

The Doctrine of Inspiration – Part VII
Vetting the Bible as a Document of Antiquity Bible

The veracity and transmission of the bible is knowable and provable. When assessed by the rules governing the veracity of any text of antiquity, the Bible is superior to all others.

1. **Eyewitness Accounts** – The most reliable documents of antiquity that detail historical events are those which are comprised of eyewitness accounts, or which are based on eyewitness accounts. Documents of less weight are those which have no claim of eyewitness reporting.
 - a. Luke was based upon eyewitness accounts. (Luke 1:1-4)
 - b. Acts, considered Luke 2, was written in the same manner. (Acts 1:1)
 - c. Mark and Matthew were written from the perspective of eyewitnesses, but they make no such claim.
 - d. John was an eyewitness account. (John 21:24)
 - e. Paul was an eyewitness of his accounts of Christ, his own missionary journeys, and the growth of the early church. (1 Corinthians 2 15:8)
2. **Irrelevant Material** – True accounts of events tend to include specific, non-relevant information because true events are cluttered with such information. False accounts tend to be less specific, general, and only report basic facts. See John 20:1-8 for examples of non-relevant detail, such as which disciple arrived first at the tomb, the arrangement of the burial clothes, etc.
3. **Self-Damaging Material** – Anyone critically examining an ancient text should ask the question, “Does the document contain self-damaging material?” Documents that contain self-damaging material tend to be regarded as more reliable than documents which present flawless accounts of events and only include details which strengthen their stories or heroes. When an author includes details which could weaken the story in the eyes of its immediate audience, the same strengthens the veracity of the account in the eyes of historians looking back at the author’s account, since the author’s motivation for writing the document appears to have been to communicate the facts.
 - a. **The Resurrection Account** – As in the account of Jesus’ resurrection (above), a woman is the first to find the tomb empty, and also later in John 20:14-18 the first to meet the resurrected Christ. Women were considered notorious liars in ancient Israel’s culture and were not allowed to testify in courts of law. Having a woman discover the empty tomb and be the first to meet the risen Christ was scandalous and harmed the credibility of the account in the first century. Through the ages, however, these details have added weight to the account. If the story had been invented, it would hardly have included such damaging details.
 - b. **The Character of Peter** – After Paul, Peter is the most prominent apostle of the New Testament. Yet, he is consistently shown to be weak in faith, arrogant and belligerent.
 - i. Peter denied Christ three times (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22 and John 13).
 - ii. Peter cut the ear off of Malchus at Jesus’ arrest (John 18:10).
 - iii. Peter was influenced by Satan (Matthew 16:23).
 - c. **The Actions of Jesus** – Sometimes Jesus’ actions and attitudes are portrayed in an unflattering light. If He were the Messiah and the Son of God, one would not normally expect this kind of behavior.
 - iv. Syrophenician woman refused assistance (Matthew 15:21-28).
 - v. Cleansing the temple with violence (Matthew 21:12, John 2:15).
 - vi. Prayer at Gethsemane to avoid the cross (Matthew 26:39, Luke 22:42).
 - vii. Crying out from the cross, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (Matthew 27:46). These seemingly self-damaging details would likely not have been included in a fabricated account of a messianic figure. Yet, they are included in the biblical accounts because they are a true record of what actually happened.

