

BIBLIOLOGY (24)

Now the survival of the Bible is amazing, in fact it is miraculous. There are three areas of survival that need to be considered:

(Area #1) - The Bible has survived through Time.

I. The Survival of the Old Testament.

It is very clear that the Israelites preserved and copied the Hebrew Old Testament with great care and great accuracy, which has never been given to any other book. We know, for example, that Moses was one of the O.T. writers (Deut. 31:9). We also know that his writings were still carefully preserved in approximately 621 B.C. (II Kings 22:8).

One of the truly intriguing passages of Scripture which clearly reveals the unique and miraculous survival ability of the O.T. is Jeremiah. In this context, God commanded Jeremiah to write His word on a scroll (36:1-3). Jeremiah called Burach to help him accomplish his task (36:4). When King Johoiakim learned of this writing, he sent Jehudi to get it and read it to him and when he listened to a portion of it, he had the manuscript cut-up and burned (36:21-23). This was a direct attempt to get rid of this portion of God's written word. However, God simply reproduced it (36:27-28). He clearly preserved the O.T. Himself, even when part of it was cut and burned. There can be no denying that there is no other book like this. It truly has survived time, even times when attempts were made to get rid of it.

The preservation of O.T. Hebrew manuscripts is truly an amazing study in which one does see the preservative hand of God. As far as can be determined, the actual, original Hebrew manuscript actually penned by the real author (i.e. Moses), called autograph, is not available. In other words, to any scholar's knowledge, God did not preserve the actual and first manuscript that was written by an O.T. writer such as Isaiah, David, Samuel, etc.. However, just as Jeremiah 36 reveals, God certainly did preserve copies of the original manuscript. In fact, the Hebrew text of the Old Testament is "amply represented by both pre- and post- Christian manuscripts." Because of what God has preserved it is possible to know and believe that the Hebrew manuscripts of God's word are available and reliable.

The first attempt to form a collection of Hebrew manuscripts was done by Benjamin Kennicott from the years AD 1776-1780. Through his work, he compiled and listed 615 O.T. manuscripts. Four years later, Giovanni de Rossi published a list of 731 manuscripts of the O.T. (1784-1788). The two main O.T. manuscript discoveries that God permitted man to find in modern times are: 1) The O.T. Manuscripts of Cairo Geniza (AD 1890ff.); 2) The Dead Sea Scrolls (AD 1947ff.).

In a Cairo synagogue attic storeroom an unbelievable discovery was made of some 200,000 manuscripts and fragments and some 10,000 of them were Hebrew Biblical texts. Of the 200,000 Cairo manuscripts, 100,000 are housed today in Cambridge and the largest organized collection of Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts are housed in Leningrad. There are 1582 texts of the Hebrew O.T. written on parchment, 725 written on paper, plus 1200 O.T. Hebrew fragments.

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There can be no doubt that the most remarkable O.T. Hebrew manuscripts are the "Dead Sea Scrolls." In fact, W.F. Albright said that the Dead Sea Scrolls are "the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times." These manuscripts are dated by scholars as having been copied from the 3rd century B.C. to the 1st century A.D.. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain one complete O.T. book of Isaiah and thousands of fragments, which together represent every O.T. book except Esther.

There can be no doubt that God's providential hand of Sovereignty was involved in the discovery of these scrolls, when an Arab shepherd boy (Muhammad Adh-Dhib) was pursuing a lost goat 7 1/2 miles south of Jericho and 1 mile west of the Dead Sea. He went into a cave and found some jars containing several leather scrolls. It turns out, this was the hide-out of a religious Jewish sect who lived at the time of Jesus Christ called the Essenes. The Essenes took copies of the O.T. and broke away from the Temple worship in Jerusalem and established their own commune in the Judean desert near Qumran. They used the Qumran caves as their place of residency. In all there were eleven caves containing the scrolls which were excavated between February 1949 - February 1956.

