

The Verbal Inspiration and Providential Preservation of the Bible

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The Holy Bible is our supreme authority for faith and practice (Deut 4:1-2, Rev 22:18-19). In times when men deny God's truth (Rom 1:18, 1Tim 6:3-5), wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction (2Pet 2:1, 3:16) and bind others with the leaven of the Pharisees as in the KJV-VPP *heresy* that sows confusion and strife (Mt 7:16-20, 16:6-12, Gal 5:7-16), it is our humble prayer that Almighty God would preserve His people in steadfast assurance of His Word.

The Canon of the Bible is the entirety of God's written Word, *given once for all* by Divine Inspiration and Providentially Preserved thereafter. A balanced and accurate understanding of these doctrines would reinforce our confidence and conviction in the infallibility and divinity of the Bible, so that we are not "*tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness...*" (Jude 1:3, Eph 4:14).

The **outline** of this paper is as follows: - I) By way of background - God's Revelation to Man, the Definition of 'Word of God' and the Languages of God's Revelation; II) Verbal Inspiration - its processes and operation, 'Authentication' and 'Canon'; III) Providential Preservation in the extant manuscripts (MSS) and 'Textual Criticism'; and IV) Conclusion. A short appendix is then included, entitled, "The Strange Fire of Verbal Plenary Preservation".

THE REVELATION OF GOD TO MAN

"O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD endureth forever. Praise ye the LORD". (Ps 117:1-2)

Almighty God, the Sovereign Creator of the Universe, is boundless in mercies, endless in love and eternal. Omnipotent, He has all power without limit (Mt 19:26, Mk 10:27); Omnipresent, everywhere in His immediate presence (Jer 23:23-24, Ps 139:7-12, Mt 28:20); and Omniscient, He knows all things at all points of space and time (Act 17:26, Heb 9:27). God in His Providence sustains all Creation, and in His Beneficence reveals His truth that endures forever.

God reveals Himself in **General Revelation** to all men through the Creation of the world and all things that are made, whereby His invisible attributes, eternal power and Godhead are clearly understood. This is observable in nature, for a child gazing out on a night sky would not fail to be awed at the mysterious infinitude of the Universe; or one peering into a microscope, captured by the beauties of tiny cells. Through this, a conscience of God and His righteousness is placed in every man, so that none shall have an excuse on the Day of Judgement (Rom 1:18-20).

God in **Special Revelation** spoke directly at various times to various men of truths, not otherwise discoverable in nature. Through this the Word of God was revealed, pointing us to Jesus Christ, God's only Begotten Son who is both Saviour and Lord, through Whom alone by faith, salvation and redemption must be found (Jn 1:29, 3:16, 5:39, 1Cor 1:30, 2Tim 3:15).

DEFINITION OF 'WORD OF GOD'

There are 3 senses of 'Word of God' used in the Bible that should be accurately distinguished: - 1) God's Oral Words, 2) God's Written Word, and 3) The Pre-Incarnate Eternal Word.

Spoken or Oral Words

In the beginning at Eden, God spoke with man. Transgression against the Divine spoken words

resulted for Adam and Eve in death, i.e. spiritual separation from God and expulsion from the Garden of Eden with sorrows and hardships for the rest of their lives (Gen 2:16-3:24).

Before the Flood, a canopy of water was set in the earth's atmosphere, shielding away harmful radiation and trapping moisture, so that it did not rain until the day that Noah entered the Ark (Gen 1:6-7, 2:5-6, 7:1, 4, 11-12). These ideal conditions made for great longevity. Enoch the 7th generation was 121 years old and his son Methuselah was 56 years old, when Adam died at the ripe old age of 930 years. Enoch, a godly man, and in time his son too, would have visited the first patriarch to learn firsthand the account of Creation and man's history. Methuselah in turn could tell Noah his grandson and also his great grandsons what Adam told him. In this manner, God's Word was reliably passed down during the years of Oral Transmission.

Methuselah means "When he dies, it shall come". His record 969 years of life, is testimony of God's longsuffering in withholding of judgement, for exactly in the year he died, the Flood came. Thereafter, longevity declined rapidly and by the time of Moses, averaged our present 70 to 80 years (Ps 90:10). 5 generations after Noah in the days of Peleg at Babel, God confounded the language of the earth and scattered the peoples throughout the world. 5 generations later, Abram was born of the sons of Shem, who was declared righteous on the basis of his faith in God, 430 years before the Law was given. God renamed him Abraham, making him the covenantal father of all who would believe in God. (Gen 10:25-11:9, 15:1-6, 17:5, Gal 3:7, 17)

Abraham's grandson, Jacob with his family entered Egypt during a severe famine and lived there with Joseph. In the 4th generation, Levi's great grandson, Moses, led Israel out in the Exodus (Gen 46:5-11, Ex 1 – 15, 1Chr 6:1-3). God also used Moses to pen the first writings of His Word, ending 26 generations or about 2,463 years of Oral Transmission of God's Word.

Written Word or Holy Scriptures

"The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." (Deut 29:29)

In time, God revealed His Word in written form progressively during the Old Testament ("OT") and New Testament ("NT") eras before and after the first Advent of Jesus Christ. Jesus and His Apostles referred to the written word as "Scriptures" or 'Holy Scriptures' (Mt 21:42, Mk 12:24, Lk 24:27, Jn 5:39, Act 17:2, 18:28, Rom 1:2, 15:4, 1Cor 15:3-4). The angel Gabriel used the term 'Scriptures' in reference to a prophecy he came to give to Daniel, where interestingly his past tense '*that which is noted in*' demonstrates the *eternality* of God's Word.

The Old Testament

Egypt was a great regional power and centre of cultural advancements. Her papyrus, perennial ink, hieroglyphs depicting maths fractions, clay bricks reinforced with chemicals from straw, pyramids and mummies preserved for posterity, attest to an advanced knowledge of science. Moses, adopted as son to Pharaoh's daughter, was skilled 40 years in the learning of Pharaoh's courts and further proved 40 years shepherding Jethro's flock in the wilderness of Midian before becoming God's instrument to lead Israel out of Egypt and to pen the first writings of the Bible, the Pentateuch or Five Books of Moses, as well as Psalm 90 and probably also Psalm 91.

After Moses, God raised Joshua and the judges until Samuel, and the prophets during the times of kings until Malachi some 300 years before the first advent of Jesus Christ. Through all of God's chosen holy men, 39 God-breathed books together making up the OT canon were penned between BC 1600 to 300. (See also 'Jewish Old Testament Canon' below).

The New Testament

After Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension, the Gospel was preached beginning at Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria unto the uttermost parts of the world. With the Gospel advance, 27 Divinely Inspired NT documents were written during the second half of the 1st Century AD, namely 4 Gospels declaring the absolute certainty of things most surely believed among early Christians, 21 epistles addressed to specific churches and believers, the Book of Acts documenting the apostolic start of the Church and the Revelation of Jesus Christ of things shortly to come to pass. This last NT book, penned circa AD 95 by John, exiled in Patmos, ended with a warning not to add to or take away *'from the words of the book of this prophecy'* (Rev 22:18-19), signalling the completion of the Canon of 66 books of the Bible given over a period of 1,756 years.

The Church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets, represented by their NT and OT writings respectively, with Jesus Christ as Chief Corner Stone (Eph 2:20). So closely and mysteriously are the two intertwined, that it is also said, *"The New is in the Old contained; the Old is in the New Explained."* In man's first 4,219 years of history, we did not have the complete Bible. Perhaps in these latter times, we have the greater need of the entire counsel of God's Word, of which we also have to give greater account (Lk 12:48).

The Pre-Incarnate Eternal Word

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (Jn 1:1)

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." (Heb 1:1-20)

"He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God." (Rev 19:13)

The loftiest use of *λόγος* refers to the Eternal Logos, the Pre-Incarnate Son of God. All things are created by and for Him, and shall be finally subjected to Him (Gen 1:3, 1Cor 8:6, 5:24-28).

