

Has the Bible Been Changed?

The Bible is a collection of texts written over about 1,600 years by at least 40 separate authors. The 39 Jewish texts of the Old Testament (OT) were written from about 1,500 - 400 BC. The 27 Christian texts of New Testament (NT) were written from about 40 - 90 AD. Together these texts demonstrate an inherent design that binds them into one integrative work.

In ancient times the Jewish Scriptures were copied by hand, but were extremely accurate copy to copy. The Jews had a class of scribes who used strict methods to insure that copying errors were avoided. A single copying error might require the destruction of the entire scroll. There are thousands of exist OT manuscripts and fragments that agree phenomenally with each other. These texts also agree substantially with the Septuagint (translated from Hebrew to Greek during the 3rd century BC). The Dead Sea Scrolls also provide evidence for the reliability of the ancient transmission of the Jewish Scriptures.

The manuscript evidence for the NT is comprised of over 24,000 ancient copies and fragments, at least 5,600 of which are in the original Greek. The earliest known fragment is a portion of the Gospel of John dated at 125 - 150 AD. Compare that with Plato's Tetralogies, of which only 7 ancient copies exist, the earliest dated about 1,200 years after Plato wrote the original. When the Bible manuscripts are compared to other ancient writings, they stand alone as the best-preserved literary works of all antiquity. Between each manuscript copy there is 99.5% agreement, the few errors are mainly grammatical.

Some Early Extra-Biblical References to Jesus

Cornelius Tacitus (55 - 120 AD) was a Roman historian who lived through the reigns of many Roman emperors.

"Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius."

Flavius Josephus (37 - 100 AD) was a Jewish historian and general who turned to the side of the Romans in the great Jewish revolt of 66-70 AD. For centuries Josephus' works were widely read and translated into many languages.

"At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders." Antiquities, Book 18, Chapter 3 (translated from 4th century Arabic manuscript).

Israeli scholar Prof. Shlomo Pines addressed this reference and the historicity of Jesus in general in the following quote:

"In fact, as far as probabilities go, no believing Christian could have produced such a neutral text: for him the only significant point about it could have been its attesting the historical evidence of Jesus. But the fact is that until modern times this particular hare (i.e. claiming Jesus is a hoax) was never started. Even the most bitter opponents of Christianity never expressed any doubt as to Jesus having really lived."

Lucian of Samosata (120 - ~180 AD) was a second century Greek satirist and rhetorician. Though he ridicules the Christians, this reference affirms that Jesus was crucified and that He was the founder of Christianity.

"The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day - the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account... It was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers from the moment they are converted and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws..."

Mara Bar-Serapion (Post 70 AD) was a stoic philosopher from Syria. He wrote the following in a letter to his son, sometime after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans (70 AD):

"What advantage did the Jews gain from their executing their wise king? It was just after that that their kingdom was abolished. ... Nor did the wise king die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he had given."

Celsus (~ 178 AD) was a second century Roman author and avid opponent of Christianity. He went to great lengths to disprove the divinity of Jesus yet never denied His actual existence. He sets himself up for criticism by mimicking the exact accusations brought against Jesus by the Pharisees which had already been addressed and refuted in the New Testament.

"One who was a god could neither flee nor be led away a prisoner... What great deeds did Jesus perform as God? Did he put his enemies to shame or bring to an end what was designed against him? No calamity happened even to him who condemned him... Why does he not give some manifestation of his divinity, and free himself from this reproach, and take vengeance upon those who insult both him and his Father?"

Celsus ridicules Jesus for the same reasons that the Pharisees at His crucifixion ridiculed Him, 'if Jesus was the Son of God, why didn't He save Himself from the cross?' Neither Celsus nor the Pharisees understood the spiritual implications of Jesus' sacrificial death to atone for the sin of those who believe.

Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (69 - 130 AD) was a secretary and historian to Hadrian, Emperor of Rome from 117 to 138 AD. Regarding Emperor Claudius (41-54 AD) and the Riot of Rome in 49 AD, Suetonius wrote:

"As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus [Christ], he expelled them from Rome."

Acts 18:2 relates that Paul met Aquila and his wife Priscilla after they left Italy because Claudius had expelled them.

