

THE NATURE OF THE BIBLE (Part Two): Unique in its Formation and Preservation.

READ Isaiah 61:1

In Luke 4:17, we read of Yeshua when He came to Nazareth, and as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read: *And He was handed the book (biblion) of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book (biblion), He found the place where it was written: The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me...*

And with this quote from Isaiah 61, Yeshua began His rather provocative drash. He goes on to say "this day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." Filled with rage, those in attendance led Him to the edge of the city, and attempted to toss Him off the cliff.

Our English word **BIBLE** comes from the Greek term *biblion*, which literally means a "roll" or "book." Notice that Luke uses *biblion* specifically in reference to *the scroll of Isaiah*. Every time we say "Bible," what we are recalling... is that the **original transmission technology** of the Scriptures was the ancient scroll. Fortunately, Johannes Gutenberg invented movable type in the 15th century, and ushered in the "Age of the Printed Book." Otherwise...

The English word **SCRIPTURE** is a translation of the Greek word *graphei* (f,n), and literally means "writings." It is used of both secular writings and sacred writings. There is nothing special about the word in and of itself. We derive our English word GRAPHIC from this Greek word. However, in the Bible this term is used *particularly* of books regarded as sacred; *books considered to be inspired by God.*

Romans 3:4 *God forbid: (May it never be!) Yes, let God be found true, but every man a liar. As it is written, That you might be justified in your words, And might prevail when you come into judgment.*

When Paul says: *As it is written* and then quotes from Psalm 51:4, he is using the term *grapho* (v) specifically of the OT. Okay... *let's see why this is very important.*

II Peter 3:15-16 *Regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; even as our beloved brother Sha'ul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote to you; as also in all of his letters (grapho), speaking in them of these things. In those are some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unsettled twist, as they also do to the other Scriptures (graphei), to their own destruction.*

Here, the very same word, *graphei* or "Scripture," which is used of the OT, *is also used of Paul's writings.* What we should carefully note here is that Peter, who had a dispute with Paul in Galatians 2, in the course of time began to realize that the writings of Paul were Scripture. The very fact that he used the same term that the Jews used to refer to the OT, shows us that Peter considered the writings of Paul of equal inspiration as the OT itself.

Here we begin to see the answer to John's question. READ: II Timothy 3:16, II Peter 1:20
What is ALL Scripture? It seems to me that the answer has two parts:

1) **The Canon** (Hebrew *ganah*, Greek *Kanon*, reed, standard), the officially accepted list of books. It's important to keep in mind that the early church did NOT create the canon (despite what the Discovery channel says) or the books included in what we call Scripture. Instead, the church recognized the books that were INSPIRED by the Holy Spirit from their inception. *The primary test of the New Testament Canon, was apostolic authority and approval.*

Remember, the OT Canon was determined long before Yeshua was born, and the Only begotten of the Father, The Word made flesh, put His stamp of imprimatur on the OT Scripture repeatedly during His ministry on earth (Mat 23:35; Luke 24:44). Not only did He validate the OT, He pre-authorized the NT!

The Kehilat was 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets' (Eph 2:20) whom Messiah had promised to 'guide into all truth' (John 16:13) and 'bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you' (John 14:26) by the *Ruach HaKodesh*. The church at Jerusalem was said to have continued in the 'apostles' teaching and fellowship (Acts 2:42).

Judah, Yeshua's own half-brother wrote (67-68 AD) to the Messianic Jews and exhorted them to 'contend earnestly for the faith' and in Greek it has the definite article; it is THE faith, emphasizing the (past tense) body of apostolic teaching which was '*once for all (hapax) delivered unto the saints.*'

That word is hapax, meaning a one time teaching of perpetual validity that never needs repeating. Just a few years earlier Peter (II Peter 2:1) prophesied that false teachers were on the way. Now Jude (who started out to write a letter concerning the doctrine of salvation), *was constrained by the Holy Spirit to alert the Messianic Jews that the tares had sprouted!* The false teachers Peter warned about, had snuck in the back door of the congregation and were already perverting the once-and-for-all truth.