4. **Self-Consistency** – True historical writings tend toward directness, coherence, and consistency. False accounts can meander, confuse, and self-contradict.
- a. **A Single Integrated Message:** The Bible was written in 3 languages over 15 centuries by 40 authors and, yet presents a single message: the creation, fall and redemption of mankind. The books of the Bible are complimentary, rather than contradictory and present a thorough and multi-faceted picture of God, man, and history, rather than a disconnected group of confusing stories. The Gospels especially show that, while written by four different authors, each with his own perspective, audience, and purpose, they are utterly consistent in their portrayal of Jesus.
 - i. Matthew, who was a Jew, wrote to the Jews to show that Jesus was the King of the Jews. His genealogy begins with Abraham, the first Jew, and follows the royal line through Judah to Solomon to Joseph.
 - ii. Mark, who wrote to the Romans, presented Jesus as the suffering servant who *came not to be served, but to serve* (Mark 10:45). Mark's gospel omits a genealogy since no one cares about the pedigree of a servant.
 - iii. Luke, a doctor whose audience was the Greeks, presents Jesus in His humanity. Luke's genealogy begins with the first man, Adam, and traces Jesus' lineage through Solomon's brother, Nathan, down the natural line to Mary.
 - iv. John, who wrote to the church, presented the deity of Christ. He omits a genealogy and replaces it with the revelation of Jesus' eternal existence.
 - b. **Typology:** is a literary device used throughout the Old Testament to present biblical personalities, events, and doctrines in a hidden fashion. These hidden symbols and types are given interpretive expression in the New Testament. Among the most prominent uses of typology are those which prefigure Christ.
 - i. Noah's Ark – made of wood which had to die to be useful in saving lives, one had to be in it when judgment came; it was the only means of salvation.
 - ii. Isaac – offered as a sacrifice to God, place of sacrifice same as Calvary, returned to his father on 3rd day.
 - iii. Joseph – betrayed by Judah for pieces of silver, falsely accused of a crime, ascended to the right hand of power, provided the bread of life, was the savior of his people.
 - iv. Boaz – was a redeemer, married a Gentile bride.
 - v. Jonah – called people to repentance, emerged after three days in the deep.
 - vi. David – was persecuted by Saul, was the king of the Jews.
5. **Scientific Claims** – Those which make accurate scientific claims, which at the time of their writing were not yet validated by science – but later were validated by science – should be given greater weight. The Bible is scientifically accurate. All the scientific statements made by the Bible have either been proven accurate, or are yet to be proven accurate, and are only challenged by unproven scientific theories. Science routinely revises its theories as new information comes to light. Yet, the Bible has stood firm and unchanged since its authorship.
- a. The Big Bang – Genesis 1:1-3.
 - b. The Water Cycle – Ecclesiastes 1:7,11:3, Psalm 135:7, Job 26:8, 36:27-28.
 - c. Dinosaurs – Behemoth is described in Job 40:15-24, and Leviathan in Job 41:1-34.
 - d. The Earth – Scripture describes the earth as spherical (Luke 17:34-36, Matthew 24:40, **Isaiah 40:22**) and suspended in space (Job 26:7).
 - e. Entropy – The scientific principle that measures randomness and governs the transition of all systems from order to chaos. As entropy increases, systems become more corrupted and order breaks down. The Second Law of Thermodynamics (one of two entropy laws) states that everything in the universe is winding down and tending toward chaos. Heat is declining in the universe, as it cools. The speed of light has now been shown to be gradually degrading over time. Energy is dissipating throughout the universe. Material things wear out, etc. Scripture offers numerous references to the entropy in the universe– Psalm 102:26-27, Isaiah 51:6, Romans 8:20-22, Hebrews 1:10-12.
 - f. Evolution – a theory, not a set of proven scientific facts. Transitional life forms not found in fossil record. Since the Bible has consistently shown its scientific accuracy centuries prior to modern science's validation of it, the Bible's claims about the origin of the universe and the creation of the world and mankind should be accepted. Thus, the Theory of Evolution should be rejected.