Moshe Goshen-Gottstein estimates that the total number of O.T. Hebrew manuscript fragments throughout the world runs into the tens of thousands. For sake of interest, in the United States it is estimated that there are more than 500 Hebrew manuscripts of Biblical texts. Clearly God has preserved His O.T. throughout time.

II. The Survival of the New Testament.

When it comes to the New Testament, it is again clear that more than any other writing, the Bible has uniquely and dramatically survived through time. The study of the transmission and the preservation of N.T. manuscripts is interesting, informative and extremely important. No other book in history has been copied and preserved as the Bible- both O.T. and N.T..

Since the purpose of this section is to show how unique the Bible is in its survival through time, a complete discussion of the preparation, transmission and preservation of N.T. manuscripts is not the purpose here, however it is important and even necessary for those interested in truth to have some knowledge of how this all worked.

In order for us to appreciate the amazing work of God in all of this we need to have a basic understanding of some key terms:

- 1) The term papyrus is a term that refers to one type of paper on which the Scriptures were written. This type of paper came from a plant, of the same name, which grew in the marsh lands of Egypt.
- 2) The term parchment is a term that refers to another type of paper on which the Scriptures were written. This type of paper came from either goat or sheep skin.

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- 3) The term vellum is a term that refers to yet another type of paper on which the Scriptures were written. This type of paper came from either calf or antelope skin.
- 4) The term manuscript refers to a handwritten, hand copied composition. When used in connection to the Scriptures, it refers to Scriptures which have been hand-written or hand-copied. Something that has been printed or copied by a machine **is not** a manuscript. To be classified as a manuscript it must have been written by hand.
- 5) The term miniscule manuscript is a term that refers to manuscripts which were hand-written in small-case letters, not capital letters. These manuscripts are typically written in a cursive style.
- 6) The term uncial or majuscule manuscripts is a term that refers to manuscripts which were hand-written in capital letters. These manuscripts are typically written in a formal style as opposed to cursive style.
- 7) The term lectionaries is a term that refers to the early church service books which were used in the early church for worship. These books contain several selected N.T. passages.
- 8) The term codex is a term that refers to a manuscript that is in book form. A codex actually has its sheets of paper bound together rather than in the form of a scroll or roll.
- 9) The term autograph or autographa refers to the first original manuscript that was actually written by the author.

Having defined these terms, we are now prepared to give some perspective of how uniquely the New Testament has survived throughout time. The following statistics truly are eye opening in showing us the preserving power of God. In existence today are:

1. 88 papyri manuscripts.
2. 274 uncial manuscripts in codex form.
3. 245 lectionaries in uncial form.
4. 2,795 manuscripts in minuscule form.
5. 1964 lectionaries in minuscule form.

The total of just these Greek manuscripts alone, which all have been cataloged, is 5,366. This figure does not even include early Scriptural quotations or early commentaries or translations. There are 5,366 Greek New Testament manuscripts in existence today, which clearly proves the N.T. is the most unique writing in historical existence. We may easily see this by comparing the number of manuscripts of the N.T. to other historical documents which are easily believed and accepted:

1. There are 643 copies of Homer's Illiad, considered to be an epic poem.
2. There are 7 manuscripts of Plato, who wrote about 400 B.C..
3. There are 20 copies of Livy's History of Rome, who wrote about 59 B.C. to AD. 17.

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4. There are 7 manuscripts of Pliny's Natural History who wrote about A.D. 61-113.

The world considers these to be monumental works of history because of their survival. When you compare these figures to the N.T. manuscripts God has preserved, 5,366, any honest thinker must admit the Bible, just by virtue of the number of manuscripts, is totally and completely unique. It has survived through time as no other writing ever put into existence.

This very point caused Sir Frederic G. Kenyon to write these words: "The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations it and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the Church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities. This can be said of no other ancient book in the world. The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries."

(Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, p55)

It was this very point that prompted Drs. Norman Geisler and William Nix to write: "...no book from the ancient world comes to us with more abundant evidence for its integrity than does the New Testament." (*A General Introduction To The Bible*, Revised and Expanded, p.405. For one of the most thorough and accurate discussions on this subject matter, get this book and carefully read pages 341-405).

Truly, we may dogmatically and unequivocally testify that the Bible has survived throughout time as no other book in history. It stands totally and completely alone from all other writings, proving it is indeed the Word of God.

(Area #2) - The Bible has survived through Persecution.

From its inception, many in history have tried to rid the world of the Bible. As we have already seen, King Johoiakim tried (Jer. 36:21-23). In the early days of the N.T. age, when the Romans hated and persecuted Christianity, even until our present time, many have tried to burn, to ban and to outlaw the Bible, but all to no avail.

One such example is that of Diocletian. He issued an edict in A.D.303 that Christians and their sacred writings were to be destroyed. Eusebius, in his Church History, writes: "...an imperial letter was everywhere promulgated, ordering the razing of the churches to the ground and the destruction by fire of the Scriptures...". Obviously, by virtue of the fact of the existence of so many manuscripts, this attempt to destroy the Scriptures proved unsuccessful, for the Bible still stands.

It is no coincidence that the Satanic world has tried to destroy God's Divine book. It is also no coincidence that the Bible has **never** been able to be destroyed. In fact, this very point proves the Bible is what it claims to be, the inspired Word of God.

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(Area #3) - The Bible has survived through Criticism.

Infidels, atheists, pseudo-"intellectuals", agnostics, unbelievers and skeptics have all taken their verbal shots at the Scriptures in an attempt to discredit it or to promote a disbelief in it. No other book in history has drawn as much criticism as the Bible. In spite of all of the abuse, the Bible is still loved, studied and believed by untold millions. The sales of the Bible continue to soar, and ever secular book-stores find it to be a book that is in much demand. Certainly the Bible has received great criticism, however, it has **always** stood up against its critics. Critics come and go, but the Bible still stands. The Bible is a book that has moved through history as no other book which has ever been written. Any intelligent person, truly desiring to know truth had better take a close look at the Bible. Regardless of the critic or scoffer, whether neighbor or politician, whether manager or professor, they will all come and go, but the Bible will stand forever.

Without a doubt, there is a unique eternal, survival lifespan to the Bible. Whether the destructive danger was time, persecution or criticism, the Bible survives and will always survive. There is an eternal character to this book because it is the **Eternal Book**. The Bible is the Word of God and if any person will take an honest look at the objective, factual evidence, that evidence demands this conclusion.

(External Proof #8) – The Fulfillment of Biblical Prophecy.

Here is a very remarkable and very Biblical proof that the Bible is completely set apart from any other book that has ever been written. In fact, this external proof was actually used by God to convince His own disciples that the Bible was the inspired word of God (John 2:19,22). No other book in all of history has been able to predict, with perfect accuracy, specific things which were to take place in the future. Yet hundreds and hundreds of times that is exactly what the Bible does do.

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer made an important observation of Biblical prophecy when he wrote: "Based on obvious conditions, a man might make a fortunate guess as to the turn of events on the day that follows; but the Bible prophecy disregards the element of time. Who would be prepared to believe that hundreds of predictions which are fulfilled on the pages of history and extending over thousands of years of intervening time are the work of unaided men? Yet there is no other alternative for the one who questions the divine origin of the Scriptures." (Vol.1, p.30)

The purpose of this part of Bibliology is not to study Eschatology, the doctrine of future events. The purpose is to give a few brief illustrations of prophetic predictions and their fulfillment. This study does force any honest, thinking person to admit the Bible is the inspired word of God.

Prophetic Text #1 – Psalm 22

Notice carefully verses 1,7,16,17,18. These verses were predictively written 1000 years before Jesus Christ was born. It is obvious that these verses give a clear prediction of Christ's crucifixion.