2) **Preservation of The Canon** and its transmission down through the ages. How do we know that the Canon of Scripture, which I believe was settled long ago... before the death of the last Apostle... has gotten to us intact? *That is what we'll deal with here this morning.*

THE BIBLE IS UNIQUE in a variety of ways (see study 030), but our focus today is the Bible's uniqueness in regards to its **Formation**, and its **Preservation**. *What do we mean by uniqueness?*

In English, the word UNIQUE is the paradigmatic (serves as a pattern or model) absolute term. **If you want to upset a grammarian**, say that something is *very unique* or *more unique* than something else. *You can't do that, it violates the definition of the word.* **So if I say, "the Bible is unique" that's a powerful statement.** Because, the definition of UNIQUE is: Being THE only one of its kind; without an Equal or Equivalent; Unparalleled. **And that is what this book is!**

Sir M. Monier-Williams, (founder Oxford's Indian Institute) Boden professor of **Sanskrit** (*the liturgical language of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism*), spent 42 years studying Eastern books and said in comparing them with the Bible: "*Pile them, if you will, on the left side of your study table; but place your own Holy Bible on the right side - all by itself, all alone - and with a wide gap between them. For, ...there is a gulf between it (the Bible) and the so-called sacred books of the East which severs the one from the other utterly, hopelessly, and forever... a veritable gulf which cannot be bridged over by any science of religious thought.*"

UNIQUE IN ITS FORMATION: There exists an *amazing diversity* in the unity of this book.

The 66 books of the Bible were written by 40 different authors, over 40 generations, over a 1,600 year time span. In spite of this, not one section contradicts another. The Scriptures were written in three different languages: *Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic*. The majority of Scripture was written in the Land of Israel. However, other sections were written in *Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and Arabia*.

These 40 authors of the Scripture came from all walks of life: Prophets, Priests, and Kings. *Poets,*

Peasants, and Philosophers. Soldiers, Statesmen, and Scribal Scholars. Shepherds, Fishermen, and a Medical Doctor. A despised Tax Collector, and even a tent-making Rabbi.

Under the inspiration of the Ruach HaKodesh the authors were driven to record revelation at different times and in different places. Moses in the wilderness. Jeremiah in a dank dark dungeon. Daniel in a pagan palace. Paul while locked inside prison walls. Luke while traveling the open road. David in times of war, and Solomon in times of peace. John on the isle of Patmos.

They wrote during different moods: Some writing from the heights of joy, and others writing from the depths of sorrow and despair.

They wrote in a diversity of literary forms, including: history, law (civil, criminal, ethical, ritual, sanitary), biographies, poetry, proverbs, drama, sermons, personal letters or epistles, and psalms. And that's not to mention the **distinctively** Biblical literary types of: *prophecy and the apocalyptic.*

Despite all of this tremendous diversity, there exists a perfect harmony among the Bible's component parts. *This would be impossible with any other subject or book.* (edv 17)

The Bible uniqueness does not prove that it is the Word of God. Socrates - *"The unexamined life is not worth living."* Wise words from an **Athenian Greek philosopher** who lived (470-399 BC) at the same time as the **Jewish prophet Mal'akhi.** However, this undeniable uniqueness should provoke any intellectually honest seeker to seriously examine the claims of the Bible.

PRESERVATION: Another unique thing about the Bible, is that God has *preserved* this book.

It has come down to us in an **unaltered state.** And despite numerous attempts, it has proven to be indestructible. SO... *how do we know we have the original Scriptures?*

I Peter 1:24-25

*For, All flesh is like grass, And all of man's glory like the flower in the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls; **But the word of the Lord endures forever. This is the word of good news which was preached to you.***

Military Historian C. Sanders explains the three basic principles of *historiography* (methodology of scholarly historical research based on critical analysis). **1) Bibliographical Test, 2) Internal Evidence Test 3) External Evidence Test.** (edv 39) **The Bible passes all three tests with flying colors!**

1) The Bibliographical Test *is an examination of the textual transmission by which documents reach us. In other words, since we do **not** have the original documents, how reliable are the copies we have in regard to the number of manuscripts (MSS) and the time interval between the original and extant copy?* **JWM ==>**

Let's discuss the OT first. Critics once doubted the unaltered state of the OT, because the oldest complete copy of the **Masoretic Text in one manuscript (Aleppo Codex) dates from A.D. 900.**

The key event that forever silenced these naysayers, of course, was *the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947.* Archeological excavation at the Qumran caves has yielded fragmentary evidence of every book of the OT, *except for The Book of Esther.* **Scripture contained within the Dead Sea Scrolls dates from the first century B.C.** *When these two texts separated by an approximate 1,000 years were exhaustively compared, what was revealed?* There was virtually no variation, and absolutely no change of meaning.

