epistles	Revelation	Total
Justin Martyr	268	10	43	6	3 (266 allusions)	330
Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon	1,038	194	499	23	65	1,819
Clement of Alexandria	1,017	44	1,127	207	11	2,406
Origen	9,231	349	7,778	399	165	17,922
Tertullian	3,822	502	2,609	120	205	7,258
Hippolytus	734	42	387	27	188	1,378
Eusebius	3,258	211	1,592	88	27	5,176
<b>Totals</b>	<b>19,368</b>	<b>1,352</b>	<b>14,035</b>	<b>870</b>	<b>664</b>	<b>36,289</b>

## The Testimony of Archeology

The authenticity of the New Testament document has been confirmed by several archeological discoveries, a selection of which I examine below. Critics (including John Dominic Crossan) have argued that if Jesus was truly crucified, his body

<sup>107</sup> See Douglas Groothuis, *Jesus in an Age of Controversy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 308.

<sup>108</sup> Chart adapted from McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, 55. To all of the above you could add Augustine, Amabius, Laitantius, Chrysostom, Jerome, Gaius Romanus, Athanasius, Ambrose of Milan, Cyril of Alexandria, Ephraem the Syrian, Hilary of Poitiers, Gregory of Nyssa, and others.

would have been left on the cross to be eaten by dogs. Therefore, the biblical account of Jesus' crucifixion and burial must be in error. Contrary to this claim, archeologists have discovered (in Giv'at ha-Mivtar, a Jewish neighborhood in north-east Jerusalem) the bones of Yehohanan Ben Ha'galgol, who was crucified at an age between 24 and 28 years.<sup>109</sup> His bones were discovered in an 18-inch long limestone ossuary (or bone box), with a seven-inch nail driven through the heel bone of his left foot. Remains of olive wood used for his crucifixion were also found at the point of the nail.<sup>110</sup> The discovery points to the fact that victims of crucifixion were buried, just as the Gospel accounts suggest. Yohanan's legs were crushed by a blow, consistent with the biblical account of the Roman *crucifragium* (John 19:31-32). One can deduce that crucifixion in the Greco-Roman world involved the use of nails to pierce the ankles of the victims. This answers skeptics who believed that the Romans used only ropes to tie the victim's legs to the cross. As a matter of fact, each detail of the discovery confirms an aspect of the New Testament description of crucifixion found in the Gospels.

There are also archeological discoveries confirming many places in the New Testament. John 9 tells us a story of a man whom Jesus healed from blindness. Jesus is reported to

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<sup>109</sup> McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 67.

<sup>110</sup> McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 67.

have spat on the ground, made some mud, and put it on the blind man's eyes. He then instructs the blind man to wash his face in the Pool of Siloam. The blind man does so and is healed. Critics of Scripture often assume that John's Gospel contains fictional accounts of Christ's actions. However, the existence of the pool of Siloam and the accuracy of the biblical account contradicts the view that such stories were later inventions.

In 1961, Antonio Frova found an inscription at Caesarea Maritima which confirms both that Pilate ruled in Judea (as the New Testament says) and used the title "Prefect." The Latin inscription (dated to c. 26-37 AD) roughly translates: "To Tiberius-Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea." "This inscription", argues McDowell, "clarifies the title of Pontius Pilate as 'Prefect' at least during a time in his rulership. Tacitus and Josephus later referred to him as 'Procurator.' The New Testament calls him 'Governor' (Matt 27:2), a term which incorporates both titles."<sup>111</sup>

Luke (3:1) refers to Lysanias, the tetrarch of Abilene who ruled in Syria and Palestine at the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry (c. 27 AD). Historians accused Luke of being in error, arguing that the only Lysanias known was the one killed in 36 BC.<sup>112</sup> Archeological discovery of an inscription (which dated from 14 and 29 AD and reads "Freedman of

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<sup>111</sup> McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 67.

<sup>112</sup> McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 64.



Lysanias the tetrarch”) at Abila near Damascus supports Luke’s record and contradicts the claims of skeptics about Lysanias.<sup>113</sup>

In Acts 17:6 Luke uses politarchs to denote the civil authorities of Thessalonica. However, since this term is not used in classical literature, he was accused of being in error. There are however 19 inscriptions found with the same title, five of them being specific to Thessalonica.

Archaeological discoveries have also established that the Romans had a regular enrollment of taxpayers as well as the practice of counting people every fourteen years. This tradition started with Augustus and the first counting took place in either 23-22 BC or in 9-8 BC.<sup>114</sup> A Papyrus in Egypt reads: “Because of the approaching census all those residing for any cause away from their homes must at once prepare to return to their government so that they may complete the family registration of the enrollment and that the tilled lands may retain those belonging to them.”<sup>115</sup> Luke’s account of Emperor Augustus asking all people to register their names in their towns (2:1ff) obviously refers to one of such enrollments.

Luke records in Acts 21 that an incident broke out between Paul and certain Jews from Asia in which Paul was accused of defiling the Temple by allowing Trophimus, a

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<sup>113</sup> McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 64.

<sup>114</sup> McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 64.

<sup>115</sup> William D. Hamilton, *Is Jesus the Messiah?* (New York: Writers Club Press, 2001), 53.

Gentile, to enter it. In 1871, Greek inscriptions were found in support of this incident, which read: “No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to thank for his ensuing death.”<sup>116</sup> Certainly, this discovery of this inscription underscores the fact that Luke was accurate in his account.

Moreover, three coins mentioned in the Greek New Testament namely, The “tribute penny”<sup>117</sup> (Matt 22:17-21; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26 ), The “thirty pieces of silver”<sup>118</sup> (Matt 26:14-15) and The “widow’s mite”<sup>119</sup> (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4) have all been found by archeological excavations.<sup>120</sup> This also supports the historical accuracy of the Gospel accounts.

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<sup>116</sup> Michael R. Cosby, *Apostle on the Edge: An Inductive Approach to Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 257.

<sup>117</sup> The Greek word for the coin shown to Jesus in these passages is “denarius,” a small silver coin which carried the image of Caesar on one side. Its value was equal to one day’s wages for an average worker in Palestine.

<sup>118</sup> This amount was probably thirty silver shekels. Originally a shekel was a measure of weight equaling approximately two-fifths of an ounce. It later developed into a silver coin of about the same weight.

<sup>119</sup> The passage in question reads (in NIV): “two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny.” The first words translate the Greek “lepta” which is the smallest Greek copper coin, the second translates the Greek word “quadrans” which is the smallest Roman copper coin. Knowing the minute monetary value of these coins gives even greater meaning to the message of the parable.

<sup>120</sup> McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 68.

Also, archeological discoveries have confirmed the authenticity of Paul's reference to the city treasurer Erastus (Rom 16:23). An archeological excavation in Corinth in 1929 unearthed a pavement inscribed with these words: Erastus curator of public buildings laid this pavement at his own expense. Bruce opines that, "the pavement quite likely existed in the first century AD, and the donor and the man Paul mentions are probably one and the same."<sup>121</sup>

The archeological support for the reliability of the New Testament is so remarkable that some skeptics have conceded the Bible's historical accuracy. Renowned Jewish archaeologist Nelson Glueck, admits, "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference," and "the almost incredibly accurate historical memory of the Bible, and particularly so when it is fortified by archaeological fact."<sup>122</sup> This is a very significant statement because it comes from a person who totally denied the inspiration of Scripture. Another one-time skeptic, Clifford Wilson described the Bible as "**the ancient world's most reliable history textbook**"<sup>123</sup> Wilson, like Ramsey, goes on to hail Luke for his accuracy:

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<sup>121</sup> McDowell paraphrases Bruce' idea which I have quoted here. See McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 64.

<sup>122</sup> McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 65.

<sup>123</sup> Clifford A. Wilson, *Rocks, Relics and Biblical Reliability* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), 126.

**Luke demonstrated a remarkably accurate knowledge of geographical and political ideas.** He referred **correctly** to provinces that were established at that time, as indicated in Acts 15:6. He demonstrated a clear knowledge of local customs, such as those relating to the speech of the Lycaonians (Acts 14:11), some aspects relating to the foreign woman who was converted at Athens (Acts 17:34), and he even knew that the city of Ephesus was known as the “temple-keeper of Artemis” (Acts 19:35) ... he refers to different local officers by their exact titles – the proconsul (deputy) of Cyprus (Acts 13:7), the magistrates at Philippi (Acts 16:20,35), the politarchs (another word for magistrates) at Thessalonica (Acts 17:6), the proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:12), and the treasurer of Corinth (Aedile) – which was the title of the man known as Erastus at Corinth (Acts 19:22; Romans 16:23 ...).<sup>124</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Given the uniquely large number of manuscripts, the relatively short length of time involved in many cases from composition to manuscript, and the ravages of history, the evidence for the

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<sup>124</sup> John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Handbook of Biblical Evidences* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publisher, 1997), 361.

reliability of the New Testament is something unparalleled. The support from the Church Fathers is also remarkable. Up till this time, I have presented arguments to support the Christian claim that the Bible is a historically reliable document. Any objective reader of this book should have come to the understanding that God has graciously preserved His word for us. In the next chapter, I will attend to some passages that pose challenges to readers of the Bible.



