

# The Trustworthy Word

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Importance of the Topic

### 1.2 The Text of Scripture

## 2. How was the Old Testament Formed?

### 2.1 Prior to 300 BC

#### 2.1.1 Authoritative Utterances

- a) The Bible assumes revelation that was subsequently written down (Exodus 17:14–16; 24:3–4, 7, 12)
- b) Why were they written down (Deuteronomy 6, Joshua 4; Deut 17:18–20, 31:9–11)?
- c) The importance of these words are signified by where they are kept (Ex 25:16, 21; Deut 10:2–5; Deut 31:24–26; 1 Kings 8:9; Heb 9:4) and the warning o not add or delete from it (Deut 4:2; 12:32).<sup>1</sup>
- d) It's not just laws that were written down but even prophetic oracles (Isai-ah 30:8; Jer 25:13; Hab 2:2; 1 Chron 29:29).

#### 2.1.2 Development into a Collection

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<sup>1</sup> Paul D. Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods and Results*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 62.

- a) These written authoritative utterances develop and evolve into a collection of authoritative texts/scrolls. For example:
  - (1) The ten commandments and the covenant law (Exod. 20:1–19; Deut. 5:6–27; Exod. 20:22–23:33)
  - (2) The book of Psalms and the book of Proverbs.
  - (3) 1 9:2
- b) There is appeal to earlier written texts as being authoritative.
  - (1) There are frequent appeals to the law of Moses (Josh 1:7–8; 2 Kgs 14:6; 17:13; Jer 26:4–5; Ezra 3:2; 9:10–11).<sup>2</sup>
  - (2) Prophets and other writers appeal to earlier prophets as authoritative (Ezek 38:17; Hosea 6:5; Zech 1:4–6; Ps 1; Dan 9:2)
- c) Portions of Scripture during this phase could be edited them into new independent literary units. Compare 2 Sam 22 = Ps 18; 2 Kgs 18:13–20:19 = Isa 36–39; 2 Kgs 24:18–25:30 = Jer 52; Isa 2:2–4 = Mic 4:1–3; Ps 14 = 53; 40:14–18 = Ps 70; 57:8–12 = 108:2–6; 60:7–14 = 108:7–14; Ps 96 = 1 Chron 16:23–33; Ps 106:1, 47–48 = 1 Chron 16:34–36; and the parallels between Samuel-Kings and Chronicles).<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1.3 Who Preserved these Texts?

- a) Priests and Levites (Deut 17:18; Deut 31:24–26; 2 Kings 22:8; Ezra 7:1–6; 2 Sam 8:17; 1 Kgs 4:3; Ps 45:1; Prov 25:1)
- b) Soldier Scribes - Archaeological evidence also connects scribal activities with soldiers and fortresses, like Kuntillet ‘Ajrud (9th century BC in the Sinai area). See Josh 18:9.<sup>4</sup>

### 2.1.4 How Were these Texts Maintained?

- a) Commonly written on papyrus or leather.

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<sup>2</sup> See Michael B. Shepherd, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, (Kregel Academic, 2023), 25

<sup>3</sup> See Bruce K Waltke, “Textual Criticism of the Old Testament and its Relation to Exegesis and Theology,” in *NIDOTTE*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> John D. Meade and Peter J. Gurry, *Scribes and Scripture: The Amazing Story of How We Got the Bible*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022), 44.

- b) Scrolls would be copied, buried or sometimes collected in a hidden place (genizah) until they could be buried together.
- c) Tendency to Preserve the Text
  - (1) Revise the Text

## **2.2 300 BC–135 BC**

### **2.2.1 What's the biblical text like during this period?**

- a) A plurality of texts

### **2.2.2 Who is Preserving these Texts**

- a) Sopherim or scribes arose during this period.

### **2.2.3 How did Scribes Maintain these Texts?**

- a) Preservation of Old Testament Texts (Conservative Examples)

- b) Revision of Old Testament Texts

#### **(a) Is the Old Testament Reliable in this Period**

- a) First, we see the dominance of the proto-MT tradition that testifies to its acceptance.
- b) Secondly, the way of categorizing the fluidity of texts at Qumran is misleading and those in the non-aligned category are much closer to a proto-MT.
- c) Thirdly, the picture of fluidity that we get from Qumran must be kept in perspective.

## **2.3 135 BC–AD 1000**

### **2.3.1 What is the biblical text like during this period?**

### **2.3.2 External or Paratextual Elements are added**

- a) AD 135–AD 500 - The Talmudic Period
  
- b) AD 500–AD 1000 - The Masoretic Period
  
- c) Copied with meticulous detail

### **2.3.3 AD 1000–AD 1450**

- 1) The OT text is transmitted by the Masoretes almost complete standardization with no real significant issues.
- 2) The oldest complete copy of the Hebrew Old Testament comes from this period in 1009 and is a codex called the Leningrad Codex.

### **2.3.4 1450–Today**

- 1) Hebrew Bibles begin to be printed in the late 15th century and they start replace manuscript copies along with what are called Rabbinic Bibles which are Hebrew Bibles printed along with Aramaic Targums and Medieval Jewish commentaries.
- 2) These Bibles serve as the first basis of Biblia Hebraica.