6. **Bibliographical Test** (20,000+ ancient copies of New Testament).
 - a. 5,795 Greek manuscript copies.
 - b. 2,587 Armenian manuscript copies.
 - c. 975 Coptic manuscript copies.
 - d. 6 Gothic manuscript copies.
 - e. 600 Ethiopian manuscript copies.
 - f. 10,000 Latin translation copies.
 - g. 350 Syriac manuscript copies.
7. **Other Writings of Antiquity**
 - a. Compared to the Bible, no other document of antiquity comes close to the sheer number of manuscript copies, and no other ancient document's copies were made so closely to the original autographs as those of the Bible.
 - a. 1,757 copies of Homer's *Iliad* which was written around 800 B.C.
 - b. 109 copies of Herodotus, considered the Father of Ancient History, wrote his *History* in the 5th century B.C.
 - c. 193 copies of the plays of Sophocles were also written in the 5th century B.C.
 - d. 210 copies of the Tetralogies of Plato were written around 400 B.C.
 - e. 251 copies of Caesar's *Gallic Wars* which were written in the first century B.C.
 - b. This begs the question, how is the age of an ancient manuscript determined? (excerpted from a Blue Letter Bible article, see *Appendix I*) Most ancient writings are undated; there is nothing in the text that specifically states when it was written. This is also true for the copies of the biblical manuscripts. Scholars must use a variety of methods to determine the age of a manuscript. They include the following:
 - a. The materials upon which the work is written – general use of materials changed over time as production methods improved (stone, animal skins, papyrus, paper).
 - b. Letter formation (Paleography) – the formation of language alphabets changed over time.
 - c. The color of ink – later NT copies were made of colored ink, and were elaborately adorned.
 - d. The language in which it was written – the Bible was written in Greek. Copies in other languages would be later.
 - e. Carbon 14 dating – discovered in 1947 and requires the destruction of some of the material.
 - f. Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS) – recent innovation and refinement of the carbon-14.
 - g. Punctuation – The earliest New Testament manuscripts contained no breaks between the words. About the sixth century A.D. punctuation marks began to be used.
 - h. Other documents found with the manuscript – If there were dated documents found with the manuscript, this would help with approximate dates.
8. **Dead Sea Scrolls** – discovered in 1946, moved copies back two centuries to 3rd BC – no textual changes.
9. **Falsehood Motive** – NT writers died for their faith, and did not seek fame, power, or wealth. No reason to lie.
10. **Archaeology** – has proven many biblical claims.
 - a. Noah's Flood – accounts of a global flood discovered throughout antiquity (cave murals, etc.)
 - b. The Code of Hammurabi – is a stone slab, from around 1750 B.C., in the Louvre Museum in Paris uses phrases word-for-word from the OT Law.
 - c. Hittites – considered fictitious by skeptics until 1906 when their capital city was discovered in Turkey.
 - d. The Merneptah Stele – 1230 BC seven-foot stone with hieroglyphics depicting Egyptian conquest of Israel. It is the oldest non-biblical reference to Israel extant today.
 - e. Biblical Cities – Haran, Hazor, Dan, Megiddo, Shechem, Samaria, Shiloh, Gezer, Gibeah, and Beersheba all discovered and excavated by archaeology.
 - f. Garden Tomb (of Jesus) adjacent to Calvary (Golgotha or "Place of a Skull") where Jesus was crucified.
 - g. The House Church of Peter was discovered in Capernaum in 1906, later excavated in 1968 and 1998.
 - h. The Crucified Foot of a 1st Century Jewish Man was found near Jerusalem in 1968.
 - i. Inscription of Pontius Pilate's name was found in Caesarea Maritima in 1962.
11. **Legitimate Naysayers** – no denials of the Resurrection at the time; Jews made excuses for the empty tomb.
12. **Extra-biblical Writers** – Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, and others wrote of Christ and Christians.
13. **Fulfilled Prophecy** – Over 100 about Jesus from the OT which are fulfilled in the NT. See *Appendix II*

Appendix I

How are Manuscripts Dated?

(Excerpted from a Blue Letter Bible [article](#).)

Introduction – Most ancient writings are undated; there is nothing in the text that specifically states when it was written. This is also true for the copies of the biblical manuscripts. The earliest New Testament manuscript that has a date in it comes from the 9th century A.D. Consequently, scholars must use a variety of methods to determine the age of a manuscript. They include the following:

The Materials upon Which the Work Is Written – One way that the age of a manuscript can be determined is by the materials upon which the document was written. The earliest writings of humans were preserved in stone. As time progressed, the materials changed. Leather scrolls were used prior to the use of papyrus codices (books). When the ancient document is found, the materials are an important key in dating the work because of the different historical periods when these surfaces were in use.

Letter Formation – Paleography – Paleography is the science of the study of ancient writing. It examines the way scribes formed their letters when they were writing or copying something. As writing progressed, the way in which the various letters and combinations of letters were formed or changed somewhat. By closely observing the changes, paleographers can provide a basic time frame for when the document was written. For example, the earliest Hebrew characters resembled pronged-shape Phoenician script. This is known as paleo-Hebrew. After 400 B.C. the letters were written in more a square shape. In addition, the size and shape of letters changed as writing evolved. Certain letters were formed differently during history. Sometimes a document can be dated almost precisely, due to the way some of the letters were formed. To determine the various handwriting styles during different times in history, it is necessary to have documents that contain some type of date in them. Fortunately, there are a number of Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic documents that do indeed have dates. For example, there are Aramaic texts from an ancient Jewish military colony in Egypt that contain dates in the reign of King Darius II of Persia. We know that he ruled from 423-404 B.C. Consequently, scholars can use these documents to determine the way letters were formed during that time. More and more ancient documents are being discovered with dates in them. This allows scholars to observe how the formation of letters changed over time. When one discovers an ancient text without a date, the handwriting is compared to a dated text which is similar in style. Since most of the documents in the ancient world were written by professional scribes, they tended to look relatively similar for a given period of time. Gradual changes would enter, and these changes can be readily observed. Since more and more of these dated ancient documents are being discovered, scholars can be more precise in their dating of documents that have no date contained in the manuscripts. However, the science of paleography can only give general dates to manuscripts—not exact dates. In the New Testament period, documents were first written in large letters known as uncial script. There also was no space between the words. About the ninth century, New Testament manuscripts began to be written in a different style known as “minuscule” writing. This form of writing became popular and eventually all manuscripts were copied in this style. Therefore, we know the general periods when scribes used uncial writing and when it changed to the minuscule style.