## CHAPTER SIX

### WHAT ABOUT “APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS” IN THE BIBLE?

Earlier, I argued that the Bible is without errors or contradictions because the Person behind it is infallible. Yet at the same time, it must be admitted that the Bible has some difficult passages. Before considering some of these passages, it is important to take a word of advice from Augustine who states, “If we are perplexed by any apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is not allowable to say, the author of this book is mistaken, but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have not understood.”<sup>125</sup> In almost all cases, the mistake is not from the source (the text itself) but from fallible interpreters.

#### Cases from the Old Testament

##### **Are there two contradictory creation accounts?**

Critics of the Bible have argued that there is a contradiction between Genesis 1:1-12, which records vegetation appearing on the third day of creation and 2:5, which seems to teach that no vegetation appeared until Adam was created. In response to the allegation, it can be stated that Genesis chapter two adds details

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<sup>125</sup> Aurelius Augustine, *The Writings Against the Manichaeans and Against the Donatists: Part I - The Manichaeans* (Np: Lulu.com, 2017), 221.

to the account given in chapter one, serving as a supplement rather than a contrary account. One could note that the statement that God created man (a generic term for humankind) male and female is expanded in detail in 2:18-23, where the processes involved in the creation of Adam and Eve are given.<sup>126</sup> Similarly, the fifth verse of chapter 2 adds further information about the creation of vegetation on day three. It must however be noted that verse 5 refers to plants that require cultivation rather than all kinds of plants. The point therefore is that plants that require cultivation did not appear until Adam was created to cultivate them.<sup>127</sup> It is also possible that they appeared but did not grow until Adam was created to see to their cultivation. In short, the kind of life that required the attentive care of humankind in greater measure did not show up till after the creation of Adam.

### **Where did Cain get his wife?**

The question of where Cain obtained his wife is a common query that arises from the biblical narrative in Genesis. In Genesis 4:1ff, we learn that Adam and Eve, the first human couple, had two sons, Cain and Abel. Following Cain's heinous act of fratricide and subsequent exile, we encounter the

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<sup>126</sup> Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 108.

<sup>127</sup> Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 109.

puzzling mention of Cain taking a wife in Genesis 4:17. This raises the question: from where did Cain find a wife?

Critics often seize upon this apparent inconsistency to challenge the biblical assertion that Adam and Eve were the first humans on earth. They argue that if Adam and Eve were indeed the sole progenitors of humanity, Cain could not have found a wife after Abel's murder. As a result, some propose the existence of a pre-Adamic race from which Cain might have taken a wife.

However, a careful examination of biblical teachings affirms the position that Adam and Eve were indeed the first created humans. This is unequivocally stated in passages such as Genesis 1:26-27 and is further corroborated by Jesus in Matthew 19:3-9, as well as by Luke in his genealogy of Christ, which traces back to Adam (Luke 3:38). Additionally, the apostle Paul explicitly identifies Adam as the first human (1 Cor. 15:45).

Moreover, Genesis 5:4 informs us that Adam and Eve had other sons and daughters beyond Cain and Abel. It is from among these siblings that Cain would have found his wife. In the early days of humanity, it was not uncommon for marriages to occur between close relatives, such as siblings, due to the limited population. Importantly, at this early stage in human history, the genetic risks associated with such unions were not



yet a concern, as harmful genetic mutations had not accumulated over successive generations.

Therefore, while the question of Cain's wife may initially appear perplexing, a closer examination of biblical teachings reveals a coherent explanation within the framework of Adam and Eve being the first humans and their offspring intermarrying among siblings as was customary in the early days of humanity.

### **How could God condemn human sacrifice and yet command it?**

In both Leviticus 18:21 and 20:2, God categorically condemned human sacrifice when He commanded Israel, “Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech” (Lev 18:21, NIV ), and “Any Israelite or any alien living in Israel, who gives any of his children to Molech, must be put to death; the people of the community are to stone him” (Lev 20:2, NIV ). Nonetheless, in Genesis 22:2, He commanded Abraham to “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” How are we to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory commands by God?

Firstly, a critical analysis of the text reveals that God was not interested, nor did He plan, that Abraham should actually kill Isaac. It was to test Abraham’s faith that God gave

that order. Verse 12 tells us that it was Abraham's willingness to surrender Isaac, not the actual killing of him, that satisfied God's expectations for him. In other words, what God wanted from Abraham was his willingness to offer even his only son for Him, not the actual act of offering. God had no intention whatsoever that Abraham should actually sacrifice Isaac to Him.

Second, the prohibitions in both Leviticus 18:21 and 20:2 were specifically against the offering of one's offspring to the pagan god, Molech. Even if God wanted Abraham to actually sacrifice Isaac, we should note that human sacrifice to Molech (a pagan god who does not own anybody's life) is not the same as human sacrifice to the only true God, who alone is sovereign over life (Deut 32:39; Job 1:21 ), and therefore has the sole right to demand when it should be taken.

Thirdly, God was using this command as a polemic against human sacrifice. Human sacrifice was prevalent in the surrounding culture, particularly Abraham's place of origin. Three circumstances led to this sacrifice. One, human (firstborn) sacrifice was made in times of calamity/natural disaster. Two, human sacrifice was performed in times of war to the gods to ensure victory. Three, human sacrifice was made as a means of getting a bumper harvest. It must be noted that it was a request that God made before Abraham, not a demand. Abraham was free to offer Isaac or not to.

By requesting Abraham to sacrifice Isaac and later telling him to stop at the verge of killing Isaac, God was teaching Abraham that He is the God who is interested in the firstborn child. However, He takes the first-born child and makes him live in opposition to the gods (of his fathers) who demand the actual sacrifice of the first-born child. This is the reason why God later asked Israel to consecrate their firstborn children to Him for not killing them in Egypt during the Passover. God does not require human sacrifice; He wants us to present ourselves as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1-2).

### **Was God known by His name Yahweh before Moses' time?**

God's declaration to Moses that by His name Yahweh he did not make Himself known to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) (Exod 6:3) and the fact that the word Yahweh (LORD) occurs in Genesis in many places, both in combination with the term "God," as "LORD God" (see Gen 2:4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 15, etc.) and alone as LORD (Gen 4:1, 3, 4, 6, 9, 26, etc.) before the time of Moses poses a challenge which critics consider as error. It has been argued that since God's name was not known until the time of Moses, it is not possible to have this name being called upon by Seth and other people who lived before the patriarchs.

Does Exodus 6:3 mean that the name Yahweh was unknown until the time of Moses? Many have answered "yes"

to this question and have tried to explain the issue by considering texts that contain the name Yahweh and appear before Exodus 6:3 as coming from a source (referred to as the Jahwist account) and those without the name Yahweh as coming from another source (called Elohist source). While this may sound convincing, the Hebrew text warrants no such conclusion. A key step in dealing with the issue is to appreciate what the expression “to know the name of Yahweh” or “to know that I am Yahweh” means. A clue to understanding this expression is found in Exodus 6:7 where God says, “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will **know** that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of.” From this text, it is clear that the word “know” means more than intellectual knowledge. It really means to “know by experience.” This understanding is supported by Exodus 14:4 where God says that what He was about to do to the Egyptians (their drowning in the Sea of Reed) was going to make them (the Egyptians) know that He is Yahweh. As a matter of fact, Pharaoh knew that the name of the God of Moses was Yahweh (see Exod 5:2) long before the statement in Exodus 14:4 was made. Therefore, God could not mean that the Egyptians (including Pharaoh who was following the Israelites did not know His name, Yahweh). God was rather saying that by what He was about to do the Egyptians will learn the bitter lesson that He is the One who redeems His people and

keeps His covenant with His people. This thought is in line with Gleason L. Archer's observation that this expression means "to learn by actual experience that God is Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God who chastens, cares for and delivers His covenant people from their foes" in all its twenty-six appearances in the Old Testament.<sup>128</sup>

What Exodus 6:3 therefore means is that even though God was referred to as Yahweh in His relationship with Abraham and his family (see for example Gen 18:1ff), His redemptive miracle was reserved for Moses' generation. We are therefore to understand Exodus 6:3 as follows: "I showed Myself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the all-powerful Ruler of creation and Sovereign over all the forces of nature [that is, El Shaddai, God Almighty], but I did not show Myself to them as a covenant-keeping God in the miraculous display in the deliverance of the entire nation of Israel from Egyptian bondage."<sup>129</sup>

### **How could God harden Pharaoh's heart and yet hold Pharaoh responsible?**

The Bible quotes God as saying that He will harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will not let the Israelites go (Exod 4:21; 7:3). Paul explicitly states that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Rom

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<sup>128</sup> Gleason L. Archer, *The New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 66-67.

