

Chapter 10

Textual Evidences for the Bible and the Koran

The Bible is Essentially Inerrant

This book has shown that science supports the Bible. This chapter though documents textual evidences for the Bible (analysis of ancient manuscripts, text types, etc.). This helps to prove that the Bible is God's Holy Word and that we live in a spiritual universe. The most popular Bible translations are nearly inerrant. The Bible becomes inerrant though once it is properly translated and decoded from the best manuscripts. But inerrant translations are only possible when false traditions are rejected. Also, it may surprise readers to learn that the Koran is also inerrant. This is documented after the sections about the Bible and in Chapter 11.

It is true that some have compared the transmission of scripture to the telephone game where a statement or story is passed through a series of people, which causes it to become quite corrupt when it reaches the last person. However, the transmission of scripture is quite different and much more reliable. This is because scholars can cross-examine each manuscript against the others unlike in the telephone game. This has been tested many times. Conferences have been convened where people copy a document again and again until it becomes corrupted. Then they compare many of the copies. But this is without access to the earliest ones and with others in the transmission missing, and they are able to produce the original text. Because there is an abundance of ancient copies, scholars can use this science to reconstruct the original biblical text. Thus, to restore the New Testament, there is no need to look at copies from the first century.¹

Abundance of Ancient Copies

The first century Jewish historian Josephus wrote that the Jews were extremely careful when they made copies of the Old Testament.² For instance, they kept track of how many letters were on each line of scripture and how many times a particular word appeared in each book. There is less manuscript evidence for the Old Testament though than there is for the New Testament. There are over 5,686 ancient manuscripts of the New Testament written in Greek, over 10,000 in Latin, and over 9,300 in various other languages and from various geographical locations. This is thus a total of over 24,980 ancient copies. Ancient documents though usually survive in no more than about twelve ancient manuscripts, and these are generally of a much later date than the manuscript evidence for the Bible.³ Other than the Koran, no other ancient historical document comes close to having so much manuscript evidence.

Among ancient Greek and Latin literature, the book with the next best manuscript evidence to that of the Bible is Homer's *Iliad*, which has only 643 early copies, and they date no earlier than about 400 years after the original. The New Testament, on the other hand, has some partial copies that date between about 150-250 years after the original, with the earliest complete copy dating to about 225 years after the original. In fact, ancient non-biblical documents typically have on average about 1,000 years separating their extant manuscripts from their original compositions.⁴ One reason these facts have great importance is because by supporting the Bible they support the prophecies within it that point to Bahá'u'lláh, which were discussed in the last two chapters.

Reliability of the Old Testament

Although there are fewer ancient Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament than there are Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, the Old Testament is still highly reliable. As explained in Chapter 4, the Old Testament manuscripts come in three main families: the Masoretic Text (MT), the Greek Septuagint (LXX), and the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP). Moreover, perhaps the Aramaic Targums should also be added to this list.⁵ The SP differs from the MT in about 6,000 places, while about 1,900 of these variants agree with the LXX.⁶ The ancient Old Testament version with the least variants is the MT. The truth is that the Old Testament is 95 percent or more true to the original. And most of the variants do not affect meaning, and none of them call into question any fundamental Christian doctrines.⁷

The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) greatly support the truth of the Old Testament. They were discovered in 1947 near Jerusalem and a place called Qumran. Most of the scrolls date from 250 B.C. to A.D. 68, and remarkably, they include Hebrew copies of the entire Book of Isaiah, along with portions of all the other Old Testament books except Esther. These biblical scrolls are about 1,000 years older than the oldest complete Old Testament manuscripts we previously possessed, which were written around A.D. 980. In fact, when the DSS copy of Isaiah was carefully compared with our MT version of Isaiah, it was found that both of these manuscripts were in remarkable agreement, even though they were written almost 1,000 years apart. The truth is that over 95 percent of the two texts were the same; indeed, most of the variants did not affect meaning.⁸ This was also true of the other Old Testament books found among the DSS.⁹

A comparison of the Yemenite and Masoretic versions of the Torah (the Five Books of Moses) gives more evidence that the Old Testament is near perfectly preserved. Although these two groups of Jews separated over one thousand years ago, when their two versions of the Torah were brought together and compared, there were only nine letters that did not match out of a total of 304,805. Moreover, there were no differences in the meanings of the words involved!¹⁰ This section thus gives strong evidence that the Old Testament is quite reliable.