And then we have the SEPTUAGINT or LXX. In about 277 B.C., King Ptolemy Philadelphia of Egypt, who was a patron of the arts, commissioned a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures for the great

library of Alexandria. A delegation was sent to Jerusalem. Eleazar, the *Kohen HaGadol*, selected six elders from each of the twelve tribes to act as translators, and return with the delegation. These 72 Jewish scholars were winned, and dined, but had to prove their wisdom in debate. Satisfied they were up to the challenge, they were sequestered on the island of Pharos. Seventy-two days later... and tada! A gleaming, glorious, Greek translation. It is *very* close to the Masoretic Text we have today, and further testifies to the *reliability of transmission* of the TaNaK throughout some 1,400 years.

In terms of the NT, God has preserved a multitude of Greek texts. The original content of Scripture was determined long ago by *virtue* of these many texts, and thoroughly *vett*ed by brilliant scholars. In fact, scholars are embarrassed by the riches of NT documentary evidence. We have over **24,633** manuscript copies of portions of the NT in existence today. No other document of antiquity even begins to approach such numbers and attestation.

In comparison, the *Iliad* by Homer is second with only **643** manuscripts that still survive. *The first complete preserved text of Homer dates from the 13th century.* The NT has about 20,000 lines of text. *Homer's Iliad has about 15,600 lines.* Only 40 lines (or 400 words) of the NT show variation, whereas 764 lines of the Iliad are questioned. This equates to a **5%** textual corruption for the *Iliad*, as compared to **one-half of one percent** for the NT. From time the *Iliad* was written until the first extant copy, we jump a gap of 500 years. From the time of the NT until the first copy... only 25 years.

Next closest: Sophocles 193 copies, Aristotle 49, Tacitus (*Annals*) 20, Herodotus (*History*) 8, Plato (*Tetralogies*) 7, Pliny the Younger 7, Lucretius 2. *Time gap jumps range 750 minimum to 1,500 years!*

Dr. John Warwick Montgomery says that: "*to be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament.*" (edv 19)

Dr. Bernard Ramm speaks of the accuracy of biblical manuscripts: "*Jews preserved it as no other manuscript has ever been preserved. With their massora (parva, magna, and finalis) they kept tabs on every letter, syllable, word and paragraph. They had special classes of men within their culture whose sole duty was to preserve and transmit these documents with practically perfect fidelity - scribes, lawyers, massorettes. Who ever counted the letters and syllables and words of Plato or Aristotle? Cicero or Seneca?*"

BOTTOM LINE? The Bible, compared with other ancient writings, *has more manuscript evidence than any 10 pieces of classical literature combined.* How's that for a "*miny*an?"

2) The Internal Evidence Test concerns how literary critics follow Aristotle's dictum that "the benefit of the doubt is to be given to the document itself, not arrogated by the critic to himself. Therefore, one must listen to the claims of the document under analysis, and not assume fraud or error unless the author disqualified himself by contradictions or know factual inaccuracies." **JWM ==>**

The thing is this: *the authors of the NT wrote as eyewitnesses or from first-hand information.*

II Peter 1:16

For we did not follow **cunningly devised fables (muthos, myths)**, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, but we were **eyewitnesses** of his majesty.

The Apostle John said "...What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you..." (I John 1:3) At the opening of his Gospel... writing to Theophilus, Luke says (I'm paraphrasing), "*I compiled the eyewitness*

accounts... *investigated everything carefully, and prepared it for you in consecutive order.*" (Luke 1:1-3)

Shimon Rock in Acts 2:22 preaching to the Jews on Shavuot says "*Men of Yisra'el, hear these words! Yeshua of Natzeret, a man approved by God to you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as you yourselves know,*"

Over and over again the Apostles appeal to their hearer's knowledge of the events. In Acts 26, Festus says "*Paul, you are out of your mind!*" Rav Shaul says, *no I'm not*, I utter words of sober truth... "*For the king knows of these things, to whom also I speak freely. For I am persuaded that none of these things is hidden from him, for this has not been done in a corner.*" On the contrary, Paul had Festus in a corner, because he was speaking truth to power.

These documents were widely circulated in the presence of hostile witnesses. *The disciples could not afford to risk inaccuracies, let alone some willful manipulation of the facts.* If that were the case, they would have been exposed at once by those who would have been only too glad to do so.

William Foxwell Albright, who was one of the world's foremost biblical archaeologists, said: "*We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the NT after about A.D. 80, two full generations before the date between 130 and 150 given by the more radical NT critics of today.*"

Albright reiterated this in an interview for Christianity Today (1963): "*In my opinion, every book of the NT was written by a baptized Jew between the forties and the eighties of the first century A.D. (very probably sometime between about A.D. 50 and 75).*"

Dr. John A.T. Robinson's research led to the conviction that the whole of the NT was written BEFORE the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

3) The External Evidence Test has to do with substantiating authenticity. It answers the question: "*Do other historical materials confirm or deny the internal testimony provided by the documents themselves?*" The answer is yes... there is powerful supporting evidence by extra-biblical authors.