<sup>129</sup> Archer, *The New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, 67.

9:17–18). This begs the question: If God determined to harden Pharaoh's heart, then how is God just in holding Pharaoh morally responsible for his sins?

Firstly, though God promised Moses that He would harden Pharaoh's heart (Exod 4:21; 7:3), the Exodus account underscores the fact that Pharaoh was responsible for hardening his own heart (Exod 7:13, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7; cf. 9:34). When God hardens the hearts of people like Pharaoh, He is not compelling them to act contrary to their inclinations. God did not directly cause Pharaoh to sin but probably withdrew his grace from Pharaoh. Thus, without the grace of God, there is nothing human beings can do and get it right. In the absence of the grace of God human beings freely sin. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart (as stated earlier) should be understood as God withdrawing His grace from Pharaoh so that he (Pharaoh) would act according to his sinful desire.

In addition, God presented Pharaoh with ample opportunity to either repent or continue in rebellion. Every time God showed Pharaoh mercy and removed a plague from Egypt, he responded in stubborn disobedience. As such, God's mercy was the occasion for the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. That is to say, by showing mercy to Pharaoh through the removal of the various plagues from the land of Egypt, Pharaoh hardened his heart thinking that the longsuffering God would not hurt him.

## **How could God “give” Saul’s wives to David without endorsing polygamy?**

God, through Nathan the prophet, told David that He had given him Saul’s wives and other things and was ready to add more if that was not enough for David (2 Sam 12:8). This statement together with the fact that most of God’s friends (including Abraham, David, and Solomon) were polygamists makes people argue that God endorses polygamy.

However, we do not read anywhere that David married Saul’s wives. In fact, we are told of only one wife of Saul (1 Sam 14:50) and of one concubine (2 Sam 3:7) who was taken by Abner. If he had others, David certainly could not have taken them until more than seven and a half years after Saul’s death. God was only referring to the Oriental custom that the new king had a right to the harem of his predecessor. That is why Abner was upset with being accused of wanting Rizpah (2 Sam 3:8). It also explains why Adonijah’s request for Abishag to be his wife cost him his life (1 Kings 1:52-53). Why would Adonijah be sentenced to death for asking for Abishag?

Abishag was a young girl who was brought to the service of King David in his old age (1 Kings 1:1-4, 15). Though David did not have any sexual affair with her, outsiders perceived her to be one of David’s concubines. Adonijah was the older half-brother of Solomon, but David had promised the throne to Solomon. Adonijah conspired with Joab to usurp the

throne to make himself king without his father knowing (1 King 1:7ff). Bathsheba hinted to King David about Adonijah's plan and the king made Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon as the legitimate king (1 Kings 1:38-40). This action settled the issue temporarily.

After David's death, Adonijah persuaded Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, to entreat the king to permit him to marry Abishag. Solomon suspected in this request an aspiration to the throne and therefore caused him to be put to death. Kiel and Delitzsch say concerning Adonijah's plan, "Although Abishag had been only David's nurse, in the eyes of the people she passed as his concubine; and among the Israelites, just as with the ancient Persians, taking possession of the harem of a deceased king was equivalent to the establishment of the claim to the throne (see at 2 Sam 12: 8 and 2 Sam 3:7, 8)."<sup>130</sup> 2 Samuel 3:7, 8 and 2 Samuel 12:8 confirm this practice, as does 2 Samuel 16:15–23, in which Absalom, having tried to usurp the throne of David, goes into his concubines. To lay claim to the former king's wives was to lay claim to the kingship. God's statement to David through Nathan simply means He gave David everything he currently had, his wealth, power, and authority and if there had been too little, He would have given David

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<sup>130</sup> F. Delitzsch and C. Keil, "Commentary on 1 Kings" in *Commentary on the Old Testament: 1 Kings-Esther* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969), 32.



more. It is not an endorsement of polygamy as it literally seems. God spoke figuratively, not literally and He must be interpreted accordingly.

## **Cases from the New Testament**

### **Why are the Gospel accounts sometimes different?**

The Gospels sometimes give different accounts of the same event. Critics see differences in the Gospels as contradictions. In response, it must be noted that each of the Gospels was written for a particular purpose(s) and audience which determined the perspective from which the authors reported events. Mark was written to persecuted Christians, Matthew to Jewish Christians, Luke to Gentile Christians, and John to philosophically-minded predominantly Gentile Christians.

Consequently, each author emphasizes certain aspects of Jesus' person and work. Matthew depicts Christ as the Messiah and King who fulfills the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible. Mark's focus is not so much on Jesus' Messiahship but on his identity as the suffering Servant of God. Luke portrays Jesus as Universal Lord and Savior while John emphasizes that Jesus is the Son of God. Each author selected his reports to fulfill the aim of writing his gospels.

Therefore, differences between them should not be regarded as contradictions because it is a result of reporting different perspectives of the same events. There are also many

examples of partial reports in the Gospels which must be regarded as such rather than taking them to be contradictions or errors. For example, Matthew records two demon-possessed men (Matt 8:28), but Luke only mentions one (Luke 8:27). These are not contradicting reports. Note that Luke never says that there was only one man. Instead, he only gives a partial report, whereas Matthew gives the full report. A partial report is not false. No historical or news report is exhaustive. In effect, the Gospel accounts complement one another rather than contradict themselves.

### **Why was Jesus not called Immanuel?**

Approximately 700 years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah prophesied about a virgin who would “conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (7:14). Matthew referred to this prophecy and applied it to Jesus, specifying once again that, “they shall call His name Immanuel” (1:22-23). Many have wondered why Jesus was not named Immanuel in the New Testament if the promised Son of Mary was supposed to be called “Immanuel”.

To answer this question, we need to know what Isaiah meant by the **name** Immanuel. A clue could be found in Isaiah 9:6 where he wrote: “His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Obviously, Isaiah was not saying that the Messiah would

literally have as his given name “Wonderful,” “Counselor,” “Everlasting Father”, or “Prince of Peace.” These names were given to describe the **nature** of the Messiah, not to serve as literal, given names.

A similar distinction between one’s nature and name is found in Genesis chapter two. Following God’s creation of Eve from Adam’s rib, Adam declared, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; **she shall be called woman** because she was taken out of man” (Gen 2:23, emphasis added). Although Adam said, “She shall be called woman,” one chapter later the Bible records that “Adam called his wife’s name Eve” (3:20). Obviously, Adam meant that by **nature** the one whom God created from his rib was a female human (a woman), “a helper comparable to him” (though with noticeable differences and roles—3:18-23), but by **name**, she would be known as “Eve.”

Similarly, the angel Gabriel made a distinction between Jesus’ given name and the titles by which he would be known as a result of his divine nature: Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and **shall call His name Jesus**. He will be great, and **will be called the Son of the Highest**; ... that Holy One who is to be born **will be called the Son of God** (Luke 1:30-35, emp. added). In this text, the names “the Son of the Highest” and “the

Son of God” are just a description of the Messiah’s nature, not a name by which he will be called, which is Jesus.

Further still, Matthew further clarifies God’s use of the “name” Immanuel in the very passage he quotes—Isaiah 7:14. Immediately before and after Matthew reminds his readers of the prophecy regarding the Messiah’s name being “Immanuel” (1:23), he noted how Joseph **would** call (1:21) and **did** call (1:25) the Messiah by “His name Jesus.” The fact that Matthew wrote of the Messiah’s “name” being “Immanuel” in verse 23, but “Jesus” in verses 21 and 25, clearly shows that Matthew understood that one name (Jesus) was literal while the other (Immanuel) characterized his nature. By nature, Jesus was Immanuel in that he was God (John 1:1,14) with us (Matt 28:20).

### **Was Jesus interred for three days?**

Jesus’ statement that he will be in the heart of the earth for **three days** and **three nights** just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights (Matt 12:40, cf. Jonah 1:17) has been considered evidence of inconsistencies in the Bible. Critics of the Bible argue that the three days and three nights Jonah spent in the belly of the fish has a duration of seventy-two hours but Jesus resurrected in less than seventy-two hours after his burial (from Friday afternoon to Sunday dawn). According to Christian tradition, Jesus died on Friday of the

Holy Week around 3:00 pm (cf. Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:44-49; John 19:14-16) and then rose from the dead at Sunday's dawn. If that is the case, how could Jesus refer to the duration of his interment as three days and three nights?