The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus Christ the Son of God, who became the Son of Man, is the culmination of God's revelation to us. No man has seen God at any time but the Son came to declare the Father to us. Whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father. (Jn 1:14, 18 and 14:7-9). This same Jesus humbled Himself to take on the form of a man and became obedient to death; even death on a cross. (Phil 2:6-11, Heb 1:8, Rev 19:13). This is the Gospel declared in the Word of God, beneath whose sacred pages, we see the Lord. (Rom 10:17)

THE LANGUAGES OF GOD'S REVELATION

"In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." (Lk 10:21a)

God is no respecter of persons and accepts in every nation every humble seeker who reverences Him and works righteousness (Act 10:34-44). Jesus rejoiced that the Father hid His deeper revelations from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes. As God's truth was progressively revealed to man, changes in the languages of communication took place so that the inspired records were not always written in the original spoken languages, yet without an iota of loss of Divine power and truth. This underscores that God's Word is for all races and languages and the necessity of Bible translations for the Gospel to reach all men (Act 17:30). Certainly it is the spirit, meanings and reality that give life, and not the form of letters (2Cor 3:6).

Adam's Original Language Lost

Prior to Babel, all the earth spoke one language (Gen 11:1), which has since been literally lost.

The *meanings* of inspired conversations in this original language however were preserved orally down the generations and later authoritatively in the inspired Hebrew writings of Moses.

Aramaic and Hebrew

“For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever...Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.” (Gen 13:15, 17).

600 years after the Flood, Terah took Abram his son and Lot his grandson, out of Ur of the Chaldees and went as far as Haran, where he died. God then called Abram again to leave the fertile Mesopotamian Valley and enter into a life of nomadic wanderings throughout Canaan. In time, through the nomadic life of Abram and his sons, Hebrew was developed from a Canaanite root, modified in vocabulary with words to describe Abram’s lofty views of Almighty God.

Canaanite and Aramaic are cognate with the languages of Syria and of Mesopotamia. Thus Hebrew and the various Aramaic dialects share a common alphabet but with distinct vocabulary, spelling and pronunciations. Hebrew (Arabic) and Moabite (Jordan) are South Canaanite. Phoenician (Lebanon) is North Canaanite. Aramaic is North-West Semitic.

Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah thrice between BC606 and 587, taking in succession to Babylon the noble men including Daniel, King Jehoiachin and his household, and finally the rest except the poorest (Dan 1:1, 2Ki 24, 25). In Babylon, the Jews learnt Aramaic. When Medo-Persia conquered Babylon, Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews to return to Judea (Dan 5:31, 2Chr 36:22-23, Ezra 1-2) where a Persian Province was established, with Aramaic as the administrative language. Aramaic portions in the Bible include Dan 2:4-7:28 and Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26.

During the time of Jesus’ ministry, the Israelites of Galilee used a form of Galilean Aramaic, with which they interacted with Aramaic-speaking societies to the North and East of Israel. In Jerusalem and Judea, Hebrew was used among the Jews (cf. Jn 5:2, 19:13, 17, Act 21:40, 22:2).

Jesus’ Original Words Unrecorded

“...many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.” (Jn 21:25b)

Jesus would have ministered in the people’s vernacular, Galilean Aramaic in Galilee and Hebrew in Judea. His Sermon on the Mount to a great multitude from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and beyond the Jordan (Mt 4:23-7:29) would be in Aramaic-Hebrew. In God’s Wisdom, the Gospel writers inspired by the Holy Spirit, translated and recorded Jesus’ words in Greek, without an iota or stroke of loss in power, meaning or authority of His words.

The KJV Translators recognized that Jesus would have spoken in Hebrew-Aramaic and reflected this by translating the Greek $\iota\omega\tau\alpha$ (iota, ‘the smallest Gk letter’) as jot (a transliteration of the Hebrew yodh י), and $\kappa\epsilon\rho\alpha\iota\alpha$ (keraia, ‘dot’) as tittle (the smallest Hebrew stroke) in Mt 5:18.

Many things Jesus did are also not recorded in the Bible. We should thus magnify God who gave His Word rather than the Word per se. The Pharisees and Scribes reversed this and crucified the Lord of glory. Indeed spiritual things are spiritually discerned (1Cor 2:13-16).

Koine Greek: lingua franca of the Gospel Advance

The conquests of Alexander the Great (BC 356-323) spread Greek culture and language to Egypt and to the fringes of India, where the language remained lingua franca during the days of the Roman Empire, as seen in the Hellenist Jews at Jerusalem and Pilate’s superscription over the

cross of Jesus in Greek, Latin and Hebrew (Act 6:1, Lk 23:38, Jn 19:19-20).

The Gospel writers wrote the Gospels in their individual styles and proficiency of Greek under Divine Inspiration, which include the translation process of Hebrew-Aramaic discourses into apt and accurate Greek expressions ministered by the Holy Spirit. Barnabas and Paul who preached the Gospel beyond Judea, were conversant in various languages (Act 4:36, 14:11-15, 17:4, 1Cor 14:18). Paul wrote his epistles directly in Greek, as did John, Peter, James and Jude. These writings were supernaturally inspired as to their contents and choice of Greek words.

In God's Wisdom and Foreknowledge, the use of Greek in preaching and in writing the NT documents, helped power the Gospel's advance throughout the Roman Empire (Rom 1:16).

VERBAL PLENARY INSPIRATION

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." (2Tim 3:16)

"But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon. So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive ... and, fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven... driven up and down in Adriatic Sea (Act 27: 14, 15, 17, 27)."

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (2Pet 1:20-21)

The term Verbal Inspiration was popularised by John Calvin based on 2Tim 3:16. It later came to be interchangeably used with 'Plenary Inspiration' or 'Verbal Plenary Inspiration'.

The Greek γραφή (grapha), 'writing' gives the basis for **verbal**, 'language or words'.

Πάσα (Pasa), 'every' or 'each' gives the basis of **plenary**, 'fullness or completeness'.

The Greek θεόπνευστος (Theo-pneustos), 'God-breathed', i.e. God expired out the Scriptures is rendered **inspiration**. An analogy is when God formed Adam out of the dust of the ground and breathed life into his nostrils, and Adam inspiring in became a living soul (Gen 2:7). Hence is God's Word inspired '*quick, powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword*' (Heb 4:12).

In Act 27:14-27 and 2Pet 1:21, 'moved' and 'drive/driven' are from φέρω (pherō), to bear or carry. The tempest drove the ship - a picture of the Holy Spirit's control over the holy men who spake. The men had a part, which was to yield to the Spirit's control, illustrated in the mariners striking sail to prevent the ship running aground, giving control to the tempest. The spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets (1Cor 14:32), who when they strike sail, yield to the Spirit, in Whose fullness they were 'borne along', not acting on their own wills or simply expressing their own thoughts, but expressing the mind of God with words ministered by the Spirit.

One primary effect of Verbal Inspiration is that the Bible is not subject to private interpretation at any person's fancy, for these are not the words of capricious men. When God breathed out His Word, He intended only one meaning, which we are to humbly and prayerfully search out.

Further insights on the process and effects of Verbal Inspiration may perhaps be gleaned from observing the 4 ways or so in which God's Word was written.

God wrote the first Tablets

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them” (Ex 24:12).

“And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon Mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.... And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables.” (Ex 31:18, 32:16)

God wrote the first tablets of the Ten Commandments Himself. The words inscribed are pure Divine Words breathed out by God with no human intermediary having any part in the writing.

At Mount Sinai, on the third day of the third month after the exit from Egypt, God spoke the Ten Commandments to Israel, accompanied by thunders and lightnings so that the people trembled. To spare them, God spoke through Moses who in turn spoke to the people. Moses later wrote down the statutes God had also spoken when he with Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and 70 elders of Israel prepared to worship before God, where they *“saw the God of Israel: and under his feet ... a paved work of a sapphire stone.”* Moses then went up the mount alone for 40 days and nights, and at the end of this, God gave to him these first two tablets written by the finger of God.

This did not stop Moses breaking these first tablets when he saw the golden calf and dancing in the camp, which shows the heart of God’s faithful servant at the sight of Israel’s great sin. It is not the stone or the ink but the true meanings inscribed therein that count! Almighty God could have made the Autographs physically indestructible, but in His Wisdom chose humble ordinary materials to demonstrate that He is looking for hearts of flesh, responsive and yielded to the Spirit of the Living God. (Ex 19:16-20:17, 24:4-18, 31:18, 32:4-21, 2Cor 3:3,6)

Thought: If we have the Autographs today, would we be better believers? Or would these ensnare us, as Aaron’s golden calf ensnared the people of Israel?

