

What Do the Biblical Manuscripts Mean?

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12.24.2021

What do the Biblical manuscripts mean to us today? What do they have to do with the development and presence of the Old and New Testament books we have today? They have a lot to do with those books for it is these manuscripts, which prove the validity of the actual books of the Bible. How is this so? Take for example of Shakespeare who wrote so much and in play form. The basis of knowing that he wrote them is based that they existed in the past and today. However, more than that, what if someone uses a pseudo name today and makes up these plays and says these brand-new manuscripts and gives better understanding into the past of what Shakespeare really wrote. He gets all the royalties as he or she is able to copyright them and get selling rights and become wealthy, whether they existed or not. Someone though finds old manuscripts of Shakespeare going back to the late 1600's. Shakespeare lived from 1564-1616 and was born and lived in the same place his whole life. The same person finds also some manuscripts dated from the 1700's and 1800's and early 1900's, which are essentially with all of the same contents. It is also virtually the same content of the of the man with the pseudo name. That is all the manuscripts were essentially the same. It is the finding and reliability of the manuscripts which addressed the truth of the manuscripts. The same is true of the Bible and its manuscripts. It is their presence of, which affirms their truth of existence and truth of content.

1. Have the Old Testament Manuscripts Been Transmitted Reliably?

a. Oral Transmissions in Ancient Near East Cultures

1) There is adequate evidence about the power and validity of oral memory and the capacity of orators in the biblical era to transmit oral material accurately establishes a trustworthy foundation upon which the biblical text was built.

b. The Bible as Text (taken from William Schniedewind, professor of Biblical studies at UCLA).

1) 'To be fair, the Bible- that is, the collection of canonized books of the Bible as we have come to know them- was produced between the

1) Jesus' View of the Old Testament

a) Matthew 9.3-9. A discussion between some Pharisees and Jesus on divorce. It is evident from the ways in which the encounters are recorded that both Jesus and his opponents knew and relied upon the scriptures as determinative in disputes. Both the Pharisees and Jesus assume the question they are discussing is to be answered from the scriptures. This is something so obvious no one raises a question about it. The books appealed to are the Torah (first five books of the Bible) and both sides accept the authority of all these books.

b) New Testament Authors' View of the OT

1)) NT writings recognized the inspired nature and authority of the OT Law and Prophets (Mark 12.19; Luke 2.22, 20.28; John 1.17, 21; 8.5; 9.29; Acts 3.22; 6.14; 13.39; 15.1,21; 26.22; 28,23; Romans 10.5; 1 Corinthians 9.9; 2 Corinthians 3.15; Hebrew 9.19; Revelation 15.3)

2)) The Christians believe that the whole story of God's plans and purposes for Israel developed in the OT Scriptures had reached its complete in the life and work of Jesus

3)) For these reasons it can reasonably concluded that Jesus, the NT authors, and the early Christian church viewed the OT as inspired by God, originally written by or spoken through the prophets, and accurately transmitted through the generations to the time of Jesus Christ himself.

e. Is the Old Testament Authoritative?

1) The text of the Hebrew Bible was copied with a high degree of accuracy from the time of the first century after Christ till today.

2) The identifiable variants between the primary textual traditions have no significance to the core theological truths and historical accuracy contained within each text.

3) The content of the textual witnesses of the Hebrew Bible correlates to the periods of antiquity in which they were supposedly written.

- 2) Visualizing the Number of Biblical Manuscripts. See pages 52,53,54, 56
- 3) No one questions the authenticity of the historical books of antiquity because we do not possess the original copies. Yet we have far fewer manuscripts of these works than we possess of the NT.
- 4) If we have doubts about what the autographic NT said, those doubts would have to multiplied a hundredfold for the average classical author. Wallace
- 5) Some caution when comparing surviving Biblical and Classical Manuscripts, see the bottom of page 56.
- 6) The key point is that 99 plus percent of the Biblical manuscripts are consistent with each other and the differences are minor. For example, most are scribal differences, eg 'I ated an apple.' When we know that it should be 'I ate an apple.' We know what the former means and that does not change the theological meaning. The more manuscripts we have the more assurance we have of the truth of the manuscripts and thus the Bible.
- 7) Elimination of scribal errors and intentional changes leaves only a small percentage of text about which any question occurs. It must be said that the amount of time between the original composition and the next surviving manuscript is far less for the New Testament than for any other work in the Greek literature. Although there are certainly differences in many of the New Testament manuscripts, not one fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading.
- f. Early Citations of the New Testament by the Church Fathers- Quotations of the early church fathers..they play an important role of reconstructing the NT text in that they give us insight into what text types were available and in use when they wrote.
- g. The New Testament Writers were Eyewitnesses to Events They Describe: Luke 1.1-3, 2 Peter 1.16, 1 John 1.3, Acts 2.22, John 19.35, Luke 3.1, Acts 26.24-26

remain. There are no exact numbers because not all the manuscripts have been carefully catalogued." (Wallace, correspondence to J. McDowell and M. J. Tingblad, June 3, 2016)