Reliability of the New Testament

The ancient Greek New Testament manuscripts have about 400,000 textual variants. The vast majority of these though are spelling errors, while the remaining errors are almost all due to word order or the addition or absence of insignificant words. Indeed, according to the third edition of the UBS Greek New Testament, there are only 1,435 errors that affect meaning, with only 124 places of high uncertainty, 694 places of moderate uncertainty, and 477 places of small uncertainty. Yet, according to Philip Schaff, these errors do not affect key doctrine or any articles of faith. Thus the New Testament is about 99.41 percent true to the original. This is better than any other ancient book, except the Koran.¹¹

The earliest New Testament manuscript fragment we have is the Rylands fragment, which dates to A.D. 130 and contains parts of the Gospel of John. There are also dozens of early manuscripts dated to before the fourth century that include much of the New Testament and sometimes even portions of the Old Testament. For instance, the Bodmer Papyrus II, which contains most of the Gospel of John, is dated to A.D. 150-200, and the Chester Beatty Papyrus, which includes major portions of the New Testament, is dated to A.D. 200. There is also a copy of the Gospels, called the Diatessaron by Tatian, dated to A.D. 200. The earliest complete copies

of the New Testament we have though, both containing almost the entire Greek Old Testament, are the Codex Vaticanus (A.D. 325-350) and the Codex Sinaiticus (A.D. 350). And finally, virtually the entire New Testament can be constructed from the citations of the early Church Fathers that were written between the late first and the late third centuries (beginning around A.D. 80). They left us with about 32,000 citations.

These facts give strong evidence that the New Testament, like the Old Testament, is very reliable, especially because those who wrote the New Testament were eyewitnesses in many cases to what they wrote about, or personally knew the eyewitnesses. Chapter 7 documented that the New Testament was written too early to have been based on legend or myth. It was also not forged by scribes under Constantine's authority in the fourth century, since we have many partial copies that date to long before that time. These partial copies even teach that Jesus was divine. Indeed, archaeological evidence like the Shroud of Turin supports the truth of the New Testament, as well. The evidence for that shroud is given in Chapter 11.^{12 13}

What Bible version is the best?

Next, textual criticism is addressed. It is the study of ancient biblical manuscripts, text-types, and variants. This science is used to determine what Bible versions are the best. This is done because many arguments in this book depend upon what translation/s are used for a given verse or set of verses. For instance, if only the King James Version were used, some of my arguments would not be possible. Indeed, some people actually claim that the KJV is the only unpolluted Bible, and they call modern translations "New Age Bible versions." But the facts show that the KJV is not the best Bible version. All the respected translations, including the KJV, have some errors.¹⁴ Although some verses in the KJV give the best reading, some verses in modern versions are the best.

The KJV was translated in 1611, and, in many instances, it is hard to read and understand. Also, many of its readings compared side by side with newer readings are clearly inferior. Although scholars agree that the Masoretic Text is the best Old Testament text, they are somewhat divided over what New Testament text should be used. The English translation of the New Testament in the KJV comes from Erasmus's Greek New Testament. This Greek version was published in 1516 and then became the most popular Greek text until the late nineteenth century.¹⁵ This text, which both Luther and Calvin used to make their English translations, is called in Latin the *Textus Receptus*. The standard before it was the Latin Vulgate.

However, the *Textus Receptus* was compiled from only five or six Greek manuscripts, which were of the Byzantine text-type. Indeed, it was not until 1881 that Westcott and Hort's Greek New Testament superseded it.^{16 17} However, most modern Bible translations, such as the NASB and the NIV, are translated from editions of the Nestle Aland Greek New Testament and the United Bible Societies Greek New Testament. These two Greek critical texts used all 5,664 available Greek manuscripts, relying primarily upon the Alexandrian text-type.¹⁸

To know what translations are best, one must understand some basic principles of textual criticism. There are four New Testament manuscript text-types: Western, Alexandrian, Caesarian, and Byzantine. The Western text-type was widespread in Italy, North Africa, Gaul, and Egypt (among other places). It is characterized by how it often paraphrases, harmonizes, and expands upon the original. In fact, in some places it shows evidence of doctrinal tampering. The Alexandrian is characterized by its refinement of the *Original Text* through omissions of repetitious words and phrases. These two text-types, the Western and Alexandrian, are the

earliest text-types to emerge from the *Original Text*. The Caesarian text-type is a combination of Western and Alexandrian readings. It was written where both of these text-types were available, such as Caesarea. The Byzantine text-type is the latest text-type to develop. As would be expected for a later text-type, it has more developed grammar, style, and elegance. It is also characteristic of Byzantine readings to fuse two or more different readings into a single one and also to harmonize different accounts.¹⁹ As early as the time of Origen (ca A.D. 185-ca 253), a mixed text-type had been introduced, which was mainly Alexandrian.²⁰