God’s servant wrote as God dictated

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write these words ...’ And He wrote on the tablets the words of the Covenant, the Ten Commandments.” (Ex 34:27-28)

After the people were severely chastised, God told Moses to hew 2 tables of stone like the first and go up to the mount for another 40 days and nights. There God dictated to Moses to write on the tables the words of the Ten Commandments according to the first writings. This was the first instance of Divine Verbal Inspiration via direct dictation! (Ex 34:1, 4, 27-28, Deut 10:1-4)

That this second set written by Moses was equal to the first set written by God signifies that thenceforth, the writings by God’s inspired servants are in every respect verily the Word of God.

A comparison of the 10 Commandments spoken at Mount Sinai (Ex 20:1-17) and at its recount 40 years later (Deut 5:6-21), both recorded by Moses by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, would show disparities in words, without however any loss to primary meanings, underscoring again the recurring theme, ‘the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life’ (2Cor 3:6).

An amanuensis wrote what God dictated to His servant

“I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord.” (Rom 16:22)

At times, God’s Word was written by an amanuensis for God’s servant.

Paul, cruelly stoned at Iconium, bore an infirmity of the flesh in his eyes which was visible when he arrived at Galatia and which remained with him permanently. When he later wrote his

epistles, he needed the help of amanuenses; and when he wrote a few words himself, he did so in large letters! (Acts 14:19, 16:6, Gal 4:13-15, 6:11, 17, 1Cor 16:21, 2Cor 12:7-9)

Jeremiah the prophet also used the help of Baruch the scribe to write down the words of God. In the 4th year of King Jehoiakim, the Lord told Jeremiah to write all the words that God had spoken against Judah and Israel, which Jeremiah then dictated to Baruch to write on a roll. Jehoiakim however cut and burned this roll, whereupon God commanded Jeremiah to write again all the former words and add '*besides unto them many like words*'. This highlights the importance of meanings over formal exactitude of letters. (Jer 36:1-32, 2Cor 3:16)

The third party amanuenses did not detract from God's Word as the Holy Spirit superintended over them as well while they wrote at the dictation of God's servants. This is indicated by Tertius writing for Paul in the Spirit, being inspired to personally greet the saints at Rome.

God's servant wrote after careful collation

"Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus." (Lk 1:1-3)

Verbal Inspiration does not mean that the holy men of God wrote in a spiritual whirlwind with no preparation on their parts. Mark, believed to be the first Gospel written, would only have been written after Mark's journey with Barnabas into Cyprus (Act 13:13, 15:39). Luke made careful collation of eyewitness accounts to arrive at a perfect understanding of the chronological events of his Gospel and the Book of Acts. He joined Paul's missionary journey at Troas and remained with Paul till his imprisonment in Rome. (Act 16:8, 10, 28:31, Col 4:4, 2Tim 4:11)

Paul was a meticulous man, who acted to safeguard his parchments (perhaps his near-complete epistle-treatise to the Hebrews (Heb 13:19, 23-24)) which he requested Timothy to bring to him at Rome (2Tim 4:13). A life of stern discipline and preparation in the knowledge of the OT was required to become a Pharisee of Pharisees. Paul in ignorance, zealously persecuted the Church but in grace, was a chosen and prepared vessel unto the Lord (Phil 3:5-6, Act 9:15).

Moses had 80 years of preparation in Egypt and Midian. His thirst for God led him to God's mountain at the back side of Midian's desert, where God appeared to him in a burning bush, and God's conversation with him there reveals his burden for the welfare of his kinsfolk in Egypt. It is possible that at Midian already, a man of Moses' zeal, knowledge and abilities, would have started collating the materials for the Book of Genesis. (Ex 2:11-14, 3:1-5, 32:31-32, 33:18-23).

Ezra also painstakingly prepared himself for God's service and was a ready scribe (Ezra 7:6, 10). If we look at the inspired writers one by one, we will find that all of these men were vessels cleansed and prepared for use in the service to God, yielded to the Holy Spirit's call.

AUTHENTICATION

"And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off." (Ex 20:18)

The first giving of God's Word was accompanied by thunder and lightnings. The people trembled and succeeding generations did not doubt the Divine pronouncements (Jos 8:35). Subsequent giving of God's Word was without lightning and thunder for God's people had learnt that God would communicate with man in holy writing. All the inspired writings are authentic at the instance of writing. Thus Daniel quoted Jeremiah; Jesus quoted Isaiah and

Daniel; and Matthew quoted Jeremiah (Dan 9:2, Mt 2:17, 11:14, 27:9, Mk 13:14).

Safeguards and Test of Authentication

“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’ when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” (Deut 18:20-22)

“By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.” (2Cor 13:1b)

The Lord provided safeguards and means to ascertain the word which He had spoken or had not spoken. This includes prophetic fulfilment - if a prophecy fails, the prophet is false; and confirmation by 2 or 3 witnesses whereby Scripture also explain Scripture. (Deut 18:20-22, 19:5, Jer 28:9, 2Cor 13:1). That there are 4 Gospels, double the requisite testimony, underlines most assuredly the truth of their proclamation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Fulfilled Prophecies

“Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure.’” (Isa 46:9-10)

Almighty God knows everything past, present and future. As such, every statement of fact in the Bible, whether of science, history or geography, are true. The Bible also contains many future prophecies revealing God’s plan and will. Some examples of these are here discussed.

Gen 2:7 reveals Adam’s composition as of the dust of the ground (before man knew chemistry). Isaiah 40:22 reveals the world as encircled (whereas sailors of old thought of the world as flat). When Abram was childless and Sarai past child-bearing, God promised to multiply his seed as the stars of heaven. (Long before telescopes were invented, the Bible revealed that the stars are countless!) Abraham’s descendants today through Isaac and Jacob are numberless, not counting Christians who are also his seed (Gen 15:5, 22:17, Gal 3:29). God promised that Ishmael also would be a great nation, and he became father of 12 princes, including Kedar, a father of Arabia (Gen 21:18, 25:12-16) so that Arabs count their ancestry to Abraham.

Mic 5:2 prophesied that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah, a little village among thousands in Judah. This was fulfilled some 700 years later when Jesus was born there (Lk 2:4, Jn 7:42). Ps 22:1-21 foretold the sufferings of the Lord Jesus on the cross, which was fulfilled in exact detail a thousand years later at Calvary (Mt 27:35-50, Lk 23:34-46, Jn 19:24-37).

Isaiah ministered in the 8th Century BC during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. He prophesied Judah’s captivity in Babylon and that Judah will again be re-inhabited; and that God’s shepherd-king whom he identified by name, Cyrus, even before he was born, shall open the two leaved gates, release the Jewish captives and rebuild Jerusalem (Isa 1:1, 39:5-7, 43:14-17, 44:26-45:5). 200 years later, Cyrus, king of Persia overthrew Babylon (the two-leaved gates) and decreed the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s Temple (Ezra 1:1-4).

Jeremiah foretold of Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion of Judah and *70 years of servitude*, after which God shall punish the king of Babylon (Jer 25:9-12, 29:10, 33:10-14). Daniel was in the first batch taken into captivity to Babylon in the 3rd year of Jehoikim, or 606 BC, the year Nebuchadnezzar became king. Daniel lived to see the 1st year of King Cyrus (Dan 1:1-6, 21, Ezra 1:1-4) or 536 BC, when Babylon was overthrown exactly ending the 70 years of servitude.

Daniel's Prophecy of 70 Weeks (Dan 9:1-19, 24-27)

In the 1st year of Darius' reign, as Daniel considered the number of *the years* of Jeremiah's 70-year prophecy nearing completion and sought the Lord God in earnest supplications, fasting, ashes and sackcloth, Gabriel was sent to give him the prophecy of 70 שבועים (weeks) of God's remaining covenantal dealings with the Jews, to finish their transgression, make an end of sins and embrace Messiah, *starting from a decree* to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.

The Hebrew 'weeks' means any period of 7, and year is meant in the context of Daniel's consideration. The Jewish year is lunar-solar with 360 days¹. The prophecy covers 70 x 7 years x 360 days. The only decree in history to restore Jerusalem was Artaxerxes', given in response to Nehemiah in Artaxerxes 20th year of reign during the first day of Nisan (Ne 2:1, 5). Artaxerxes acceded to the throne in July BC 465 when his father, Xerxes was murdered, making his 20th year BC 445. Based on the Paschal moon, this date was established by Sir Robert Anderson² with the help of the Astronomer Royal, Sir George Airy as 14 March BC 445.