E. The New and Old Testament Manuscript Attestations

Influential biblical scholar F. F. Bruce writes: "There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament" (Bruce, BR, 178)

In the chart "Number of Biblical Manuscripts," the second and third columns compare

both "old" and "new" dates determined for the earliest manuscript in each language. The two columns at the far right compare the "old" and "new" number of manuscripts estimated to be catalogued for that language. For each language, the data labeled "old" was tabulated in 2012. The columns labeled "new" show the data for each language as of August, 2014 — with the exception of the new number of Greek manuscripts which reflects the official number as of January 2017.

This comparison reveals the change, if any, in dating and numbers of manuscripts that have occurred in that two-year interval.

NUMBER OF BIBLICAL MANUSCRIPTS

Language*	Earliest MS (old)	Earliest MS (new)	Number of MSS (old)	Number of MSS (new)
Armenian	AD 887	AD 862	2000+	2000+
Coptic	Late 3rd c. AD	Late 3rd c. AD	Around 975	Around 975
Gothic	5th or 6th c. AD	5th or 6th c. AD	6	6
Ethiopian	10th c. AD	6th c. AD	600+	600+
Total Latin Translations	N/A	N/A		
Old Latin	4th c. AD	4th c. AD	50	110
Vulgate	4th c. AD	4th c. AD	10,000+	10,000+
Syriac	5th c. AD	Late 4th or Early 5th c. AD	350+	350+
Georgian	Late 9th c. AD	5th c. AD	43+	89
Slavic	10th c. AD	10th c. AD	4,000+	4,000+
Total Non-Greek manuscripts				18,130+
Greek	AD 130 (or earlier)	AD 130 (or earlier)	5838	5,856
TOTAL GREEK AND NON-GREEK MANUSCRIPTS				23,986
Biblical Manuscripts, Scrolls, and Translations				
New Testament Greek Manuscripts				5,856
New Testament Early Translations				18,130
Old Testament Scrolls, Codices				42,300**
TOTAL BIBLICAL MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCES				66,286

Chart adapted from Cowe, AVNT, 256

* Many of these languages are not catalogued regularly.

** 25,000 are relatively recent, dated to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

SUMMARY CHART OF SELECTED SURVIVING MSS OF MAJOR CLASSICAL WORKS

Work	Earliest MS (old)	Earliest MS (new)	Number of MSS (old)	Number of MSS (new)
Homer's Iliad	About 400 BC	About 415 BC	1,800+	1,900+
Herodotus—History	1st c. AD	150–50 BC	109	About 106
Sophocles' Plays	3rd c. BC	3rd c. BC	193	About 226
Plato's Tetralogies	AD 895	3rd c. BC	210	238
Caesar's Gallic Wars	9th c. AD	9th c. AD	251	251
Livy's History of Rome	Early 5th c. AD	4th c. AD	150	About 473
Tacitus's Annals	1st half: AD 850 2nd half: AD 1050	1st half: AD 850 2nd half: AD 1050	33	36
Pliny the Elder's Natural History	One 5th c. AD fragment. Others in 14th and 15th c.	5th c. AD	200	200+
Thucydides' History	3rd c. BC	3rd c. BC	96	188
Demosthenes' Speeches	Fragments from 1st c. BC	1st c. BC, possibly earlier	340	444
TOTAL				4,062+

1. A Caution When Comparing Surviving Biblical and Classical Manuscripts

One needs to be careful in comparing the survival and dating of an abundance of biblical manuscripts with classical works. Yes, we believe that God has superintended the preservation of such an abundance of biblical manuscripts. But, there are good historical reasons for the paucity of classical manuscripts. Carroll comments on the importance of caution here, lest we draw the wrong conclusions:

It is implied that an unspoken reason for the preservation of manuscripts is supernatural overagainst the loss of non-inspired works, but it is a bit more involved. Most classical works were in a region that could promise preservation on papyrus and were then recopied in Egypt and disseminated (not like the Christian monastic system).

These texts were systematically copied and studied at the library in Alexandria which burned partially in the first century BC, and then the texts were also systematically destroyed by Christians in the fourth century and Muslims in the seventh and eighth centuries. Christians are in part to blame for destroying around a million classical scrolls, and the fact that any classical texts survive in large numbers is remarkable. Centuries later, we often use the dearth of evidence [for classical works] to show the superior preservation of the Bible.

Early classical works were written primarily on papyrus, a highly perishable medium, as was the scroll format. Christians quickly transitioned to the codex [book format] and to parchment and vellum, which were much more durable and suitable for the codex and thus, these factors hastened the decline of classical works.

We also keep in mind that classical works were copied, only if by chance, by monks after the