The Color of Ink – Later, New Testament manuscripts were written in colored ink and were lavishly adorned by scribes. This is particularly true with Latin manuscripts. When we find a manuscript written in such a manner, we can give an approximate date to it based upon this practice.

The Language in Which It Was Written – When we find copies of the New Testament written in languages other than Greek, we can place them into a general time frame. This is because we know approximately when these translations were first made. Consequently, we know that the manuscript could not have been copied before a certain date.

Carbon 14 – The carbon-14 dating method was discovered in 1947. It is possible that the process of carbon dating can also be applied to date the existing biblical manuscripts. However, to do this, part of the manuscript must be destroyed. In the early years, none of the Dead Sea Scrolls were subjected to carbon 14 dating. Too large of a portion of these brittle manuscripts would have had to have been destroyed to get a precise date.

Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS) – Is a recent innovation. It is a refinement of the carbon-14 dating method. AMS can test documents by using only a fraction of the material that was needed for carbon-14 dating. Eight manuscripts from the Dead Sea Scrolls were tested with the AMS method. In all but one instance, they confirmed the date that had been given to them by paleographers.

Punctuation – The earliest New Testament manuscripts contained no breaks between the words. About the sixth century A.D. punctuation marks began to be used. By the eighth century many different punctuation marks such as commas, colons, and periods (full stops), as well as spaces between words, were used. Since the employment of punctuation was a gradual process, it helps determine the period during which a manuscript was written.

Other Documents Found with the Manuscript – If there were dated documents found with the manuscript, this would help with approximate dates. For example, biblical manuscripts have been found that have been wrapped inside other documents. Some of these documents have a date on them. This gives us a general idea of the time they were written.

Conclusion – These Factors Help Give Approximate Ages to Ancient Documents – These factors, along with some others, help scholars determine the approximate time a manuscript was composed. However, unless there is a date written on the manuscript, we can only approximate when it was actually written.

Appendix II

Fulfilled Prophecies of Christ

Prophecy	Declared	Fulfilled
1. The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1, Luke 2:4-6
2. The Messiah would be born of a virgin.	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:22-23, Luke 1:26-31
3. The Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah.	Genesis 49:10	Luke 3:33, Hebrews 7:14
4. The Messiah would be heir to King David's throne.	2 Samuel 7:12-13, Isaiah 9:7	Luke 1:32-33, Romans 1:3
5. A forerunner would prepare the way for the Messiah	Isaiah 40:3-5	Luke 3:3-6
6. The Messiah would be called the Son of God.	Psalms 2:7	Matthew 3:16-17
7. The Messiah would speak in parables.	Psalms 78:2-4, Isaiah 6:9-10	Matthew 13:10-15, 34-35
8. The Messiah would bind the brokenhearted.	Isaiah 61:1-2	Luke 4:18-19
9. The Messiah would be called King.	Psalms 2:6, Zechariah 9:9	Matthew 27:37, Mark 11:7-11
10. The Messiah would be betrayed.	Psalms 41:9, Zechariah 11:12-13	Luke 22:47-48, Matthew 26:14-16
11. The Messiah's betrayal price to buy a potter's field.	Zechariah 11:12-13	Matthew 27:9-10
12. The Messiah would be crucified with criminals.	Isaiah 53:12	Matthew 27:38, Mark 15:27-28
13. The Messiah's hands and feet would be pierced.	Psalms 22:16, Zechariah 12:10	John 20:25-27
14. Soldiers would gamble for the Messiah's garments.	Psalms 22:18	Matthew 27:35-36, Luke 23:34
15. The Messiah's bones would not be broken.	Exodus 12:46, Psalms 34:20	John 19:33-36
16. The Messiah would be forsaken by God.	Psalms 22:1	Matthew 27:46
17. Soldiers would pierce the Messiah's side.	Zechariah 12:10	John 19:34
18. The Messiah would be buried with the rich.	Isaiah 53:9	Matthew 27:57-60
19. The Messiah would be resurrected from the dead.	Psalms 16:10, Psalms 49:15	Matthew 28:2-7, Acts 2:22-32
20. The Messiah would be a sacrifice for sin.	Isaiah 53:5-12	Romans 5:6-8