7 weeks was to rebuild Jerusalem, 62 weeks for Messiah the Prince to be presented, with a final great tribulation week for the Jews left in the future. Jesus was publicly presented as Messiah only once when in fulfilment of Zech 9:9, He entered Jerusalem riding on an ass with her foal on Palm Sunday; a day that if the multitudes praising God with loud hosannas held their peace, the stones would immediately cry out! (Mt 21:4-5, Mk 11:4-11, Lk 19:28-40, Jn 12:12-15).

Jesus' ministry began in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar (Lk 3:1-3), i.e. the year beginning 19 August 28AD as Tiberius succeeded his stepfather Octavius on 19 August 14AD, and lasted 3+ years over 4 Passovers (Jn 2:13, 5:1, 6:4 and 11:55). The first Passover of His ministry was in Nisan 29AD and his final Passover in Nisan 32AD. He went up to Jerusalem on 8th Nisan, 'six days before the Passover' (Jn 12:1), which was a Friday (as the 14th on which the Paschal Supper was eaten (Ex 12:2, 6) that year was a Thursday). He must have spent the Sabbath at Bethany; and on the evening of the 9th, after the Sabbath had ended, they made him a supper where Mary served and Lazarus was present. On the following day, 10th Nisan, He entered Jerusalem (Jn 12:12) and presented Himself for the first time as Messiah, completing Daniel's 69th week to the very day! The Julian date was 6 April 32AD. Between BC 14 March 445 and 6 April 32AD is exactly 69 weeks x 7 years x 360 or 173,880 days!

476 Gregorian years x 365 days =	173,740 days
Add (14 March to 6 April, both inclusive):	24 days
Add for leap years:	116 days
Total:	<u>173,880 days</u>

AD starts with AD 1 and between 1 BC and AD 1 is one year. The Julian year is 11 minutes 10.46 seconds or about 1/129 day longer than the mean solar year, and would contain 3 leap years too many in 4 centuries. The adjustment for leap years would be to add back 476/4 minus 3 or 116 leap days. (Or in Gregorian calendar terms, 300 BC, 200 BC and 100 BC are not leap years).

The NT also contains many prophecies. Jesus prophesied the manner of His death, His resurrection 3 days later, that Judas Iscariot would betray Him and that Jerusalem would be desolate and its' Temple completely destroyed. In 70AD, Titus, who later succeeded his father Vespasian as Roman Emperor, destroyed Jerusalem. Jesus also foretold of the tribulation of the end times; the rise of deception and false Christs, wars, rumours of wars, famine, earthquake and pestilences in various places, and His visible return in glory accompanied by His holy angels (Jn 2:22, 3:14, 13:26, Mt 23:37-38, 24:1-31). The Apostle John also wrote many prophecies in the

¹ As was the Babylonian year, which also explains the ancient sextant (compass) being divided into 360 degrees.

² The discussion of this prophecy with its proofs is from Robert Anderson's 'The Coming Prince', reprinted 1957 from 10th edition, Kregel Publications, which the reader could refer to for the entire details.

Book of Revelation, while the other Apostles also included prophecies in their writings.

All the prophecies in the Bible attest to and authenticate the Bible as verily the infallible Word of God. Simple faith in Almighty God is all we need to acknowledge His marvellous truths.

THE CANON OF THE BIBLE

“Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth forever.” (Ps 119:160)

Per Wikipedia: the word ‘canon’ is derived from κανών (kanon) meaning ‘reed’ or ‘cane’ or also ‘rule’ or ‘measure’, and is itself derived from the Hebrew קֶנֶה (kaneh) or ‘standard of measurement’. Thus, a *canonic text* is a single authoritative edition for a given work. The word ‘bible’ is from the Latin *biblia sacra* (‘holy book’), from the Greek τὰ βιβλία τὰ ἅγια (‘the holy books’) derived from βιβλίον (biblion), ‘paper’ or ‘scroll’. The Online Etymology Dictionary states that “The Christian scripture was referred to in Greek as *Ta Biblia* as early as c.223.”

The Word of God is inspired from the beginning even as it is breathed out of the mouth of God. All of God’s inspired words together make up the Canon of the Bible. A book is not inspired because or when it is put into the Canon, but is canonical because it is inspired.

Jewish Old Testament Canon

Rabbinic Judaism recognizes the 24 books of the Masoretic Text - the Tanakh or Hebrew Bible, divided into the Torah (Law), the Prophets and the Writings starting with Psalms. This threefold division is attested as early as the grandson of Jesus ben Sira, who after migrating to Alexandria in BC132, translated his grandfather’s ‘Wisdom’ book (Ecclesiasticus) from Hebrew into Greek, and referred to it in his preface. Scholars believed that the Torah was canonized circa BC400, the Prophets circa BC200, and the Writings circa 100AD at a Council at Jamnia.

The Law comprises the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy); the Prophets comprise the 4 ‘Former Prophets’ (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings), and the 4 ‘Latter Prophets’ (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve); and the Writings comprise Psalms, Proverbs and Job, the five *Megillot* (‘rolls’), namely Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, and end with Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles. By so grouping, the Tanakh has 24 books which we count individually as 39 books. Josephus in ‘Against Apion’ enumerates 22 sacred books, which could be in accordance with the Greek Septuagint reckoning and if he treated Ruth as an appendix to Judges and Lamentations as an appendix to Jeremiah³.

Jesus said that all things concerning Him in the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms (the threefold division) must be fulfilled (Lk 24:44-45). When He spoke of all the martyrs of the earth from the blood of Abel (Gen 4:8) to the blood of Zechariah (2 Chr 24:20-22), He followed the Hebrew sequence which starts at Genesis and ends with Chronicles. (Mt 23:35, Lk 11:50-51)

The writings known as the Apocrypha are not part of the Jewish OT Canon, or of the Bible.

Christian New Testament Canon

During the Apostolic Fathers, a 4-Gospel canon was asserted by Irenaeus, c. 160AD. By the early 200’s, Origen of Alexandria probably used the same 27 books in our NT editions. The Muratorian fragment dated 200AD shows a compilation of Christian writings similar to our

³ A key source for this discussion is FF Bruce, ‘New Testament History’, Doubleday-Galilee 1980, pp148-149.

current NT, which included 4 Gospels and argued against objections to them. Thus, the major writings were accepted by almost all Christians by the middle of the 2nd Century.

For the Greek Fathers, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria in his Easter letter of 367AD, gave a list of exactly our NT books, which he referred to as ‘canonized’ (*kanonizomena*).


For the Latin Fathers, the African Synod of Hippo in 393AD approved the NT books together with the Septuagint books; a decision repeated by Councils of Carthage in 397 and 419AD. The Latin Vulgate (c 383AD) commissioned by Pope Damasus I exhibited the same NT books. In 405AD, Pope Innocent I sent a list of this to a Gallic Bishop, Exsuperius of Toulouse. Unanimity in the West on the NT canon thus existed from the 4th Century. By the 5th Century, the East accepted the Revelation and came into harmony as well.

During the Reformation Period, the canon was re-affirmed by the Roman Catholic Council of Trent, 1546; the Church of England Thirty Nine Articles, 1563; the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1647 for British Calvinism; and the Greek Orthodox Synod of Jerusalem, 1672.

PROVIDENTIAL PRESERVATION

“And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law.” (Deut 32:46)

“As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and forever.” (Isa 59:21)



When Moses finished writing the words of the Law in a book, he commanded the Levites to store this in the Ark of the Covenant and he charged all Israel to set their hearts unto all these words and to command their children likewise (Deut 10:1-5, 31:24-26, 32:46). The Levites made copies for the various tribes, a practice continued down the generations so that when Jesus visited Nazareth, the scroll of Isaiah was handed to Him (1Ki 4:3, 1Chr 2:55, 2Chr 34:13, Lk 4:14-17). In time, sufficient copies were made so that when the Autographs were eventually lost, the surviving apographs ensured the preservation of God’s Word, in fulfilment of Isa 59:21.

Today, a pool of extant ancient OT and NT manuscripts (MSS) codices and fragments testify to God’s Providential Preservation of His Word. Their numbers and random variety are effective in helping eliminate uncertainties over the Original Autographic readings and meanings, while the physical MSS themselves display the methods and processes of preservation over time.

Extant Old Testament MSS

The OT MSS are preserved in various forms, primarily in the Masoretic Text (‘MT’) but also in the Dead Sea Scrolls (‘DSS’), Septuagint (‘LXX’) and the Samaritan Pentateuch (‘SP’).