The answer to this question lies in getting a true understanding of what the expression "three days and three nights" meant to the ancient Jews. A clue may be obtained from the narrative in 1 Samuel 30:12-13 where "he had not eaten any food or drunk any water for three days and three nights" (verse 12) is equated with "the day before yesterday" or "three days ago." A similar example is found in Esther 4:16, where Queen Esther asked the Jews to fast for "three days and three nights" after which she would go and see the king. In 5:1, however, we learn that she went to the king on "the third day."

The obvious conclusion from the two examples given above is that the expression "three days three nights" was used in ancient Israel parlance to refer to three separate twenty-four-hour days, even though only part of the first and third days might be involved. Once an activity took place on three consecutive days (whether or not it covers all the hours in the days) it was considered as covering "three days and three nights." This is similar to the modern trend where a person born at 11:00 pm on Monday is considered to be one day old any time from 12:01 am on Tuesday.

## **What inscription was written on Jesus' cross?**

There are various allegations leveled against the Gospels to show that they contradict one another. The case of the inscription written on Jesus' cross is my focus at this point. The NIV has the following citations (emphasis mine):

Mathew 27:37 “**This is Jesus, the King of the Jews**”

Mark 15:26 “The written notice of the charge against him read: **The King of the Jews**”

Luke 23:38 “**This is the King of the Jews**”

John 19:19 “Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: **Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.**”

At face value, these accounts seem contradictory because they are not the same. The only common element in all four citations is the expression “**King of the Jews.**” How are we to reconcile these citations? John gives a valuable clue: “Many of the Jews read this inscription because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek” (19:20). Pilate had the inscription first written in Latin (his native language) in a brief form. Then he wrote beneath in Greek (the language he used in communicating with non-Italians in Palestine). In writing it in Greek, Pilate might have added the name Jesus and the city he belonged to, knowing well that it is the Greek form that people of all races could read and understand. Such people, basically

Gentiles, did not know much about Jesus so such additions were necessary. The Aramaic version may have been a copy of the Greek version with the omission of “Nazareth.” The Palestinian Jews of Jesus’ time were Aramaic-speaking people who knew Jesus so well that they did not need to have “Nazareth” in the inscription before knowing his place of origin.

Putting these thoughts together I agree with Archer that (1) the Matthean citation was probably the Aramaic version; (2) the Markan citation seems to be the truncated form of the Latin version.<sup>131</sup> This collaborates with the Christian tradition that Mark was Peter’s assistant in Rome and later wrote what he heard from Peter about Jesus. The Johannine citation is the Greek version. John actually worked among the Gentiles and spent his last decades in the city of Ephesus. From the analyses, we can conclude that the order of the citations in John 19:20 was: Aramaic, with Latin beneath it and Greek at the bottom.

### **Was Jesus crucified in the third hour or the sixth hour?**

Mark (15:24-26) records that Jesus’ crucifixion took place in the third hour of the day while John (19:14-16) says Jesus’ trial before Pilate, which took place before his crucifixion, took place at “about the sixth hour.” After reading these texts, one may have the impression that one of the authors is in error.

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<sup>131</sup> Archer, *The New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, 346.

However, a critical analysis of the time systems used and the background of the writers provides a solution to the problem. John follows the Roman time system according to which the day ran from midnight to midnight while Mark follows the Jewish time system according to which the day began in the evening at 6 pm and the morning of that day began at 6 am.<sup>132</sup>

The fact that different time systems existed in ancient times is betrayed by the following quote by Pliny the Elder, “The day itself has been differently observed in different countries: by the Babylonians between two sunrises; by the Athenians between two sunsets; by the Umbrians from noon to noon; by the Roman priests and those who have defined the civil day, as the Egyptians also and Hipparchus, from midnight to midnight.”<sup>133</sup> Macrobius confirms the Roman time system: “the day, which the Romans have declared to begin at the sixth hour of the night [that is, midnight].”<sup>134</sup>

Therefore, “what will be 6:00 am according to Roman civil day (and likewise according to our modern practice) would be the first hour according to Athenian and Hebrew practice.”<sup>135</sup> This means that Mark’s “third hour” which was about 9 am., was the time that the trial of Jesus was coming to an end so that

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<sup>132</sup> Archer, *The New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, 364.

<sup>133</sup> Pliny as cited in Archer, *The New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, 364.

<sup>134</sup> Macrobius as cited in Archer, *The New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, 364.

<sup>135</sup> Archer, *The New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, 364.



he could be led to Golgotha for the crucifixion. John's sixth hour is 6 am. So, the trial of Jesus before Pilate, which John says took place at "about the sixth hour," took place early in the morning, three hours before Jesus was crucified. This fits perfectly with the sequence of events and lines up precisely with what John said elsewhere. Remember John 18:28 says Jesus was standing before Pilate "early [in the] morning." Mark, for example, has the Jewish Council reaching a decision "very early in the morning" (Mark 15:1). It is possible to fit the judgment of Pilate in at sufficiently early an hour for it to be described as being "around the sixth hour", about 6 am.

The question that remains now is the reason why John would use the Roman time system when he had the same background as Matthew, Mark, and Luke (who used the Jewish time system). The answer lies in the time and location of John when his Gospel was composed. It is believed that John wrote his Gospel almost thirty years after the other Gospels were written and he did so in Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia. Writing from the capital of the Roman province of Asia, John regarded the Roman civil day as the most appropriate for the understanding of his audience. Using Jewish time references with readers in the Roman Empire (hundreds of miles away from Israel) would have been confusing to them. Therefore, to avoid confusing his readers, John converts the references to times they would understand. Another use of the

Roman civil day system within the Johannine Gospel can be found in 20:19-23 where he extends his day till midnight. We know that John extends his day to midnight because the time he was referring to was after sundown and yet considered it as Sunday (instead of Monday if he was referring to the Jewish system). Following the line of interpretation proposed above allows the testimony of the gospels to fit together nicely and provides a more coherent picture of what happened.

### **How many angels were at Jesus' tomb?**

Matthew (28:2, 5) records that there was an angel at the tomb after the resurrection but John (20:12) says there were two angels. Critics have argued that these are contradictory accounts. In response, we must note that these accounts are simply divergent views of the same event; they are not contradictory. The statements will contradict only if Matthew should say "There was **ONLY** one angel at the tomb." Assume that your brother comes to you and says, "I saw your teacher this morning" and later tells you "I saw your teacher and his mother this morning". Has he contradicted himself? No! There is no contradiction because he did not say it was **ONLY** your teacher that he saw. In the same way, Matthew's account in no way suggests that there was only one angel at the tomb. What we may say is that Matthew gives a partial (but not a full) report

about the number of angels at the tomb while John gives a fuller account.

However, it is also important to note that Matthew and John are describing different periods. Matthew is describing the **initial moving of the stone**. John is describing the **initial meeting of Jesus**. Another angel could have appeared during this later event. This is no more contradictory than saying that one person showed up to my birthday party at 6 pm, but two people were there by 9 pm. These authors are speaking about different times in the resurrection account. Either of the above explanations could be used to resolve the ostensible contradiction.

### **How could Jesus be God and yet be tempted when the Bible says God cannot be tempted?**

The statement “God cannot be tempted” (James 1:13) seems to contradict the deity of Christ and his temptation (John 1:1, 14; Matt 4:1ff). However, on a closer look, this conclusion is invalid. This statement simply means that it is impossible to tempt God with evil because in Him there is perfect goodness and there is no trace of any evil in Him. Assuming that I say “Christian Adom-Boaheng cannot be bribed”; does it mean that he cannot be offered bribery? No! What it means is that if he is offered bribery, he will not accept it and he will never behave in a corrupt manner.

In the same way, to say that God cannot be tempted does not mean that temptation cannot come the way of God. Rather, what it means is that it is impossible to persuade God to do anything wrong or evil because in Him there is no corruption but perfect goodness. The temptation that came the way of Christ could only undermine his divinity if he had yielded to it. His ability to withstand temptation and remain sinless throughout his life (John 5:19) underlines his divinity. We can say that Christ cannot be tempted in the sense that under no circumstance will he yield to temptation.

### **Did Judas hang himself or did he fall headlong?**

Matthew (27:5) says Judas hanged himself while Luke (in Acts 1:18) says “he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out.” These are two perspectives of the same event. Judas might have hanged himself on a tree over the edge of a cliff, his body falling on sharp rocks below, and his intestines gushing out. This is likely to be the case if the branch from which he hanged himself was dead and dry. Even if the tree was strong it could still be broken due to the strong wind that blew to rip the great curtain inside the temple from the top to the bottom (Matt 27:51) at the time Jesus died and the earthquake that followed (Matt 27:45). Other possibilities are the rope snapped, a bad knot came untied, or someone came along and (maybe not wanting to touch a dead body) cut the

rope. In any case, the assertions that “Judas hanged himself” and “he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out” can both be true at the same time. Once again, they are two perspectives of the same event.

