

Archaeology Confirms the Integrity of the Bible Text

Archaeology has not only been a powerful tool for refuting claims from the Bible's enemies that it contains errors, it has also served to reassure us that the Bible we have today is an accurate representation of the original texts. Over the last couple of centuries archaeology has made significant contributions that have greatly aided in the areas of manuscript accuracy; the understanding of words used in the Bible; knowledge of the economic, cultural, social, and political background of biblical passages; and, with the discovery of literally thousands of manuscripts, attestation to the Bible's early origin and accuracy of our modern translations.

As of 1986, archaeology has uncovered over 24,000 pieces of manuscript evidence for the New Testament, of which over 10,000 are in Latin and more than 5300 in Greek. No other document of antiquity comes close to that amount of manuscript support. The document that comes closest by comparison is the Iliad by Homer with only 643 surviving manuscripts. Furthermore, the manuscript evidence of the New Testament is found closer to the original text than for any other ancient document. The New Testament was compiled between A.D. 40 and A.D. 100. The first fragment dates from about A.D. 125 and the first complete manuscripts from about A.D. 325-350. By comparison, the Iliad dates from about 900 B.C. with the first fragment appearing no earlier than 500 B.C. and the first full manuscript sometime in the thirteenth century. No one has claimed that we do not have a reliable text of the Iliad. With the much shorter time between the compilation of the New Testament and the date of the earliest manuscripts, there is no reason to doubt the reliability of the New Testament.

For another comparison consider the Greek history compiled by Herodotus (480-425 B.C.). There are only eight manuscripts of his work surviving, the earliest dating from about A.D. 900. A gap of about 1300 years exists between the source and the earliest copy. Again, no scholar doubts that we have a reliable record of the works of Herodotus.

The evidence for the New Testament so far exceeds that of any other ancient writing that the noted biblical scholar F. J. A. Hort wrote, "...in variety and fullness of the evidence on which it rests the text of the New Testament (sic) stands absolutely and unapproachably alone among ancient prose writings." If we cannot accept that we have an accurate account of the New Testament based upon the manuscript evidence, we must reject every piece of ancient literature. John Warwick Montgomery recognized this fact when he wrote, "... to be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament."

Archaeology has proven that 1) we have a reliable account of what was written in the first century and 2) it is accurate where it crosses paths with secular history. Dr. Nelson Glueck wrote, "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference..." Glueck further observed "... the almost incredibly

accurate historical memory of the Bible, and particularly so when it is fortified by archaeological fact.”

Although the modern media, publishing, and academia, whenever it addresses Christianity, the Bible, or biblical issues, continues to dredge up maverick scholars who persist in raising doubts about and casting dispersions upon the Bible, the evidence overwhelmingly supports the trustworthiness of it. Modern scholars, sometimes grudgingly and sometimes not, recognize this fact. Professor H. H. Rowley wrote:

... it is not because scholars of today begin with more conservative presuppositions than their predecessors that they have a much greater respect for the Patriarchal stories than was formerly common, but because the evidence warrants it.

Archaeology honestly pursued is a friend of the Bible and we are grateful to its contribution in providing to mankind reassurance that the Bible is what it purports to be.