The Masoretic Text

From the 7th to 10th Century AD, the Masoretes in Tiberias, Jerusalem and Babylon, dedicated themselves to making copies of the OT for the world Jewish community. They introduced diacritical notes on the external form of the Biblical text to standardise pronunciation, paragraph and verse divisions and cantillation of the Tanakh. In time, the Ben Asher family and Ben Naphtali family rose in prominence among them, resulting in two competing MT editions.

The oldest extant MT MSS are 9th Century AD fragments. The 10th Century **Aleppo Codex** produced by Aaron ben Asher was the oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible until

anti-Jewish riots desecrated the synagogue at Aleppo, Syria, where it was kept, in 1947. In 1958, Murad Faham, a Syrian Jew brought it to Israel with one-third including most of the Torah missing. It is now entrusted to the Ben-Zvi Institute and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The **Leningrad Codex** circa 1008AD, based on the Aleppo Codex, is now the oldest complete Hebrew Bible MSS. The strict copying rules of the Masoretes were designed to prevent deviations from the archetypes, and older MSS that exhibit any damage were destroyed to prevent copying from these. This may explain why there are no older MT MSS found to date.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

The DSS were first discovered in 1947 in caves at Qumran, and include MSS dating from BC150 to 75AD containing the entire Isaiah and fragments of all the OT books except for Esther. The antiquity of the DSS sheds important new light on the MT. The DSS MSS from Masada are close to the MT, suggesting that an ancestor of the MT was extant as early as the 2nd Century BC. MSS from Qumran however exhibit greater variances with the MT.

The Septuagint

The LXX ('70') is the oldest Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, and held in great respect in ancient times by many including Philo and Josephus. 70 Jewish scholars translated the Pentateuch for Ptolemy II Philadelphus (BC285–246) at Alexandria, Egypt, with the rest of the OT translated in stages between the 3rd and 1st Centuries BC. The LXX with the Old Latin versions are the basis for the Slavonic, Syro-Hexaplar, Old Armenian, Old Georgian and Coptic OT versions. The NT and the Church Fathers directly quote from the LXX in many places.

The oldest MSS are 2nd Century BC fragments of Leviticus and Deuteronomy and 1st Century BC fragments of the Pentateuch and the Minor Prophets. The 4th Century Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus containing most of the LXX OT also number among its extant MSS.

At Ps 22:16, where the MT reads, '*like a lion my hands and my feet*' – 'purposefully corrupted to deny the prophetic reference to the crucifixion of Christ' according to Matthew Henry's Commentary, E F Hills and John Calvin – the LXX, the Syriac and Latin Vulgate all affirm the English reading, "*they pierced my hands and my feet*".

The Samaritan Pentateuch

The SP comprises the 5 Books of Moses written in the Samaritan alphabet, an old form of Hebrew in use before the Babylonian captivity. The Jews returning from exile refused to allow the Samaritans to worship with them at Jerusalem, so that the latter worshipped at Mount Gerizim (Deut 11:29, Jud 9:7, Jn 4:20, 21). In 1616, Pietro Della Valle brought a copy of the SP from Damascus to Europe. Jean Morin's edited SP was published in 1645 in Le Jay's (Paris) Polyglot, and republished in 1657 in Walton's Polyglot. Scholarly evaluation of the SP changed after the DSS discovery, some of which supported the SP readings.

The SP and the MT are mainly similar despite 6,000 variances, mainly in cantillation, vowel and consonant or on minor details. The more significant differences include the command to be monogamous in the SP's Lev 18:18 and the command to build the altar at Mount Gerizim in the SP's Ten Commandments. There are also instances where the LXX agrees with the SP when the latter differs with the MT. One enlightening example is at Ex 12:40: -

"Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years." (MT)

"Now the sojourning of the children of Israel and of their fathers which they had dwelt in the land of Canaan and in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years." (SP and LXX)

Per Gal 3:17, the Law was given 430 years after God's Covenant with Abraham, made when Abram was childless i.e., some 15 years before Isaac's birth. Isaac was 60 when Jacob was born, and Jacob entered Egypt with his family when he was 130 years old. The years of sojourning in Egypt alone are hence only 225 years, or 4 generations (Gen 15:3 16, 25:26, 47:9). If the SP and LXX are two witnesses of the Ex 12:40 Autographs, the 430 years is the total sojourning in both Canaan and Egypt, which would harmonize with Gal 3:17, a third witness.

Summary of OT MSS

The OT is providentially preserved in a pool of extant ancient MSS, which include the MT, LXX, DSS and SP. Before discarding MSS which may seem inferior, we should remember that God often chooses the weaker to put the stronger to shame (1Cor 1:25-29). The variety of forms and age of these MSS in conjunction with the Divine rule of 2Cor 13:1 that "by 2 or 3 witnesses, every word shall be established", helps in identifying errors due to human frailty or prejudice, leaving a clear residual witness of the true Autographic readings!

Extant New Testament MSS

Over 5,000 Greek MSS codices (books) and papyri (fragments) from the 2nd to 10th Century AD are extant. These were discovered in Europe, the Middle East and Asia Minor; many in the last 100 years alone. From the earliest times, the Scriptures were translated into other languages of antiquity, of which over 8,000 Latin MSS and some 10,000 Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Gothic, and Ethiopic MSS are also extant. The Church Fathers also quoted extensively from the NT, of which many patristic MSS are extant. John Burgon compiled an index of 86,589 NT quotations of the early fathers, which remains in the British Museum. Since then, more MSS have been found. Scholars have recompiled all but 11 verses of the NT from these patristic citations alone.

The Greek MSS are classified by age, geographical origin and writing type, and further into 4 or 5 genealogical families ascribed varying degrees of reliability by the different textual schools. Byzantine-type MSS from the Byzantine Empire region centred on Constantinople (present day Istanbul), where the 7 churches of Asia were located (Rev 1:11) are most numerous. Alexandrian-type MSS from the city in Egypt named after Alexander the Great, from whence the Septuagint came, include some of the oldest, though disputed, MSS. The main textual schools tend to champion the Alexandrian-type or the Byzantine-type MSS as though these are at opposing ends of a spectrum *where variances in readings are concerned*, at times forgetting that there are also variances within each family, and similarities among MSS across families.

No two MSS are perfectly identical, but variances among MSS readings are mostly insignificant or unsubstantial. Considering the geographical spread and the laborious hand-copying processes using different sets of archetypes down the centuries, the variances are remarkably small. If anything, they prove the authenticity of the MSS. Those who major on the variances miss the many similarities among the MSS, telling the same story of salvation by grace through God's Son, Jesus Christ! The variances being small in percentage are due to human frailty and fatigue.

Some MSS that display intentional corruption but these tend to be isolated without support by other MSS. As the MSS are the Bibles of believers and assemblies in times past, in the process of reading, glaring errors would have been discovered and not replicated. The majority of MSS, being mostly in agreement, are from a pure, reliable stream. Within this stream, MSS variances tend to exhibit certain tendencies (certain types of human errors are more common) and randomness which allows for meaningful statistical reconstruction of particular textual readings.

The NT truly is Providentially Preserved in a redoubtable pool of extant MSS and sources.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM OR COLLATION

“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity ...the greatest of these is charity. (1Cor 13:12-13)

A proper method of textual classification is required to sort out variances in MSS readings. The scribes in ancient times did this in their comparing and copying processes entailing painstaking labour, meticulous care and time. Today we have powerful computers, but perfect reconstruction remains intricate given the long passage of time and the numbers of extant MSS. In this, the Scripture is right, that today we see in a glass darkly until Jesus Christ returns.

Per Wikipedia: “Textual criticism or ‘*lower*’ criticism’ is a branch of literary criticism concerned with the identification and removal of transcription errors in the texts of manuscripts. Ancient scribes often made errors or alterations when copying manuscripts by hand. Given a manuscript copy, several or many copies, but not the original document, the textual critic seeks to reconstruct the original text (the archetype or autograph) as closely as possible. The same processes can be used to attempt to reconstruct intermediate editions, or recensions, of a document’s transcription history. The ultimate objective of the work is the production of a ‘critical edition’ containing a text most closely approximating the original.”