The latest editions of the Nestle Aland and United Bible Society's Greek New Testaments are based upon careful and comprehensive analyses of different text-types and thousands of manuscripts. These are the standard critical texts used by most Bible scholars. But they are not yet finished. More work needs to be done to fully restore the New Testament. It is true that more thorough textual studies have been done since those performed by Westcott and Hort and that those newer studies show some Byzantine readings are superior to Alexandrian readings. However, although some Alexandrian readings are inferior to Byzantine readings, in most cases they are clearly the best.²¹

It must also be understood that the *Byzantine Text* is very similar to what is called the *Majority Text*. The *Majority Text* is supported by the majority of Greek manuscripts. This is significant because most scholars believe that the New Testament was originally written in Greek. KJV only advocates claim that since the *Byzantine Text* is supported by the majority of Greek manuscripts, it must be most like the *Original Text*. But some facts need to be understood to see why that is not true.

First off, the *Byzantine Text* was not the majority among Greek manuscripts until the ninth century. Before that, the *Alexandrian Text* was the majority among Greek manuscripts. The Alexandrian readings are also the majority among Latin manuscripts, which are almost twice as numerous as Greek manuscripts.²² The Byzantine reading was not even a text-type until the fourth century. In fact, none of the manuscripts of the epistles of Paul from before the ninth century are of the *Majority Text* type.²³ The *Byzantine Text* even becomes more and more like the Alexandrian the further you go back in time.

The Byzantine reading became the majority among Greek manuscripts because Latin took the place of Greek as the dominant language in the West during the fourth century, while Greek remained the dominant language in only one area—the area around Constantinople (Byzantium), where the Eastern Church had its authority. Thus Greek Byzantine readings multiplied, while other text-types were being written in other languages (e.g., Latin). In time, the Byzantine text-type became the majority among the Greek manuscripts because of this. Another reason the Byzantine reading became the dominant Greek text-type is because Muslims conquered lands such as Palestine and northern Africa and caused the copying of Greek New Testament manuscripts in those regions to greatly diminish.²⁴

It is true that the New Testament quotes of the Church Fathers in later manuscripts often give Byzantine readings; nevertheless, almost always that reading is contradicted by an Alexandrian reading in an earlier copy of the same document. Most of these later readings were due to scribal changes to the original quote to make it conform to the standard Bible text of the time. Indeed, modern comparison of the quotes of the Church Fathers continues to support the Alexandrian readings over the Byzantine.²⁵ In a similar manner, the latest research into New Testament manuscripts also indicates that most of the Alexandrian readings are superior to the Byzantine.²⁶

Now, to determine the best Bible text, textual critics use two types of evidence: internal evidence (the study of variants in light of scribal characteristics) and external evidence (date of

manuscript, geographic source, etc.). When the earliest reliable manuscripts disagree, internal evidence helps to determine the original. Internal evidence shows that the *Byzantine Text* is a later text and that the Alexandrian is usually superior to it.²⁷

Because of these facts, many new versions rely primarily upon the earlier manuscripts, which are usually of the Alexandrian text-type. Nonetheless, before about A.D. 200, many of the Church Fathers (Justin, Tatian, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Hippolytus) primarily quoted the New Testament using the Western text-type, which suggests that the Western and Alexandrian readings are about equally ancient. The Alexandrian text-type is primarily from Egypt, while the Western text-type is from a wider geographic area. Moreover, although he is from the region where we get the original Alexandrian readings, Clement of Alexandria quoted the New Testament using a primarily Western reading.²⁸

It is true that some have suggested that the Alexandrian reading is an aberrant text-type preserved just because of the dry climate of Egypt. But the Syriac and Latin versions, which circulated in Syria and Italy, also support the Alexandrian reading.²⁹ The reason new Bible versions do not use the Western text-type is because it is more corrupt than both the Byzantine and the Alexandrian. Still, the *Western Text* is a Greek translation from the original Aramaic that was later revised into the Alexandrian text-type, and later on, into the Byzantine. Thus the *Western Text* contains the most Semitisms.³⁰ Westcott and Hort agree that the Western text-type was the earliest, not the Alexandrian. They point out though that the manuscripts from before A.D. 400 are mostly Alexandrian.³¹