Thallus (~ 52 AD) Although his works exist only in fragments today, Julius Africanus debated Thallus' explanation of the midday darkness which occurred during Jesus' crucifixion. Thallus tried to dismiss the darkness as a solar eclipse but Africanus pointed out that a solar eclipse cannot physically occur during a full moon due to the alignment of the planets. Phlegon of Tralles, a 2nd century secular historian, also mentions the darkness and tries to dismiss it as a solar eclipse. He also stated the event occurred during the time of Tiberius.

"On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness. The rocks were rent by an earthquake and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his History, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun. ...But an eclipse of the sun takes place only when the moon comes under the sun. And it cannot happen at any other time... Phlegon records that, in the time of Tiberius Caesar, at full moon, there was a full eclipse of the sun from the sixth hour to the ninth-manifestly that one of which we speak."

Pliny the Younger (63 - 113 AD) was a Roman governor who tortured and executed Christians. He wrote the following in a letter to Emperor Trajan.

"... I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition... Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinancy surely deserve to be punished."

This passage gives an example of the fulfillment of prophecy (as given by Jesus and recorded in Matthew Chapter 24). [They] were denounced to me as Christians ('they will deliver you to tribulation')... [and] executed ('and will kill you')... [for] the nature of their creed ('on account of My name').

Biblical Prophecy and History

The fulfillment of prophecy attests to the Bible being divinely inspired. Bible prophecy is history revealed in advance, predicting events such as the rise and fall of empires and the destruction of cities. Archaeology has confirmed many of the prophesied events and Biblical accounts of history.

Cyrus: In about 700 BC, the prophet Isaiah foretold that a man named Cyrus would give a decree to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple (Isaiah 44:28). In 586 BC, the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. The Jews living there were either killed or taken captive to Babylon. In about 539 BC, the Babylonian Empire was conquered by the Persians. Shortly after, a Persian king named Cyrus issued a decree that the Jews could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. This decree is confirmed by an ancient stone cylinder that details many events of Cyrus' reign.

Alexander the Great: The Book of Daniel was written during the Babylonian Captivity. Due to the accuracy of its predictions, some argue that it must have been written after that time. 'Evidences Relating to the Date of the Book of Daniel' at tektonics.org gives a detailed case for the 6th century dating.

Daniel 11:3-4: *And a mighty king shall stand up, that shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. And when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven; and not to his posterity, nor according to his dominion which he ruled: for his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others beside those.*

The "mighty king" was Alexander the Great who, shortly after conquering the Persian Empire, died abruptly at the age of 32. His empire was not bequeathed to his children but instead was divided up amongst his generals. Four lesser kingdoms emerged from the rubble of Alexander's empire.

Jericho: The Book of Joshua tells us that when the Israelites besieged Jericho, God commanded them to walk around the walls of the city seven times and on the seventh the wall fell beneath itself (Joshua 6). Archaeologists have discovered the ruins of Jericho and uncovered evidence that supports the Biblical account. One such finding is that the walls fell in a way that formed a ramp, making quick entry into the city possible.

Jesus: Written throughout the Old Testament texts there are many *Messianic prophecies* which Jesus fulfilled. Here are just a few examples: He was born of a virgin (Isa 7:14) in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2) thus being the *seed of the woman* (Gen 3:15). Before the destruction of the Temple (Dan 9:24) Jesus underwent rejection, beating and crucifixion, to make atonement for sin (Zec 12:10, Psa 22, Isa 52:13-53:12) and salvation through Him would be offered to all (Gen 12:3, Isa 49:6, 65:1).

The Flood and the Tower of Babel

If the earth's surface was smooth the water in the oceans would cover it at least 2.4 kms deep. The Biblical account of the Flood indicates more than rising waters. Plate tectonic shifts, volcanic activity, and rapid movement of large volumes of water would have caused huge changes to the earth. The immense volume of receding waters would have had vastly powerful erosive effects, carving out canyons and valleys. The thick sedimentary rock formations that span thousands of miles, stacked coal seams, peperites, fluidization pipes and polystrate fossils are some of the features which indicate widespread watery catastrophe conditions attributable to the Flood.