In today’s edited texts, all the cardinal Christian doctrines are preserved, as they are in the major complete MSS. This is not to say that there is no more place for lower criticism to reach an even purer text closer to the Autographs, but that the ‘Law of Diminishing Returns’ has already set in limiting further gains to the clearing up of minutiae. Richard Bentley as early as 1713⁴ noted,

“The real text of the sacred writers does not now (since the originals have been so long lost) lie in any MS. or edition, but is dispersed in them all. Tis competently exact indeed in the worst MS. now extant; nor is one article of faith or moral precept either perverted or lost in them; choose as awkwardly as you will, choose the worst by design, out of the whole lump of readings ... Make your 30,000 [variations] as many more, if numbers of copies can ever reach that sum: all the better to a knowing and a serious reader, who is thereby more richly furnished to select what he sees genuine. But even put them into the hands of a knave or a fool, and yet with the most sinistrous and absurd choice, he shall not extinguish the light of any one chapter, nor so disguise Christianity, but that every feature of it will still be the same.”

Old Testament Textual Criticism

Jacob ben Hayyim Ibn Adonijah collated a vast number of MT MSS and arranged the Masorah in the 2nd Bomberg edition of the Bible (Venice, 1524-25), which is the basis for the KJV. Elijah Levita in 1538 published the “Massoret ha-Massoret” and collated a vast MT concordance, “Sefer ha-Zikronot”, based on earlier 13th Century works. Elder Buxtor “Tiberias”, 1620, made Levita’s MT accessible to a Christian audience - later re-shuffled in the 8th prolegomenon to Walton’s Polyglot Bible. Other MT editions include the following: -

Everard van der Hooght, 1705, Amsterdam – the basis of most 18th and 19th Century Bibles.

Benjamin Kennicott, 1776, Oxford – the van der Hooght text, the SP and a huge collection of MSS variants and early printed editions; later extended by Johann Bernard de Rossi (1784–8).

Meir Letteris, 1852, a copy of van der Hooght; 2nd edition, 1866 carefully checked against old MSS and became the most widely reproduced text of the Hebrew Bible in history.

Christian David Ginsburg, 1st edition, 1894, close to the 2nd Bomberg edition but with MSS

⁴ “Remarks upon a Late Discourse of Free Thinking, in a Letter to F.H., D.D., by Phileleutherus Lipsiensis (London, 1713), Part I, Sect 32.” This quotation was cited by Dean Burgon as ‘Bentley’s Golden Rule’.

variants and earliest printed editions collated. The 2nd edition 1908–1926, collated more MSS and diverged slightly more from Bomberg.

Biblia Hebraica - first 2 editions in 1906 and 1912 identical to Bomberg 2nd edition but with variants from Hebrew sources and Versions. 3rd edition based on the Leningrad Codex, 1937.

Umberto Cassuto, 1953, based on Ginsburg 2nd edition revised against the Aleppo Codex, Leningrad Codex and other early MSS.

Norman Snaith, 1958, based on Sephardi MSS such as British Museum Or.2626-28 and shown to have combined the accent system of Letteris.

Hebrew University Bible Project, started 1965 by Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, based on the Aleppo Codex where extant, otherwise the Leningrad Codex, with variants from the DSS, LXX, early rabbinic literature and mediaeval MSS. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel published.

Mordechai Breuer - based on the Aleppo Codex, 1977–1982.

Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: a revision of Biblia Hebraica (3rd edition) 1977. Biblia Hebraica Quinta, revision of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia; only 3 volumes (Five Megilloth, Ezra and Nehemiah, Deuteronomy) have been published so far.

OT Textual criticism is predominantly left to Jewish rabbinical scholars, which is the way it should be, except for one little drawback – the reluctance to consult the NT witnesses which in some places of doubt could provide clarifying light. Most of the OT editions however do not differ significantly in meanings and are of high overall reliability.

New Testament Textual Criticism

Desiderius Erasmus edited a Greek NT that in 1516 was the first to be published. He was to publish 4 more editions in 1519, 1522, 1527 and 1535. In his time, he had access to limited Greek MSS, comprising a few late and some earlier Byzantine copies, and at various places such as for the last 6 verses of Revelation, reverse-translated from Jerome's Latin Vulgate into Greek.

Robert Estienne ('Stephanus' or 'Stephens') published 4 NT editions in 1546, 1549, 1550 and 1551. Theodore Beza, an associate of John Calvin, produced 9 editions between 1565 and 1604, with a 10th published posthumously in 1611. The Elzevir brothers, who were publishers, published 3 NT editions in 1624, 1633 and 1650. The preface to the 1633 edition, written by Daniel Heinsius, includes the Latin phrase 'textum ... receptum', resulting in the term Textus Receptus ('TR') or the Received Text, which expanded in use to include the aforesaid editions.

Richard Bentley (1662-1742), keeper of the Royal Libraries and Master of Trinity College (Cambridge) published in 1720 a prospectus for a NT edition including the final chapter of Revelation, outlining critical principles that projected that a text based on early MSS would differ from the TR and from the Clementine Vulgate in about 2,000 instances each.

Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752), Abbot of Alpirsach, published a NT edition in 1734.

Karl Lachmann (1793-1851), German philologist, published 2 NT editions in 1831 and 1842-50, which departed from the TR.

Constantine von Tischendorf (1815-1874) published 8 NT editions, his first in 1840 and last in 1869-72, heavily using Codex Sinaiticus or Ⲁ (Aleph), which he discovered in Mount Sinai

during his 1848 expedition to Egypt. He also produced an editorial on Codex Vaticanus or B, and was made a knight of the order of the North Star by Pope Gregory XVI.

Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (1813-1875), British scholar, spent much of his life gathering data and frequently compared collations with Tischendorf; published one NT edition.

Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901) and Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828-1892) edited 'The New Testament in the Original Greek, 1881', on which the 1881 Revised Version is based. W&H's postulated the 'Theory of Conflation' that scribes down the years combined variant textual readings into conflated verses, to justify selecting shorter verse renderings and cutting out verses that do not appear in certain MSS families, such as B and to an extent κ , on which their text heavily relied. Some of the numerous verses cut out include verses 3, 6, 9, 12, 36, 40, 51, 52 of Luke 24 related to the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ; while others were changed such as 1Tim 3:16 from 'God was manifested in the flesh' to 'He was manifested...' weakening the Biblical emphasis of the Deity of Jesus, who as Emmanuel came in the flesh (Mt 1:23).

W&H's text was controversial at once for its liberal renderings. In earlier writings, Hort had emphasised the divinity (which could mean a "celestial *being, inferior to the supreme God, but superior to man*") rather than Deity of Jesus. Moreover, the final RV product (despite W&H text being a NT text) also changed Isa 7:14 from 'virgin' to 'young woman'.

Frederick H. A. Scrivener (1813–1891) served in the RV Committee, commissioned to revise the AV via "*the removal of 'PLAIN AND CLEAR ERRORS' whether in the Greek Text originally adopted by the Translators, or in the Translation made from the same... Only necessary changes were to be made...they should indicate such alteration in the margin.*" With too many alterations, Archdeacon Palmer and he were assigned to collate them. Scrivener collated 'The New Testament in the Original Greek, according to the Text followed in the Authorized Version, together with the Variations adopted in the Revised Version in 1881', setting forth as the Text followed by the 1611 KJV Translators, Beza's 1598 NT supplemented in over 190 places from other sources and the changes introduced by the Revisers⁵.

John William Burgon (1821-1884), Dean of Chichester, devoted his life working on the Greek texts of the NT, and enunciated 7 critical canons of Textual Criticism, namely, 'Antiquity', 'Number', 'Variety', 'Continuity', 'Respectability of Witnesses', 'Context' and 'Internal Reasonableness'. Witnesses included the Patristic citations and Versions (ancient translations). Burgon laid the groundwork for the 'Majority Text', which favoured the Byzantine MSS due to superiority in numbers while disregarding κ and B due to lack of witnesses. Burgon left behind copious notes for correcting the TR including 150 corrections in Matthew's Gospel alone.⁶

Burgon was perturbed with the 10 years unfolding of the RV and protested to Bishop Ellicott, RV Chairman without much avail. He spent 6 months collating 1Tim 3:16 MSS, Patristic citations and Versions and documented in 76 pages that 89 out of 90 codices plus a majority of patristic citations and Versions support "God was manifested...", 2 notable exceptions being B and κ . Burgon finally wrote 'The Revision Revised' to refute W&H's Greek Text and Theory.

Scrivener and Burgon admired each other as *facile princeps* in textual criticism. Scrivener from within argued against W&H, "pleading faithfully, but he pleaded in vain."⁷ Their efforts

⁵ The Revision Revised - A Refutation of Westcott and Hort's False Greek Text and Theory. 1881. Dean John William Burgon, re-published, Dean Burgon Society; Page 3 and footnotes on pages 49, 50 and 126.