Another aspect of Judas’ story that seems contradictory is that Matthew 27:5 says that Judas brought his money back to the priests while Acts 1:18 says he obtained a field with his money. But weaving together the two fuller accounts it appears that what really happened was that when the priests rejected the money Judas threw it down in the temple and then went out and hanged himself. But after his treachery and suicide, there was so much disgrace attached to him that no friends or relatives came to care for the body and that it had to be buried at public expense. The priests then brought out the money which he (Judas) had brought back to them. This money (because of how it was acquired) could not be put into the treasury since it was blood money. Therefore, the priests thought it appropriate to use the money to buy a burial ground, perhaps the very field in which he had committed suicide. Hence, he is said to have obtained a field with the reward of his iniquity; not that he bought it, but that it was purchased with his money and he was buried in it. Again, these divergent accounts are not necessarily in error.

## **Is justification by faith or works (Paul vs. James)?**

James' idea that a person is justified by their deeds and not by faith alone (Jas 2:24) seems antithetical to Paul's teaching that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law (Rom 3:28). However, upon critical study, one realizes that James and Paul are handling two different situations.<sup>136</sup> The two writers deal with different addresses and different perspectives of salvation. Paul deals with the question, "How can a sinner be justified before a holy God?" He answers, "By faith alone." James, on the other hand, deals with the question, "What kind of faith justifies or what kind of faith saves?" He answers, "The faith that produces good works."

When Paul speaks of Abraham's justification by faith, he is referring to Abraham's initial justification recorded in Genesis 15:6. Paul's point is that all pre-salvation works are necessarily excluded in justification because no one can do any work to merit salvation. At the time that one is receiving justification (redemption from the penalty of past sins), he/she has no good works to show.

On the other hand, when James speaks of Abraham's justification by works, he is referring to Abraham's subsequent justification, which validates or confirms Abraham's faith and

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<sup>136</sup> For a deeper understanding of the issue consult Frederick M. Amevenku and Isaac Boaheng, "Reconciling Saving Faith and Works of The Law in Paul and James" *Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology* Volume 7 (1) 2017.

his initial justification (stated in Gen 15:6). Since such a validation must be based on evidence, Abraham's post-conversion works are essential follow-ups to his justification by faith.

“Paul was rooting out ‘work’ that excluded and destroyed saving faith; James was stimulating a sluggish faith that minimized the results of saving faith in daily life.”<sup>137</sup> Their common ground is that although good works contribute nothing to justification, they serve as litmus tests for the genuineness of a person's faith. So, those who are saved will, without doubt, produce good works in keeping with their justified state and those whose faith is so intellectual that it has nothing to do with good works have no benefit of justification, imputed to them.

### **Before concluding that there are errors in the Bible ...**

The allegations of error in the Bible are usually based on a failure to recognize basic principles of interpreting ancient literature. Before one concludes that there are errors in the Bible, he/she must consider/apply the following principle:

- i. The unexplained is not necessarily unexplainable.
- ii. Fallible interpretations do not mean fallible revelation.
- iii. Understand the context of the passage.
- iv. Interpret difficult passages in the light of clear ones.

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<sup>137</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle of James* (Chicago: Moody, 1979), 175.

- v. Don't base teaching on obscure passages.
- vi. The Bible is a human book with human characteristics.
- vii. Just because a report is incomplete does not mean it is false.
- viii. New Testament citations of the Old Testament need not always be exact.
- ix. The Bible does not necessarily approve of all its records.
- x. The Bible uses non-technical, everyday language.
- xi. The Bible may use round numbers as well as exact numbers.
- xii. Note when the Bible uses different literary devices.
- xiii. An error in a copy does not equate to an error in the original.
- xiv. General statements don't necessarily mean universal promises.
- xv. Later revelation supersedes the previous revelation.<sup>138</sup>

By ignoring these principles people may easily come out with false allegations of errors and contradictions in the word of God.

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<sup>138</sup> These principles were taken from McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 47.



## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, certain principles must be noted. In the first place, we must get the correct understanding of each passage and the sense in which the author intended it to be. People have assumed texts to be contradictory only to realize later that they did not actually understand one or both texts well. The second principle is that we need to obtain all available knowledge in any matter at hand before drawing conclusions. Third, we need to seek further light which could possibly be thrown on it by advancing knowledge, textual research, archaeology, and others.

Difficulties do not necessarily constitute objections. Similarly, unsolved problems are not of necessity errors. This does not mean that the Bible does not present us with difficulties. As we have seen in this chapter, there are a lot of difficult passages. However, we should always try to seek total and final light on the passages before making any conclusion that there is an error. The allegations of error in the Bible are usually based on a failure to recognize basic principles of interpreting ancient literature.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **ARE MODERN TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE TRUSTWORTHY?**

I stated earlier that the Bible was written in three ancient languages, namely, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. These languages are, however, not sacred languages, neither are other human languages sacred. The people of Israel only had the privilege of being chosen by God as an instrument to make His word known to other nations. Israel had that privilege; it is not superior to any other nation. To be sure, God respects every language and considers every language equally important. He really prefers to speak to every person in a language that he/she can understand best. It is the mother tongue that makes people best understand God. In this chapter, I will first argue for the need for Bible translation and then give reasons why the Bible is still the pure and true word of God despite the numerous translations that exist today.

#### **What is Bible Translation?**

“To translate” means to carry across. Translation may be defined as “a process of communicating in the ‘receptor’ language (the language into which a translation is made) a message which has been given in the ‘source’ language (the

language from which a translation is made).”<sup>139</sup> For Mary Snell-Horby “Translation is a complex act of communication in which the SL–author, the reader as translator and translator as TL–author and the TL–reader interact.”<sup>140</sup> Bible translation refers to the process of rendering a biblical text from the source language (namely, Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic) into another language. The goal of the Bible translator is “the production of a version that is an accurate rendering of the text written in such a way that the Bible retains its *literary beauty, theological grandeur*, and, most importantly, its *spiritual message*.”<sup>141</sup> In other words, Bible translation must allow the reader of the message in the receptor language to understand it as nearly as possible in the same sense as those who originally received it in the source language.

### **Philosophies of Bible Translation**

Two major approaches have been used in translating the Bible, though there are other translation philosophies. The first is the literal or formal equivalent approach which seeks as nearly as

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<sup>139</sup> Eugene N. Nida, *Bible Translating: An Analysis of Principles and Procedures* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1961), 289-90, original italics.

<sup>140</sup> Mary Snell-Horby *Translation Studies: An integrated approach* (John Benjamin Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1988), 81.

<sup>141</sup> G.G Scorgie as paraphrased in Andreas J. Köstenberger and Leonard Scott Kellum, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2009), 36.

possible to preserve the structure of the original language. This approach tries to represent each word of the original text with an exact equivalent word in the receptor language so that the reader can see word for word what the original human author wrote. While this approach helps the reader to read the Bible from the original context, it can sometimes result in awkward, if not incomprehensible, translation. The New American Standard Bible (NASB, 1971) and its significant revision, the New American Standard Bible, Updated Edition (NASU, 1995); the King James II (KJ II, 1971); the New King James Version (NKJV, 1982); and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV, 1989) are examples of translations based on the theory of formal equivalence.

The dynamic equivalent approach aims at carrying the thought in the source language into the receptor language without necessarily maintaining the structure of the source text. Dynamic equivalence gives the modern reader a text that will produce the same response as the original hearers of the same text.<sup>142</sup> To achieve this aim the translator has to analyze, transfer, and restructure the text. The New English Bible (NEB, 1961) and its revision, the Revised English Bible (REB, 1989); the New International Version (NIV, 1978); the Good News Bible (GNB, 1976); the Jerusalem Bible (JB, 1966) and its

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<sup>142</sup> Eugene H. Glassman, *The Translation Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 52.

thorough revision, the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB, 1985); and the New Living Translation (NLT, 1996) are examples of dynamic equivalent translations.

### **Why are there so many versions of the Bible?**

Nelson Mandela once stated that “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.”<sup>143</sup> There is therefore the need to translate the Bible into various languages so that God’s word can be accessible to every language group. If the Bible remains in the biblical languages alone, God’s salvific message to humanity would be inaccessible to people who have no working knowledge of these languages. Bible translation is therefore the tool by which people whose languages are different from the biblical languages have access to the word of God in a way they can best understand it. Once mother-tongue translations are done, other Christian activities such as evangelism, church planting, Christian education, mother-tongue theologizing, and others are also enhanced.