Although not a simple task, Noah just had to have the Ark built and supplies gathered. God's providence ensured Noah's acts of faith would overcome the odds. Genesis tells us that God gave Noah the plans for building the Ark. Naval architects have shown that the Ark's design was ideal for its purpose. It would have been an enormously stable vessel, able to resist being overturned in massive seas. The Ark's volume was at least 43,200 cubic metres, the equivalent volume of 522 standard railroad stock cars, each of which can hold 240 sheep. The Ark only had to accommodate two of each (seven of some) land-dwelling, nostril-breathing animal kinds, not every species or variety. Large animals could have been represented by juveniles. God brought all the animals to the Ark.

After the Flood, God commanded Noah's family to multiply and fill the earth. However, their descendants disobeyed and stayed in one city, spoke the same language, and set out to construct the Tower of Babel: a focal point of their unified rebellion. To stop this, God imposed separate languages and scattered them over the whole earth. This dispersion broke up a large interbreeding group into smaller inbreeding groups, resulting in certain fixed physical features and the development of the "races" (people groups) we see today.

Remarkably, an astounding amount of cultures have accounts of a world-destroying flood. Often these have striking parallels to the original account, such as: judgement upon evil, people saved in a boat, the sending out of birds, a rainbow, and more.

When God judges their sins, will a rapist say, "Some guys did worse things," and obtain mercy? Have you rebelled against God? Have you done evil? Here's a way to find out: Have you ever lied? Stolen? Used God's name in vain? Desired to commit adultery or murder? God will hold us accountable for every sinful deed, word and thought. God's standard is perfection. How then can we be saved? God sent His Son Jesus to lead a sinless life, then took the wrath of God upon Himself to pay the penalty for sin and satisfy God's need for justice. Confess your sin to God, repent and trust in Jesus for salvation.

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Science, History and the Bible

The debates about religion, science and politics continue to rage. What is the truth? One inescapable truth is that we will all be part of the ultimate statistic, 10 out of 10 die. Most agree that our physical death is forever, final, eternal. Each one of us at any moment can be one heartbeat away from eternity. Your heart beats about 100,000 times a day. One day, one of those beats will be your last. There are a variety of beliefs about what happens after we die. Is there any way to know what will happen? Can we afford to gamble our eternity on an uncertainty?

Evolution: Another Faith Based Belief

To support evolutionary theory, natural selection and mutations would have to add new information to the genetic code. However, observed mutations (like antibiotic resistance) are neutral (no gain or loss of information) or downhill (a loss).

The term natural selection describes a process by which genetic variants more suitable for a particular environment survive and breed, and the unsuitable variants die off. This process can only *select* from the existing genes that are already present in a genetic code. It cannot add new genetic information.

Dr Ian Macreadie (microbiologist): "All you see in the lab is either gene duplication, reshuffling of existing genes, or defective genes that might help a bug to survive - e.g., by not binding to an antibiotic as effectively. But you never see any new information... Evolution would argue for things improving, whereas I see everything falling to pieces. Genes being corrupted, mutations causing an increasing community burden of inherited diseases. All things were well designed initially."

The Bible tells us that God originally created various 'kinds' (parent types) of living organisms. A familiar example of variations within a kind is the amount of dog breeds there are. Each kind would originally have had a complete genetic code, which has since been degraded. The original abundance of genes provided diverse variability, allowing a measure of adaptability for survival when environmental conditions changed.

Scientific Facts in the Bible

The Bible contains many verses that are in accordance with scientific facts. Earth is round (Isa 40:22), floats in space (Job 26:7) and turns on axis (Job 38:14), innumerable amount of stars (Jer 33:22), each is different (1 Cor 15:41), light moves (Job 38:19), air has weight (Job 28:25), wind blows in cyclones (Ecc 1:6), 2nd Law of Thermodynamics (Heb 10:11-12), wash under running water to deal with disease (Lev 15:13), and more.

God told Abraham to circumcise his family's male newborns on the eighth day after their birth (Gen 17:12). Modern medical science has discovered that the eighth day is the only time in life that the blood clotting element prothrombin is above 100%.