About 4,500 of the approximately 5,600 Greek manuscripts are of the Byzantine text-type. Thus the *Majority Text* supports the Byzantine text-type the most. The translations most like the *Majority Text* are the KJV and the NKJV. However, some Church Fathers pointed out variants that were in the minority in their day that are in the majority today, and vice versa. The majority of manuscripts are thus not always the best. The significant variants though between the *Majority Text* and the *Alexandrian Text* are few (less than 0.1 percent). Thus most of the variants do not affect meaning.³²

It is clear then that, if restored through the analysis of ancient biblical manuscripts, the Bible is true. It is supported by science, history, and archaeology. We should believe what it says. It is God's word. In time, science, history, and linguistics will allow us to reconstruct even more perfectly what it originally said.

Reliability of the Koran

Is there textual evidence that the Koran is true to the original just as the Bible is? Is it true to what the prophet Muhammad recited? Previous chapters have already shown that Muhammad was a true prophet of God and that the Koran foretells the coming of Bahá'u'lláh's forerunner. This section shows that the Koran is still inerrant. Most Christians do not know that the Koran has been preserved very well. Nor do they understand that Islamic history shows that scribes immediately wrote down what the prophet Muhammad recited, and that during his lifetime many of his earliest followers memorized long parts of the Koran, and in some cases, even the entire book. The reason we know it is possible to memorize the entire Koran is because there are people today who have done so. The prophet Muhammad himself recited the entire Koran twice not long before his death, and both times scribes recorded it. He died in A.D. 632.

In time, people in many regions had preserved the Koran through memorization and writing. Muhammad's successor, Abu Bakr, and the prophet Muhammad's personal scribe, Zayd Ibn

Thabit, oversaw the Muslim commission that compiled the first authorized Koran in A.D. 633/634. The commission analyzed the many written manuscripts and fragments (finding amazing agreement between them), and it was then able to compile the original text with complete certainty. Only those readings that could be confirmed by two or more witnesses to have been recorded in the presence of the prophet during his recitations were used. This version was both in agreement with the Koran as it was memorized and was given unanimous approval by the companions of the prophet.³³

In A.D. 645, the third caliph of Islam, Caliph Uthman, with the assistance of many of the companions of the prophet, used this original version to make further authorized copies, which were then sent to each of the Islamic provinces. Not only that, to prevent future contradictory versions, he caused all other copies that could be found to be burned. This is because variant readings had arisen because non-Arabs who did not have adequate knowledge of Arabic had made their own copies. Uthman knew that these minor variants would multiply over the centuries and eventually foster grievous textual errors.³⁴

If Uthman had changed the Koran during this process, his enemies who were also Muslim surely would have protested. Thus the copies he made were inerrant.³⁵ It is true that Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud, one of the companions of the prophet Muhammad, at first refused to hand over his copy.³⁶ But he did not believe that Uthman's copies were corrupt. He probably had just grown very attached to his personal copy because he had written many personal notes in its margins.

Early Muslim sources prove that these facts about the compilation of the Koran are correct. This is just a quick overview. More information though can easily be found on the Internet (see the footnotes for this section). Arguments that the ancient *Hadith* sources used to document these facts were forged in the eighth or ninth century have been shown to be false. (The *Hadith* are the traditional accounts of Muhammad's words and deeds.) It is unfortunate that Christian scholars usually have a strong bias in their analysis of the Koran. The truth is that great harmony will be generated once people begin to understand the holiness of both the Bible and the Koran. Muslim extremism will cease, and the road to world peace will be well-established. This does not mean though that we must obey all of the laws in the Koran. A new age has begun. Thus Bahá'u'lláh has given new laws that are appropriate for it.

The truth is that the modern Koran agrees with the original text. Two original Uthman versions even still exist—one in Tashkent, Uzbekistan and another at the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul. The Koran read by Muslims today is thus in perfect agreement with this most ancient version. Many other ancient copies of the Koran from all time periods in early Muslim history are also preserved, each essentially agreeing with all of the others. This was confirmed by a study of over 42,000 ancient copies and portions of copies over a period of about fifty years. The errors though were insignificant.