⁶ The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels, Volume I", 1896, by Dean John William Burgon, edited by Edward Miller, M.A posthumously after the Dean's death; Re-published by the Dean Burgon Society; Page 5.

⁷ The Revision Revised, pages 106, 231 and 246

prevented an even worse outcome in 1881 and laid the foundation for future corrective work.

Baron Hermann Freiherr von Soden (1852-1914), US born German scholar, edited 'Die Schriften des neuen Testaments, in ihrer ältesten erreichbaren Textgestalt hergestellt auf Grund ihrer Textgeschichte' (Berlin, Bd. I-IV, 1902-1910), introducing a new MSS notation and a theory that there were 3 recensions of the text in the 4th Century, distinguished as K, H and I, so that a 'family tree' or 'stemmatics' approach was used to reconstruct the ancestor archetypes.

Herman C. Hoskier (1864-1938) edited 'A Full Account and Collation of the Greek Cursive Codex Evangelium 604, Together with Ten Appendices Containing &c.' in 1890.

Zane Clark Hodges (1932-2008), Chairman of NT, Dallas Theological Seminary and Arthur L Farstad (1935-1998), Executive Editor of NKJV Translation, co-published the 2nd edition of 'The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text with Apparatus' in 1985. This work relied on Soden and Hoskier's Textual Apparatus as well as stemmatics.

William Grover Pierpont (1914-2003) and Maurice A. Robinson co-edited 'The Greek New Testament: Byzantine Textform' from 1976 to 1991, relying on Soden and Hoskier's Textual Apparatus but not their stemmatics but instead stayed closely to Burgon's 7 critical canons.

Eberhard Nestle (1851-1913) and his son Erwin Nestle (1883-1972) nearly harmonized all the major Greek Texts into one cohesive Critical Edition. Eberhard sided with his German countrymen, Lachmann, Tischendorf and W&H but his approach was more eclectic and less biased towards B and κ . His first published edition was in 1898. When he died, his son Erwin made several changes beginning with the 13th Edition in 1927 that added a Critical Apparatus which facilitated independent scholastic judgements based on a greater degree of information.

Kurt Aland (1915-1994), Professor of Church History and NT Textual Criticism at Muenster (Germany), served as co-editor of Nestle's Novum Testamentum graece. His wife Dr Barbara Aland later joined him as joint-editor, and the text is presently called the Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece. Kurt incorporated his own textual labours in the 26th Edition in 1979, resulting in an independently established text that reflected new MSS finds. Verses 3, 6, 9, 12, 36, 40, 51, 52 of Luke 24 left out by W&H was reinstated following the discovery of P75, a near relative of Vaticanus which included all 8 verses by the original scribe.

Bruce Metzger (born 1914), Executive Committee Member of the United Bible Societies new series of Greek Texts (1966, 1968, 1975, 1993) and Principal Editor of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV 1989). He noted that modern scholars have about 60 times the MSS evidence as did the RV Committee of 1881. Metzger wrote a companion work to the UBS Greek NT, 'A Textual Commentary of The Greek New Testament (1975)' which explains verse by verse the textual thinking and decisions of the Committee that totals over 2,000 variant readings.

Summary of NT Textual Collation

Today, many of W&H's alterations have been reversed. All the major English Bibles such as the ESV, KJV, NKJV, NASV, NIV and RSV have reinstated the verses scissored out of Luke 24 and also correctly state 'virgin' in Matt 1:23 and Luke 1:27. (Even for Isa 7:14, all the above versions with the exception of the RSV have 'virgin'.)

The 7 cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith: - 1) the Deity of Jesus, 2) Jesus' Virgin birth, 3) Atonement by Jesus' Blood, 4) Justification by Faith, 5) Jesus' bodily resurrection on the third day, 6) the Second Coming of Christ, and 7) Salvation through Grace by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone; are fully supported in today's edited texts and reflected in the major translations.

KJV-Only advocates such as David Cloud however strangely assert that all modern English Bibles do not support these cardinal doctrines. Dr James D Price (born 1925), NKJV Executive Editor of OT, examined 8 selected Bible versions available on BibleWorks 5 - the NKJV 1982, ASV 1901, NASV 1995, NIV 1984, RSV 1952, NRSV 1989, NLT and NWT, and found in his 79-page⁸ report that with the exception of the Jehovah's Witness 'New World Translation', all the versions support the 7 cardinal doctrines, some even more strongly than the KJV.

An Extreme Acid Test: Differences between NA-27 and Robinson-Pierpont

Dr Price also cited the work of Vincent Broman⁹ who evaluated the 7,041 known differences between the texts of two most opposite textual schools: the Nestle-Aland 27th edition based on Alexandrian-type MSS readings and the Robinson-Pierpont text based on Byzantine-type MSS readings. Taking the NT word population as the TR's 140,745 words, the 7,041 variances work out to 5% of the NT, i.e., 95% of the NT is without dispute. The 9 types of the 7,041 differences were then evaluated for effects, classified by 'No Effect', 'Mild Effect' and 'Significant Effect' for meaning, with a separate evaluation for 'Translation Effect Only', as different Greek words are regularly translated into the same English word and have no translation effect. For each of these tests, to avoid statistical bias, the first 30 occurrences of each difference are evaluated. The findings were then extrapolated to the population, resulting in the table below.

Ref	Type of Differences	Total No	No Effect	Mild Effect	Significant Effect	Translation Effect Only
1	Change of word division spacing	51	50	1	-	1
2	Insertion or deletion of movable <i>υ</i>	183	183			
3	Other minor spelling differences	406	406			
4	Deletion of a word	593	534	59		136
5	Insertion of a word	1,729	1,210	346	173	922
6	One word substituted for another	2,444	1,955	245	244	562
7	Interchange of <i>κα</i> for <i>δε</i> and <i>δε</i> for <i>κα</i>	55	55			
8	Transposition of words	748	748			
9	More complex miscellaneous	832	585	192	55	333
	Summary	7,041	5,726	843	472	1,954
	Distribution	100.0%	81.3%	12.0%	6.7%	27.8%
	%age effect using TR's 140,745 words	5.0%	4.07%	0.60%	0.335%	1.39%

Of the 7,041 differences, 6.7% had a significant effect on meaning and 27.8% had an effect on translation. As a percentage of the entire NT, the effects on meaning and translation are 0.335% and 1.39%, which is to say that the two opposite texts agree 99.67% and 98.61% of the time on meanings and translations respectively, which are high degrees of certainty!

For avoidance of doubt, this does not mean that 0.335% of the NT text is in error but simply that consensus among the MSS, in the case of two opposite textual approaches, yields a variance in meanings 0.335% of the time. A variance and an error are not the same thing. Given the ample MSS bases of the two texts, there is almost absolute certainty that in those places where the texts differ, one or the other is the true Autographic meaning. The average departure of either text meanings from the autographic meaning thus is only 0.168%; or a very high 99.832% certainty!

Summary of Textual Criticism Results

Today we have the most reliable texts of the complete Canon of the Bible in our hands of any ages past. Where there may be any imperfection or doubt in any particular text reading, we have Textual Apparatuses comprehensively listing MSS variations at any place. Beyond this, we

⁸ King James Onlyism: A New Sect, 2006, Dr James D. Price, pp 315 to 394.

⁹ King James Onlyism: A New Sect, 2006, Appendix J, pp 591 to 622. A correction was made to a very small summation error detected in the table, which I then re-extrapolated, without much significant effect.

should learn to be content, like the KJV 1611 Translators who in their Preface to the Reader explained the “diversity of senses in the margin, where there is great probability for each”,

“It hath pleased God in his Divine Providence here and there to scatter words and sentences of that difficulty and doubtfulness, not in doctrinal points that concern salvation, (for in such it hath been vouched that the Scriptures are plain) but in matters of less moment, that fearfulness would better beseech us than confidence, and if we will resolve, to resolve upon modesty with S. Augustine: It is better to make doubt of those things which are secret, than to strive about those things that are uncertain.”

The conclusions that may be rightly drawn are:- 1) The Word of God is Providentially Preserved in the extant MSS and the edited texts, through the painstaking labours of the scribes in ancient times, and textual scholars from the 16th Century AD on; 2) It is useful to have more than one Bible version (this author uses the KJV as reference text and consult other versions as helps) but use these with discernment; and 3) In all matters that concerns cardinal doctrines of the faith and of salvation, the Word of God is vouchsafe. No one using the better Bible translations today should be afraid that they would not be saved on account that their Bibles contain errors.

