

# Manuscript Evidence

## Bible is unique in its survival:

There is more manuscript evidence for the Bible than any ten pieces of classic literature combined. The historical reliability of the Bible should be tested by the same criteria that ALL historical documents are tested.

- 1) Number of early manuscripts
- 2) Date of the manuscripts
- 3) Proportion of variant readings

### 1. Number of manuscripts

1. Greek: 5686 manuscripts. New Testament preserved in partial or complete manuscript
2. Latin Vulgate: 10,000 manuscripts
3. Other Early Versions 9300 manuscripts
4. Total: **25,000** manuscript copies of portions of the NT. No other document of antiquity even begins to approach such numbers as the NT manuscripts
5. Even with no originals, there are abundant manuscript copies to make it possible to reconstruct the original with virtual complete accuracy.

### 2. Dating of Manuscripts:

1. New Testament written during the period 40-125 AD. The earliest copy is dated 125 AD, which is a span of 25 years in some cases between the original and earliest copy.
2. Sophocles: 7 plays written nearly 1400 years after his death.
3. Homer's Iliad: originally written in 900BC and the earliest copy dated 400 BC, which is a span of 500 years. There are 643 copies in existence. The Iliad ranks #2 in dating of manuscripts.

### 3. Variant Readings:

Compare all available manuscripts to be able to reconstruct the original

**NT:** 20,000 lines, 40 lines in question. Variant Error: .05 (1/2 of 1%)

**Iliad:** 15,600 lines, 764 lines in question. Variant Error: 5%

The Iliad has 10 times more variants than the NT and is a document ¼ length of the Bible.

Variants: 1/8 of the .05% is due to stylistic differences or misspellings.

mms 1: Jesus Christ is the Savior of the whole worl.

mms 2: Christ Jesus is the Savior of the whole world.

mms3: Jesus Christ s the Savior of the whold world.

Considering all the variants, only 50 have any real significance and not one essential point of doctrine rests upon a disputed reading.

## I. Accuracy of manuscripts supported by Early Church Fathers

Someone once asked Sir David Dalrymple: "Suppose the New Testament was destroyed and every copy lost by the end of the 3rd C, could it have been collected together again from the writings of the Fathers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>

Centuries?" Sparked by his curiosity and after a great deal of investigation, he found the entire NT except for 11verses in the works of the Fathers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries.

## II. Writers used primary sources:

The writers of the NT wrote as eyewitnesses or from firsthand information. The books of the NT make claims such as: Luke 1:1-3, 2Pet 1:16, 1Jn1:3, Acts 2:22, Jn 19:35, Luke 3:1, Acts 26:24-26 **We are witnesses to these things.** It is not easy to invent words and deeds of Jesus when so many disciples were about who could remember what had or had not happened. (FF Bruce) Plenty of people would have jumped at the opportunity to expose inaccuracies.

### III. External Evidence:

#### A. Non Christian Confirmation:

1. **Tacitus.** The first-century Roman is considered one of the more accurate historians of the ancient world. In his account of the great fire of Rome, he refers to Christians. "Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hand of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus..."
2. **Pliny the Younger** He was a Roman author and administrator who describes the early Christian worship practices. "They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to do any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up..."

#### Evidence from Archeology

- 1) Nelson Glueck (Jewish archeologist) No archeological discovery has ever controverted (deny the truth of) a biblical reference.
- 2) 1947 discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Isaiah scroll was dated 100 BC and is identical to the modern Hebrew Bible in over 95% accuracy. The 5% is attributed to spellings and obvious slips of the pen. Before this discovery, the earliest manuscripts were the Masoretic Text, which dates to 900AD. So the Dead Sea Scrolls moved the evidence back 1000 years without any appreciable change.
- 3) Prior to 1906, many claimed that the Hittite Empire referenced in the Bible was fabricated and inserted in the Bible because there was no physical evidence of it. In 1906, archaeologists unearthed the Hittite Capitol.