Muhammad was well-known among non-Muslims for his integrity, had no education, could neither read nor write, and did not recite poetry. This proves that the Koran was not written by him. It contains no contradictions and all the evidence suggests Muhammad was sincere in his deliverance of the book. This suggests a supernatural source. The Koran even has no resemblance to his normal way of speaking. In fact, Muhammad even turned down an offer of riches and kingship if he would stop reciting. He chose instead a life of poverty, persecution, and danger. Moreover, when the Koran was first recorded, because it was unrivaled and the most brilliant Arabic writing ever seen, literature contests previously held in Mecca were halted because it was clear that no man-made work could ever be its equal.³⁷

Having just established the accuracy of the Koran, the next chapter gives information that

establishes further that Muhammad was a true prophet. This will include more documentation that the Koran is true scripture. This helps to show that God is fair. He thus did not start true religions just among the Israelites. This supports the rational, unifying, and inspired Bahá'í doctrine that all of the major religions were started by prophets of God. Indeed, the Koran helps to show that we should turn to Bahá'u'lláh to attain world peace.

Conclusion

The Bible is shown to have been accurately preserved. This book has shown that the most important Old Testament stories are confirmed by science. Chapter 7 documented that the New Testament was written far too early to have been based on legends. The idea that Constantine had the concept that Jesus is divine forged into the New Testament is disproven by the fact that manuscripts that date to long before Constantine mention that Jesus is divine. The King James Version is clearly not the best Bible. There are many good modern translations. The Koran is shown to also have been accurately preserved. Thus we should look to the Bible and the Koran for authoritative spiritual truth.

¹ Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, 80-82

² *Against Apion* 1.8.158

³ McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 34-38, 69-77

⁴ *Ibid.*, 34, 38

⁵ *Ibid.*, 71-77, 82-87

⁶ Vanderkam and Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 92

⁷ Jonathan Morrow, *Welcome to College: A Christ-Follower's Guide for the Journey* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), 85.

⁸ McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 70, 78-79

⁹ Rose Publishing, *Rose Book of Bible Charts*, vol. 2 (Torrance: Rose Publishing, Inc., 2008), 35.

¹⁰ Jeffrey, *The Signature of God*, 14-15

¹¹ James D. Price, *King James Onlyism: A New Sect* (James D. Price Publisher, 2006), 396-399.

¹² McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 38-54, 61-68

¹³ Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, 82-85, 87-90, 96-98

¹⁴ Price, *King James Onlyism*

¹⁵ James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1995), 223-238.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 44-45, 53, 56, 60, 69

¹⁷ Philip Wesley Comfort, et al., *The Origin of the Bible* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), 282-283.

¹⁸ Wesley Ringer, "History of the Bible: How the Bible Came to Us," God And Science.org, Retrieved from: <http://www.godandscience.org/apologetics/bibleorigin.html> 25 January 2004

¹⁹ Arthur Ferch, "Which Version Can We Trust?" Biblical Research Institute, July 30, 1998, (2008), Retrieved from: <http://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/documents/Which%20Version%20Can%20We%20Trust.htm> 25 July 2008

²⁰ Paul D. Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods, and Results* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 196.

²¹ Jim Snapp II, "The Development of the New Testament Text" (Lessons 1-4), Retrieved from: <http://www.waynecoc.org/TextHistory.html> 1 February 2004

²² Daniel B. Wallace, "Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism," *Grace Theological Journal*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1992, pp. 21-50.

²³ Roy E. Beacham and Kevin T. Bauder, (Editors), *One Bible Only? Examining Exclusive Claims for the King James Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001), 106.

²⁴ White, *The King James Only Controversy*, 43, 152

²⁵ Daniel B. Wallace, Th.M., Ph.D., "The Majority Text and the Original Text: Are They Identical?" Bible.org, Retrieved from: http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=677 25 July 2008

²⁶ Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible*, 244

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- ³² Ken Graham, II, "Which Bible Translation Should I Use?" United Church of God, (2001), Retrieved from: <http://www.ucg.org/reprints/pdf/WhichBible.pdf> 21 June 2010
- ³³ Rein Fernhout, *Canonical Texts. Bearers of Absolute Authority. Bible, Koran, Veda, Tipitaka* (Kenilworth: Rodopi, 1994), 61-64.
- ³⁴ Abdullah Saeed, *The Qur'an: an Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 43.
- ³⁵ Nicolas Aghnides, *Islamic Theories of Finance* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2005), 33.
- ³⁶ Gabriel Sawma, *The Qur'an Misinterpreted, Mistranslated, and Misread: The Aramaic Language of the Qur'an* (Plainsboro: GMS, 2006), 84.
- ³⁷ Ibn Yasin (Editor), *The Authenticity of the Qur'an*, The Institute of Islamic Information and Education, Retrieved from: <http://www.iiie.net/node/46> 13 December 2008