### **2.3.5 Concluding thoughts on the Old Testament -**

- 1) There is a strong tendency to preserve the OT text.<sup>5</sup>
- 2) The antiquity of the MT is confirmed by the manuscript evidence and through

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<sup>5</sup>Waltke, "Textual Criticism of the Old Testament and its Relation to Exegesis and Theology", 64

Semitic grammar.<sup>6</sup>

- 3) We have to keep certain points of biblical data in perspective.
  - a) The New Testament citation of non-MT Old Testament texts
  - b) 90% of the OT is shared by all of the extant witnesses.
  - c) Consider the nature of the variants.

### **3. How was the New Testament Formed?**

#### **3.1 Before AD 100**

- 1) Different process than the Old Testament.
- 2) Like the OT, there are no existing autographs, but we have copies of copies. Our earliest fragments of evidence date to the 2nd century AD.
- 3) During this period there would be a mixture of oral and written traditions that circulated amongst Christians (Luke 1:1–4; 1 Cor. 15:1, 3–8).

(1) Letters to churches were written by Paul or amanuenses (Rom 16:22; 2 Thess 3:17) that were then delivered to churches and then in some cases encouraged to circulate to other churches (Col 4:16).<sup>7</sup>

#### **3.2 Post-AD 100**

- 1) The introduction of the codex.
- 2) It is also probably surprising for the amount of evidence that does exist during this period due to church persecution.
  - a) During this period we have more disciplined copying.<sup>8</sup>

#### **3.3 Transmission Process**

- 1) A Complicated Transmission Process

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods and Results*, 79.

<sup>8</sup> Meade and Gurry, *Scribes and Scripture: The Amazing Story of How We Got the Bible*, p. 47.

- 2) Errors were introduced into the manuscripts and then continued to be transmitted.
- 3) But these errors are also more easily filtered out.

### **3.4 New Testament Sources**

- 1) New Testament Sources are divided in papyri, majuscules, minuscules, and citations lectionaries and other patristic writings.
- 2) Papyri
- 3) Majuscules
- 4) Minuscules
- 5) Lectionaries - 2300 manuscripts

#### **3.4.1 Number of Manuscripts**

- 1) More than 5700 Greek NT manuscripts in existence from 2nd century–16th century.<sup>9</sup>
- 2) 20,000–25,000 copies of the NT that were translated into other languages: Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Gothic, and Arabic.
- 3) Matthew's Gospel has 1800 manuscripts in comparison to 3 fragments of the Gospel of Thomas with the only complete being a Coptic translation.<sup>10</sup>

#### **3.4.2 Nature of Variants**

- 1) Some estimate the number of variants in the New Testament between 400,000 and maybe 500,000.<sup>11</sup>
- 2) Variant Categories

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<sup>9</sup>Wallace, Daniel. ESV Study Bible.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 100.

- a) Spelling and nonsense errors
- b) Minor changes when a synonym is used.
  - (1) Meaningful but not viable readings.
  - (2) Meaningful and Viable Readings.

3) A Concrete Example from the Book of Jude

#### 4. Where do we go from here?

##### 4.1 Text vs. Events

##### 4.2 Old Testament Events

- 1) Egyptian Pharaoh Shishak’s invasion mentioned in 1 Kgs 14:25–26 confirmed by the discovery of a relief that chronicles various military victories in region in a temple Amun at Karnak
- 2) Tel Dan Inscription (9th century BC) to the “House of David”
- 3) Hezekiah’s Tunnel & Siloam Inscription (8th century BC) (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:30)
- 4) Moabite Stone (Mesha Stele, c. 840 BC) (2 Kings 3)
- 5) Cyrus Cylinder (6th century BC) (Ezra 1:1-4).

##### 4.3 The Historical Existence of Jesus<sup>12</sup>

- 1) Early Roman and Jewish Sources

Source	Who They Are	Reference	What They Say About Jesus
Tacitus	Roman historian and senator	Annals 15.44	Mentions that Nero blamed Christians for the Great Fire of Rome (AD 64) and refers to "Christus," who was executed under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius.

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<sup>12</sup> See Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 17–35; Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002).

Pliny the Younger	Roman governor of Bithynia (c. AD 111–113)	Letters 10.96-97	Writes to Emperor Trajan about Christians, describing them as worshipping Christ "as a god" and refusing to worship Roman gods. Seeks advice on how to handle Christian trials.
Josephus	Jewish historian (c. AD 93)	Antiquities 18.3.3 & 20.9.1	Mentions Jesus as the brother of James who had been brought to the Sanhedrin to be stoned for violating the law in AD 62.

#### 4.4 Signs of the Gospels knowledge of Events

#### 4.5 Jesus' Understanding of the Bible

### 5. Wrapping Up

Bock, Darrell L. *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.

Meade, John D., and Peter J. Gurry. *Scribes and Scripture: The Amazing Story of How We Got the Bible*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2022.

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