For languages which have the Bible already, such as English and French, there are still good reasons why new translations are made. Each generation needs a fresh translation

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<sup>143</sup> “Mandela in his own words,” CNN homepage, June 26, 2008, accessed April 9, 2018 from <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/world/africa/06/24/mandela.quotes>

of the Bible in its own language. Each generation of humanity has its own language and culture. No one will doubt that every human culture is dynamic and so new generations have peculiar cultures. To be able to introduce each generation to the Bible there is the need to have new translations that match the prevailing language and culture. These new translations are expected to match the rapid advances in biblical research, taking into consideration new data for Bible translators. The existence of many translations of the Bible does not mean the message of these translations is different. To be sure, almost all the various translations are based on the same Hebrew and Greek manuscripts which scholars have found reliable as God's word. What makes them different include the target audience of these translations (eg. youth, the elderly, and so on), the translation philosophy employed (whether literal translation, dynamic-equivalent translation, or a translation based on any other approach), or purpose (eg. devotional or scholarly). Since we have already shown evidence that the manuscripts available to us today are reliable, any good translation from these manuscripts is also reliable.

So which Bible version is the best? Each translation has the power to transform your life. Though the terminologies may differ, the voice of God can speak to you through each one. You should decide what kind of reader you are and estimate your reading level. Are you seeking a literal translation or one that

provides a thought-for-thought presentation? Do you prefer the historic dignity of the *King James Version*, the widely accepted and respected *New International Version*, or the very readable and contemporary *New Living Translation*? The decision is yours.

After a few years of working as a Bible translator, I have come to acknowledge that “Except for aberrant translations produced by sects or cults to promote their distinctive doctrines, every Bible on the market today is sufficiently faithful in its translation so that its readers can learn all of the fundamental truths of Christianity accurately.”<sup>144</sup> No matter which version it is, it is the same events that occur; it is the same characters that appear; it is the same commands that are given; it is the same wisdom that is imparted; it is the same prophecies that are articulated; it is the same doctrine that is propagated, and so on. The differences are exceedingly minor compared to the overall similarities.

### **Are Revised Editions of the Bible watering down God’s word?**

By way of definition, a Revised Version of the Bible refers to the product of a systematic and careful review and examination

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<sup>144</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Can we still believe the Bible?: An Evangelical Engagement with Contemporary Questions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014), np.

of an existing version to make necessary corrections. The revision of a Bible version may be prompted by several factors, some of which I outline below. The Bible may be revised when it is discovered that some source texts could be rendered more accurately than they have been rendered in the existing version. In other words, a better understanding of the source text after a translation has been completed may necessitate the revision of an existing version. This does not only include the meaning of words but of idioms and other word classes as well. This happens because during translation, the translator makes a choice of the meaning of a source-language word in the mother tongue and this choice is made from many alternatives. This requires that the translator chooses the best meaning in a given context. There are cases in which the choice in a current version of the Bible needs to be revised based on certain considerations. For example, the word *prototokos* (Col 1:15) has meanings such as firstborn, preeminence, and source/origin. The 1964, 2012, and 2017 versions of the Asante-Twi Bible translated it as firstborn (*abakan*, first to be given birth to). This choice obviously could easily lead readers to think that Christ was the first to be created (because of the statement Christ is the firstborn of all creations).

However, the immediate context of the text (verses 16-20) indicates clearly that Christ is not part of creation. In the immediate context, we read that all things were created through



him (Christ, see v. 16) and he was before all created things (verse 17). The translation of *prototokos* as *abakan* therefore tends to lead to inaccurate theology for those who limit their scope to the text alone without considering the immediate and larger context of the text. An examination of the wide biblical context (see, for example, John 1:1, 3) will make the reader realize that first born (in Col 1:15) is not to be equated to first to be created. The New Revised Asante Bible (2018) takes care of this and now renders *prototokos* as the source/origin (*farebae*).

Another example is found in Colossians 2:17 where the Asante Twi initially translated it *soma*<sup>145</sup> as *nipadua* (human body) but now translates it as *dea edi mu* (the substance). The expression Adam knew his wife (Gen 4:1) was initially rendered, *Na Adam hunuu ne yere Hawa*. (And Adam saw/knew his wife, Eve). The literal translation into Asante obscures the meaning of the Hebrew idiom. The 2012 revision uses an Asante idiom to replace this Hebrew idiom, *Na Adam ne ne yere Hawa hyiaa mu*. (And Adam and his Eve met together).

Another reason may be the change in vocabulary of a language. Like other aspects of human culture, language is fluid, not static. As time goes on new words are formed and old

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<sup>145</sup> The Greek word *soma* could mean body, substance or reality.

ones fade away. When this happens, it becomes important to revise the existing version to reflect the present form of the language. This helps to update the vocabulary of the receptor language as contained in the Bible. For example, in the Asante version of the Bible the word “did” was rendered *yɔɔ* in the 1964 edition of the Bible. In the revised edition, published in 2012, *yɔɔ* was replaced by *yɛɛ* to reflect the current usage of the term. *Amumuyɔ* (wickedness) is replaced with *amumuyɛ*.

There are other cases where revisions are necessitated by the discovery of new and older manuscripts of the Bible. For example, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scroll in 1946/47 had a huge impact on Bible translation as various translation agencies needed to compare existing manuscripts with what had been discovered.

Furthermore, an existing version of the Bible may be revised due to a lack of accuracy and faithfulness in the translation process. Each Bible translation is expected to be accurate, clear and natural. Accuracy means translating the text in a way that makes it reflect the meaning of the original text as closely as possible. Such a translation helps the modern reader to appreciate the world of the biblical text, and hence understand the text as the original audience did. It is then that the reader can attempt to apply the text to a contemporary situation. Clarity means expressing the meaning of the source text in the clearest way possible in the translated text. This

requires avoiding the use of obscure and awkward expressions. Naturalness deals with accessibility. To achieve naturalness, the translator has to use expressions that reflect everyday usage in the receptor language. The absence of naturalness in translation will make readers say, “We understand the translation but this is not how we say it.” Translations which lack these three major characteristics of a good Bible translation will be revised.

The conclusion is that revisions are meant to make translations more accessible to readers, not to corrupt God’s word.

### **Are there Bible verses missing in our modern Bibles?**

For some time now, there have been allegations that some of the modern Bibles (especially the NIV) have omitted certain verses in the New Testament not only to soften their stance on same-sex marriage (homosexuality and lesbianism), but also to hide some important titles and names of Christ. The verses in question include Matthew 17:21; 18:11; 23:14, Mark 9:44, 46; 11:26; 15:28, Luke 17:36, John 5:4, Acts 8:37; 15:34; 24:7; 28:29, Romans 16:24, 2 Corinthians 13:14. In what follows, I will examine these allegations. The issue relates to textual criticism and hence a brief outline of it is necessary.

Textual criticism is the science that compares all known manuscripts of a given work in an attempt to trace the history of variations within them to discover their original form. A

translator's first concern is that he is translating the actual words of the author before he decides what those words mean. Therefore, before any Bible translation project begins, the team of translators and other scholars need to determine which biblical manuscript is most reliable and should be used for the project.

Textual critics sift through all available manuscripts, carefully collating and comparing each manuscript with all others in order to detect the errors and changes in the text, and thus to decide which variant reading at any given point is more likely to be original. In the process, decisions are taken regarding the certainty or otherwise of a particular text or passage. However, since different translations use different textual critics (who employ different approaches), the degree of certainty of a text may vary slightly from one translation to another. Decisions about the degree of certainty regarding the originality of a particular text determine its inclusion in a translation. Therefore, a particular version may decide to footnote, bracket, or even omit a text depending on the level of its certainty about the originality of that text. Usually, these decisions are communicated to the reader in the preface or in footnotes. In what follows, I present some of the decisions taken by key versions of the Bible in relation to the texts in question.

## For what reasons are these verses “missing”?

### *Greek New Testament*

In the preface of the Greek New Testament, we read this comment under the heading “The evaluation of evidence for the text.”

On the basis of generally accepted principles of textual analysis, the committee took into account the widest possible range of manuscript readings as well as all internal considerations concerning the origin and transmission of the text. But since in a number of instances, the evidence from such sources points to the possibility of different solutions and thus involves different degrees of certainty with respect to the form of the original text, letters A, B, C, or D have been employed within braces { } at the beginning of each apparatus item so as to mark one of four levels of certainty, as representing in large measure the difficulties encountered by the Committee in making textual decisions.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> United Bible Societies, *The Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.) (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 2001)

### ***The New Living Translation***

The New Living Translation (Life Application Bible) puts it this way:

We also footnote cases when the NLT excludes a passage that is included in the Greek text known as the Textus Receptus (and familiar to readers through its translation in the King James Version). In such cases, we offer a translation of the excluded text in a footnote, even though it is generally recognized as a later addition to the Greek text and not part of the original Greek New Testament.”