There is no more important early Church father than Irenaeus (Bishop of Lyons in Gaul - A.D. 180). **Irenaeus** was brought up at the feet of **Polycarp**, Bishop of Smyrna... **the disciple of John the Apostle!** Polycarp was burned at the stake (70-156 AD)... martyred for his defense of the accuracy of Scripture.

The writings of Irenaeus confirm the canonical recognition of the fourfold Gospel and Acts, of Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus, of I Peter and I John and of the Revelation.

Here is a little of what Irenaeus had to say "*So firm is the ground upon which these Gospels rest, that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them...*" he goes on to say... "*Matthew published his Gospel among the Hebrews (Jews) in their own tongue, when Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel in Rome and founding the church there. After their departure* (i.e. death, which strong tradition places at the time of the Neronian persecution in 64), **Mark**, the disciple and interpreter of *Peter*, himself handed down to us in writing the substance of *Peter's* preaching. **Luke**, the follower of *Paul*, set down in a book the gospel preached by his teacher. Then **John**, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned on His breast (John 13:25 and 21:20), himself produced his Gospel, while he was living at Ephesus in Asia."

Furthermore, we have independent corroboration by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* III.39,

preserves the writings of **Papias**, who was the bishop of Heirapolis (130 AD), who got his information directly from **the Apostle John**.

Then there is the external confirmation by archaeology: A century plus ago the skeptics had a "field day" taking swipes and sneering at the validity of the Bible's assertions. Since then, astounding archaeological discoveries have served up a distasteful dish of crow for these cynics to eat... *and boy they have feasted on the mental anguish experienced when one is forced to admit fallibility.*

OT: Discovery of over 17,000 tablets from the Ebla kingdom dig in northern Syria since 1974, and what they contain has **blown away** the ridiculous so-called "Documentary Hypothesis" (JEDP) theory of the German "higher critics." The Ebla tablets confirm Abraham's victory account over the Mesopotamian kings as recorded in Genesis 14. The Ebla tablets even list the **Five Cities of the Plain** in the same exact order (Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar) that the Bible does. The critics claimed these cities were fanciful legends and the Abraham story was a fictitious fairy tale prior to this discovery!

NT: **Sir William Ramsay**, also regarded as one of the greatest archaeologists ever to have lived, was a student in the German historical school of the mid-19th century. Early in his career, he believed the Book of Acts to be a product of the mid-second century A.D., and did not give it much credence. However, he had to make a topographical map of Asia Minor as part of his archaeological research and was forced to take a look at Luke's writings.

Near the end of his career, after 30 years of study, Ramsay concluded this: "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy... this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians... Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness."

PRESERVATION, throughout history there have been many attempts to destroy the Bible. In AD 303, **Diocletian** issued an edit to have all churches razed to the ground, and all the Scriptures burned. **BOAST:** "The Christian religion is destroyed and the worship of the gods restored." **FACT:** Only 25 years later **Constantine** (G, B, & U) made Christianity the state religion and ordered 50 copies of the Scriptures to be prepared at government expense.

William Tyndale, the 16th century scholar who *for the first time translated directly from the Hebrew and Greek texts to produce the foundational English translation* gave his life for the faith. In 1535, he was arrested, tried for heresy, strangled, and burnt at the stake. **BOAST:** His persecutors *almost* destroyed his translation, and bragged that the Bible would never again appear in English. **FACT:** The majority of Bibles printed in the world today are English Bibles.

Thomas Payne is sometimes called "The Father of the American Revolution" because his pamphlet *Common Sense* published in 1776, greatly influenced our founding fathers to seek independence from Great Britain. *He was however a Deist.* **BOAST:** "When I get through, there will not be five Bibles in America." **FACT:** Many believers today have more than five Bibles in their own personal library.

The French philosopher **Voltaire** died in 1778. He was a key figure during the *European Enlightenment* and his writings influenced many (including Payne). **BOAST:** "Within a century from my time Christianity will cease to exist and pass into history." **FACT:** Fifty years later, the Geneva Bible Society purchased his home and used his printing press to produce and distribute Bibles!

H.L. Hastings summed it up this way:

"Infidels for eighteen hundred years have been refuting and overthrowing this book, and yet it stands today as solid as a rock. Its circulation increases, and it is more loved and cherished and read today than ever before.

Infidels, with all their assaults, make about as much impression on this book as a man with a tack hammer would on the Pyramids of Egypt."