CONCLUSION

“The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever” (Isa 40:8)

The Bible is not any ordinary human writing but is the divinely-breathed out Words of Almighty God recorded by His holy servants under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. These Divine Words are authentic at the instance of giving and recognised as such (i.e. canonical) by God’s people of old, who in course reverentially made meticulous hand copies for distribution and posterity. Through these means, the Word of God is by God’s singular care and providence, preserved pure in all ages, as manifested in the extant MSS that have survived out of a stream of all the Bibles of believers and assemblies of old down the generations.

The ancient scribal copyists laboured in copying and correcting textual aberrations. From the 16th Century onwards, textual critics laboured through the extant MSS to derive as nearly as possible the original Autographic readings. Today’s edited texts are of extremely high levels of certainty, complemented with Textual Apparatuses containing the important variant readings. In these, we have the Word of God today with absolute confidence, with every cardinal Christian doctrine and the teachings of Christ pertaining to holy living entirely preserved.

Truly, the Word of God stands forever!

What remains now is to obey the Scriptures and show forth charity out of a pure heart, and a good conscience and faith unfeigned, which is the goal of all instruction. In this, the Lord Jesus both promised and warned, “He that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.” (1Tim 1:5, Mt 13:12-14, Mk 4:24-25)

There is a strange fire today advocating that the preservation of God's Word is '*supernatural and miraculous, extraordinary providence*' rather than simply Providential. This teaching recently took on the name 'Verbal Plenary Preservation' and holds that the KJV Translators in 1611 were miraculously inspired to 'restore a perfect Textus Receptus' underlying the KJV Bible – which contradicts God's promise that His Word shall not depart out of the mouth of His people from generation to generation and forever (Isa 59:21), for in order for the KJV Translators to restore a perfect text in 1611, the text must first earlier have been corrupted.

As in the days when 2 priestly sons of Aaron offered strange fire at God's altar (Lev 10:1, Num 3:4, 26:61), some pastors today play with strange fire resulting in wreckage and confusion in many previously fraternal churches. We shall briefly examine why VPP is a strange fire that must be put away in the Church of Jesus Christ the Lord, the Living God.

Is Preservation of God's Word Miraculous or Providential?

"Jesus said, 'Take away the stone...' Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth'" (Jn 11:39a, 43)

Let us first observe the difference between 'miraculous', 'supernatural' and 'providential'.

A **miracle** is a perceptible interruption of the laws of nature. When Almighty God created the Universe ex-nihilo, it was entirely miraculous. God spoke the words, "Let us make..." and it was so. On its own, the processes of nature could not result in the creation of the Universe.

The term **supernatural** (Latin: *super*, 'above' + *natura* 'nature') pertains to an order of existence beyond the scientifically visible universe. The term supernatural beings may mean aside from God, beings such as angels or demons that are not deity. (The term 'Divine Intervention', by contrast would refer specifically to the direct involvement of God.) The out-of-the ordinary acts of supernatural beings are supernatural acts, which may include 'miracles'.

After the Universe was formed, the interaction of nature between the sun and the earth created the rain clouds that rain upon the earth, which in turn yields forth vegetation in regular cycles. This manner in which God through the laws of nature replenishes the earth and provides for the sustenance of His creatures is **Providential**. God miraculously created the Universe only once! Thereafter, the universal laws of nature that God in His Immense Wisdom put in place at Creation, operates and continues to operate providentially in sustaining His creatures.

One of the truths taught in the account of Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead is that God expects man do that which man can do, while God alone does the miraculous. Thus the Son of God commanded the people to roll away the stone from Lazarus' grave, which the men could do, after which He commanded Lazarus to come forth, which only He as God could do.

When God gave His Word, He acted divinely in breathing out His Word and superintending over the holy writers. The scribes thereafter had the ability to make careful and exact hand-crafted copies of the Originals for distribution and posterity. Once the Word of God was given, God only had to preserve His people from generation to generation, who in turn would read, apply and preserve His Word. (Deut 33:3, 1Sam 2:9, Ps 37:28, 145:20, 1Pet 1:5, Jude 1:1)

Do Matt 5:18 and 24:35 teach Verbal Plenary Preservation?

“For assuredly, I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law, till all is fulfilled.” (Mt 5:18)

“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” (Mt24:35)

When the earth passes away, all it contains including all apographs shall also pass away! The reference therefore cannot be to material apographs but to the absolute authority and inviolable claims of God’s Word upon us, as Mt 7:28-29 at the end of the Sermon on the Mount shows.

The Lord Jesus ministered in Hebrew-Aramaic throughout His earthly ministry. Thus the KJV Translators rendered the Greek *iota* (iota, ‘the smallest Gk letter’) as jot (a transliteration of the Hebrew yodh י), and *keraiā* (keraiā, ‘dot’) as tittle (the smallest Hebrew stroke) in Matt 5:18 (Sermon on the Mount). Yet no Hebrew jot or tittle is found in the NT! Clearly Jesus meant the power and effect of every iota and stroke of God’s Law shall not pass away till all is fulfilled.

In Mt 5:18, Jesus was referring to the Law (Torah) and specifically the 5th to 10th Commandments summed as, ‘Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself’ (Lev 19:18, Gal 5:14), which He illuminated in Mt 5:19-48. No iota of the Law shall pass away till all is fulfilled. In Mt 5:17, Jesus said that He had come to fulfil all the requirements of the Law and the prophecies of the Prophets concerning Himself. This He did by living a perfect, sinless life and offering Himself as God’s sacrificial Lamb for our sins. Heaven and earth not yet having passed away, Jesus already has once and for all fulfilled the Law! (Jn 19:30) Hallelujah, praise the Lord!

In Mt 24:35 (Mk 13:31, Lk 21:33), Jesus was referring to His words that He had just told His Disciples, i.e., His prophecies in Mt 24:4-34 in answer to their questions in Mt 24:3 of when the Temple would be destroyed and the sign of His coming and of the end of the world. These prophetic words of our Lord Jesus are so assuredly certain that heaven and earth shall pass away but His words shall not. In 70AD a good part of these were fulfilled absolutely and accurately.

Very clearly, Mt 5:18 and 24:35 do not teach ‘Verbal Plenary Preservation’.

Does Ps 12:6-7 teach Verbal Plenary Preservation?

“Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men. (Ps 12:1)

“The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation forever.” (Ps 12:6-7)

Please refer to our 3-page exegesis “Ps 12:6-7 God’s Promise to Preserve His People”, which shows irrefutably that Ps 12:6-7 refers to the preservation of the saints, i.e. including the godly man of verse 1, and not the words. If the verses did refer to the words, which they do not, this would still contradict VPP, which postulates that the words were not kept pure until 1611.

Does the Bible Contain Any Mistakes?

“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.” (1Pet 1:23)

Absolutely not, for the Word of God is incorruptible and liveth and abideth forever!

Sadly, VPP proponents falsely depict those who do not subscribe to their extreme views as saying that ‘the Bible has mistakes’. They are the true guilty parties who say that all modern (i.e. non KJV) versions are corrupt and satanic, thus causing many to doubt their Bibles.

Do Translations of the Bible (KJV, NIV and CUV, etc) have Mistakes?

All the available translated versions exhibit variances in their translated forms (English, Chinese, etc). If by perfect, we mean that the translations are 100% free from errors in grammar, diction, meaning and senses, and from human frailty; no translation is perfect, i.e. as to jot and tittle of each letter and meaning reflected. All major translations have also undergone revisions to correct clear and obvious errors. The KJV after its publication in 1611 was revised in 1613, 1616, 1629, 1631, 1638, 1717, 1745, 1762 and 1769 with numerous changes.

The translations are also based on different underlying reconstructed or edited Hebrew-Aramaic-Greek texts that exhibit variances from each other. However, despite the variances, we have today very reliable edited texts with all the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith intact, and these are reflected in all the better modern translations. (See 'Textual Criticism' above).

Does this mean that the Perfect Bible is Lost Forever?

"Forever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven." (Ps 119:89)

"And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail." (Rev 11:19)

Forever, no! For the **Original** is kept in the Ark of His Testament in God's Temple in heaven!

On earth, we have the extant MSS, edited texts and Critical Apparatuses reflecting the Autographs to the highest degree of reliability, in the manner in which God in His Sovereign Wisdom chose to communicate all His Word, Providentially Preserved through the ages, to us.