### ***The Good News Bible***

The Good News Bible has in its preface the following:

The King James Version of the New Testament was based upon a Greek Text that was marred by mistakes, containing the accumulated errors of fourteen centuries of manuscript copying. It was essentially the Greek text of the New Testament as edited by Beza, 1589, who closely followed that published by Erasmus, 1516-1535, which was based upon a few medieval manuscripts. The earliest and best of the eight manuscripts which Erasmus consulted was from the tenth-century received text; Beza had access to two manuscripts of great value, dating from the fifth and sixth centuries, but he made very little use of them because they differed from the

text published by Erasmus. We now possess many more ancient manuscripts of the New Testament and are far better equipped to seek to recover the original wording of the Greek text.

### ***The International King James Version***

Part of the preface to The International King James Version (as quoted in Dickson's Teachers' Bible) reads: "Verses and phrases that are in brackets are those readings that are questioned by Nestle and United Bible Societies' Greek text, and yet, have been retained in this revision."

### ***The New International Version***

New International Version (NIV) of the Bible, readers' attention is drawn to this: "In the New Testament, footnotes that refer to uncertainty regarding the original text are introduced by "Some manuscripts" or "similar expressions."

### **What do the "missing" verses really say?**

The following quotations are from the New King James Version.

Matt 17:21: "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

Matt 18:11: For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

Matt 23:14: Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore, you will receive greater condemnation.

Mark 9:44: Where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

Mark 9:46: Where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

Mark 11:26-27: "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

Luke 17:36: "Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left."

John 5:4: For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.

Acts 8:37: Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

Acts 15:34: However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there.

Acts 24:7: But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands,

Acts 28:29: And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.

Rom 16:24: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

2 Cor 13:14: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love



of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen

### **Are these verses really missing?**

After consulting the Greek New Testament, the interlinear Bible and other versions, I made the following observations. (1) All the Bibles consulted, including 2 Corinthians 13:14 in their main text. (2) The following versions place these verses in footnotes. They are the Greek New Testament, the NIV, the New Living Translation (Life Application Bible), the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), and the Good News Bible. (3) The following versions place the verses in brackets in their main text. They are the Asante Twi Bible, the King James Version, and the International King James Version. (4) In the interlinear Bible, all the verses are included in the main text.

The foregoing analyses coupled with what each of these texts says lead to the following conclusions: These verses do not say anything about homosexuals or lesbians; neither do they contain any new titles and names of Christ. Therefore, the allegations levelled against modern versions of the Bible (such as the NIV) that they have omitted verses that talk about same-sex relations and that some names and titles of Christ are hidden, are not valid.

## **Conclusion**

The study has shown that the aim of Bible translation is not to water down God's word but to enhance the readers' understanding of it. Revisions may bring about certain changes, but all these are for a better understanding of God and His word. There are many translations, each one having a particular purpose. Each translation is the word of God and has the potential to bring about a life-changing encounter with God. One, however, has to make a choice as to which one he/she wants to read based on the purpose for reading (eg. whether academic or devotional). On the issue of the so-called missing verses, the following observations can be made: These verses do not say anything about homosexuals or lesbians and therefore the assertion that the Bible translators are hiding some verses that talk against homosexuality is not valid. Again, the allegation that certain titles and names of Christ are hidden has no proof.

## CONCLUDING ISSUES

### **Is the “Ancient Book” still relevant today?**

The question: “Is the Bible still relevant today?” is crucial in our times when people want us to believe that the message of the Bible is only relevant to the biblical times, not to our time. The truth is that even though the Bible was completed about 1,900 years ago, it remains absolutely relevant to providing solutions to human needs. The Bible is relevant first and foremost for knowing about the natural world. While the Bible is not a scientific textbook, numerous scientific observations have been confirmed in biblical passages (cf. Lev 17:11; Eccl. 1:6-7; Job 36:27-29; Psa 102:25-27). Secondly, the Bible is relevant for providing more accurate and descriptive information about the human condition than any psychology textbook. This knowledge is obtained through the study of the many characters in the Bible. Thirdly, the Bible is relevant to history and Archeology. Many historical facts recorded in the Bible have been confirmed by extra-biblical sources. These fields of study can therefore be developed further through information obtained from biblical revelation.

However, the Bible is not meant to be a history book, a psychology text, or a scientific journal. The main purpose of the Bible is to reveal God’s salvific plan for humanity and to lead humanity to salvation in Jesus Christ. Salvation is necessary

because of the sinfulness of humanity. No one can be exempted from the wrath of God because all have sinned (Rom 3:23). The need for salvation through Jesus Christ is universal regardless of one's race, gender, generation and so on. In our world today where sin abounds so much, the Bible is very relevant to lead people to have a life-changing encounter with God. Scripture will never be irrelevant because it addresses the universal needs of all people—to know God, to experience forgiveness, and to know how the Lord would have us to live. Times may change, but the Word of God will never change. Neither will the word of God ever lose its significance.

While it is true that the word of God has a timeless message for humanity, it is equally true that the Bible does not directly address many contemporary issues including surrogacy, birth control methods, soccer betting and others. There are however texts we can find that speak to these issues implicitly. For example, while the Bible does not explicitly address the issue of gambling, some biblical teachings can be applied to the practice. The Bible emphasizes the sovereignty of God (Matt 10:29-30), whereas gambling is based on chance. Gambling is wrong because it “makes luck or chance the determining factor of human's decisions.”<sup>147</sup> Humans are to be responsible beings whose lives are not conducted by chance but

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<sup>147</sup> Emmanuel K. Asante, *Stewardship: Essays on Ethics of Stewardship* (Kumasi: Wilas Press, 1999), 64.

by purposeful planning ahead of time under God’s providence. Gambling is contrary to the fundamental principle that humans should work for a living (Gen 2:15; Eph 4:28; 2 Thess 3:10). More so, gambling promotes greed and selfishness because in practice, one desires to win and collect the money of those who lose. It is ethically wrong to base our success on people’s failure. The Bible condemns materialism (Matt 6:24-25), while gambling promotes it.

### **So, is the Bible really the word of God?**

Throughout the book, I have demonstrated that the answer to the question: Is the Bible really the word of God? is an empathic “YES!” This affirmation is grounded in a comprehensive examination of the evidence, demonstrating that we can place unwavering trust in the reliability and authority of the Bible.

Central to this confidence is the remarkable accuracy of the manuscripts from which our Bibles are translated. These ancient manuscripts serve as faithful transmissions of the divine message conveyed through the biblical authors.<sup>148</sup> They meticulously preserve the inspired words of God, ensuring that the essence and integrity of the original texts remain intact across generations.

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<sup>148</sup> See McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 349.

What we hold in our hands today, in various languages and translations, are faithful renderings of the God-breathed Scriptures that were initially recorded in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. These translations serve as conduits through which the timeless truths and divine revelations contained within the pages of Scripture are made accessible to diverse cultures and languages worldwide.

By recognizing the meticulous preservation of the biblical manuscripts and the faithful transmission of God's word through translation, we affirm the enduring authority and relevance of the Bible in guiding our lives, shaping our beliefs, and illuminating our understanding of God's purposes and plans for humanity. Thus, with confidence and conviction, we affirm that the Bible is indeed the word of God, deserving of our reverence, study, and obedience.

### **How are we to interpret the Bible?**

This book is not intended to teach the principles of interpretation. However, I deem it necessary to give general guidelines for a proper interpretation and application of Scripture. This should only be the starting point. Readers are encouraged to consult books which deal with Biblical Interpretation for a deeper understanding of the issues outlined here. First of all, **consider the context of the passage for a better understanding of its meaning.** Context may be divided

into literary context and historico-cultural context. The former focuses on what is said in the previous verses or chapters and what is said in the ones that follow will help make the text in question clear. A critical examination of a co-text (accompanying text) that occurs prior to and after the text under study most likely influences the overall development of the author's current discourse. Note in particular any points of continuation, correspondence, or contrast. For the latter, read through the entire book, paying attention to the original context (including, for example, its political, economic, geographical, artistic, sociocultural and religious background) in which it was produced.

Secondly, **identify the kind of literature (genre) your text is for insight into its meaning.** The various kinds of literature present their message in differing styles and with different structures. The way to interpret poetry is different from how one would interpret a narrative. The reader therefore needs to identify carefully, the principal genre, of the passage under investigation, along with the stylistic features that are associated with that particular genre (or sub-genre).

More so, **read the text for its plain and obvious meaning.** Even though the Bible uses symbolic or figurative language, most of it is clear to the reader. Therefore, read the Bible for its plain meaning unless you have good reasons to read it otherwise.

In addition, **try to discern the writer's intention(s) for writing the text.** A text cannot mean what it never meant to its original audience. Discovering the writer's original meaning puts the reader in a better position in determining what it means to the contemporary world.

Furthermore, **look carefully at the language of the text for what it reveals about its meaning.** Words carry thoughts. The words of the text are all we have of the writer's thoughts. We can look closely at the words, examining each one carefully for the part it plays in the message. Also, look at how the words and phrases connect with one another and how the sentences are constructed.

Moreover, **notice the various theological themes in the text.** Though a text has one intended meaning, it can have a number of significant theological themes as well as several different applications. Identifying these themes and understanding how they relate to one another in your text is the most helpful key to grasping their meaning.

Again, **always interpret Scripture using Scripture** (if possible). Often the interpretation of a passage of Scripture is given somewhere else in the Scriptures. For example, the meaning of the parable of the sower (Matt 13:3-9) is given in (verses 19-23).



## What next?

In this book, I have argued that the Bible is the **ONLY** inspired word of God. The key implication of the study for contemporary Christians is that the Bible must be the final authority in deciding what truth is. The divine Author of the Bible is infallible while the human researcher of truth is fallible. We should therefore not root our ultimate authority in history or extra-biblical data. As Christians, we must believe the ultimate authority is the word of God, seek diligently to understand it and apply it appropriately and meticulously to everyday life situations. Christians must believe the word of God and trust in the Spirit of truth to guide them into all the truth (John 16:13). Biblical principles must inform personal, public and national decisions. It is wrong to say, for example, that “This is business, so let’s put the Bible aside and apply business principles.” The Bible has (direct or indirect) principles for all life issues. We must search diligently for these principles and apply them appropriately. Our search for truth must begin with the Bible.

Having known the truth about the reliability of the Bible as discussed in this book, you have the charge to defend the Bible against false allegations. Such a task must however be done prayerfully, with humility, gentleness and respect. In other words, our defense of the Bible must be offered under Christ’s

Lordship, in humble dependence upon the Holy Spirit, and in the context of loving and respectful personal relationships. It is only by this approach that we can be fruitful in our apologetic ministry.

Finally, I urge other Ghanaian/African Christian scholars who love Apologetics to help develop the field of Apologetics for Ghanaian/African Christianity and even beyond, through preaching, teaching, research and publications, and other means. In so doing, I believe the Church will be able to raise disciples of resilient faith who can stand the test of time. I also pray for the formation of a vibrant Apologetic-oriented body, say, the African Association of Christian Apologists (AACA) in the near future to create a platform where ideas and resources could be shared. The fulfillment of this dream will go a long way to enhance God's ministry. The glory will be God's and the blessings, ours.

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**SUBJECT INDEX**

- Apocryphal, 59, 63, 74, 75  
 Apologetics, xv, 22, 24, 25,  
     27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32,  
     34, 35, 87, 100, 154,  
     155, 156, 157, 158  
 Aramaic, 41, 55, 85, 90,  
     123, 124, 134, 135, 151  
 archaeology, 28, 32, 133  
 authority, xv, xvi, 22, 36,  
     50, 58, 65, 77, 79, 99,  
     119, 153  
 Bible translation, 134, 135,  
     137, 141, 143, 148  
 Canon, v, 58, 62, 63, 70,  
     74, 155  
 canonization, 59, 60, 62,  
     63, 66, 68, 69, 70, 73, 78  
 Catholics, 59, 74, 77  
 Christ, xix, 24, 27, 30, 32,  
     33, 35, 37, 39, 51, 53,  
     64, 65, 67, 68, 71, 72,  
     78, 97, 100, 104, 112,  
     119, 128, 140, 142, 146,  
     147, 148, 149, 154, 156,  
     157  
 Christian, iv, v, vi, vii, viii,  
     ix, xiv, xv, xvii, xviii,  
     21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28,  
     29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35,  
     36, 67, 69, 72, 75, 79,  
     81, 84, 86, 101, 109,  
     122, 124, 128, 137, 154,  
     155, 156, 157  
 Christian faith, v, vii, 21,  
     24, 27, 28, 29, 31, 34,  
     67, 84  
 Christianity, ix, 21, 26, 28,  
     30, 31, 33, 34, 36, 56,  
     59, 64, 69, 70, 77, 87,  
     97, 100, 138, 154, 157  
 clarity, xv, 22, 36, 50, 51  
 crucifixion, 97, 103, 124,  
     126  
 Dead Sea Scrolls, xvi, 80,  
     87, 88  
 Deuterocanonical.  
     *Apocrypha*

- dynamic equivalent  
     approach, 136
- excavations, 92, 94, 107
- formal equivalent  
     approach, 135
- gambling, 150
- Gentiles, 124
- God, v, vi, vii, viii, ix, xiv,  
     xv, xvi, xvii, xviii, xx,  
     21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 30,  
     31, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38,  
     40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 47,  
     48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53,  
     54, 56, 57, 58, 60, 62,  
     63, 64, 65, 66, 68, 71,  
     72, 73, 79, 80, 91, 109,  
     111, 112, 113, 114, 115,  
     116, 117, 118, 119, 120,  
     121, 128, 130, 132, 134,  
     137, 138, 139, 142, 146,  
     147, 148, 149, 150, 151,  
     153, 154
- gospel, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35,  
     53, 73
- Greco-Roman world, 38,  
     92, 104
- Greek, xvi, 24, 26, 40, 41,  
     55, 58, 72, 76, 90, 97,  
     98, 101, 106, 107, 123,  
     124, 134, 135, 138, 140,  
     143, 144, 145, 147, 151,  
     158
- Hebrew, xv, 36, 41, 55, 58,  
     59, 61, 64, 68, 74, 76,  
     77, 80, 82, 83, 86, 88,  
     90, 95, 114, 119, 125,  
     134, 135, 138, 140, 151
- Holy Spirit, 33, 40, 41, 45,  
     50, 52, 53, 57, 75, 147,  
     154
- homosexuality, 29, 142,  
     148
- humanity, v, 22, 33, 36, 41,  
     53, 57, 80, 137, 149, 150
- Immanuel, 120, 121
- inerrancy, xv, 22, 36, 43,  
     44, 46, 48

- Israelites, 52, 55, 60, 93,  
115, 116, 118
- Jesus, 25, 32, 33, 37, 39,  
41, 45, 48, 53, 56, 59,  
63, 65, 67, 68, 71, 72,  
79, 103, 104, 106, 107,  
119, 120, 121, 122, 123,  
124, 126, 127, 128, 129,  
146, 147, 149, 156
- Jews, 61, 62, 64, 66, 74,  
76, 77, 89, 90, 93, 106,  
122, 123, 147
- justification, 24, 41, 130,  
131
- Latin, 98, 101, 102, 105,  
123, 124
- Lectionaries, 101
- lesbianism, 142
- manuscript, xv, xvii, 23,  
42, 80, 84, 87, 89, 90,  
97, 100, 109, 110, 143
- Minuscules, 101
- money, 129, 151
- necessity, xv, 22, 36, 50,  
53, 72, 133
- New Testament, xiv, xvi,  
xix, 23, 24, 25, 36, 42,  
50, 56, 59, 67, 68, 69,  
70, 71, 72, 74, 75, 77,  
78, 86, 96, 97, 98, 99,  
100, 101, 102, 103, 104,  
105, 107, 108, 109, 119,  
120, 132, 135, 142, 143,  
144, 145, 147, 155, 156,  
157, 158
- Old Testament, xv, xix, 36,  
50, 56, 59, 61, 62, 63,  
64, 65, 67, 68, 72, 73,  
74, 76, 77, 79, 80, 81,  
84, 86, 87, 89, 90, 91,  
93, 94, 95, 96, 110, 115,  
118, 132, 155, 156, 157
- Orthodox, 59, 79
- philosophers, 26
- Protestants, 59, 74
- Qumran, 88, 89

- revelation, 22, 36, 37, 39,  
40, 53, 71, 72, 89, 132,  
149
- sacred writings, 36, 58, 64
- Samaritan Pentateuch, 80,  
89
- Scripture, ii, v, xv, 22, 30,  
32, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45,  
50, 52, 53, 58, 59, 60,  
67, 68, 69, 70, 72, 74,  
76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 84,  
90, 104, 108, 110, 150,  
151, 153, 158
- sufficiency, xv, 22, 36, 50,  
53
- Textual criticism, 142
- Torah, 36, 60, 61, 62, 83,  
90
- trustworthiness, 22, 24, 96
- Uncials, 101
- uniqueness, xv, 22, 25, 34,  
36
- variants, 42, 90
- Yahweh, 62, 114, 115

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