

The Logic of Faith

Introduction

It is often thought that to believe in God you have to choose between logic or faith, with the presumption that faith is blind whilst logic is rational. This notion, however, could not be further from the truth. Faith in the bible is grounded on the rational evidence that the bible is true, whether it is archaeological evidence, or prophetic passages that against the odds have come to pass exactly as described, or the internal harmony of the text itself. True faith is not some special ability that some possess and others do not, it is never blind but is firmly based on the straight forward evidence set out in the pages of scripture. In the same way that you can trust a person that has shown over time that they are reliable, the bible contains very powerful evidence for its reliability.

The bible itself makes this very clear when it claims that not only are the words of its pages “inspired by God” but then elsewhere challenges the believer to test the truth of the message it contains, in particular the words of prophecy, to prove that they are God’s word. The Bible is somewhat unique for the prophetic statements that make its pages testable. Below are some examples of a few of those passages which illustrate this principle:

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3 v 16 - 17)

“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; 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.” (2 Peter 1 v 19 - 21)

“...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.” (Deuteronomy 18 v 22)

The following pages explain why we as bible students so strongly believe that the bible is God’s word.

It is His message to humankind about the creator’s plan and purpose for this earth and why the bible is the one book above all others that can be trusted.

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The Inspiration of Scripture

To anyone studying the Bible it is of vital importance to know where the ideas in the Bible came from. If they are merely the opinions of ancient clerics then they are of historical interest but there is no need to take them especially seriously today. If, on the other hand, they represent the words of a higher authority, then they provide a guide to life that must not be ignored.

The Bible makes claims for itself. For example:-

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

This passage tells us that the Bible is inspired by God. However, to understand this claim it is necessary to decide what is meant by the word inspiration.

The phrase given by inspiration of God in this passage translates one word from the original Greek, the word *theopneustos*. This word only occurs once in the Bible and is not found in Greek literature outside the Bible (apart from later commentaries on this passage). It appears to have been derived from two other words, the word *theos*, which means "God", and the word *pneustos*, which means "breathed" but is related to the word *pneuma* which means "breath" and also "spirit". One can thus decide that the word means that the scriptures were brought about by the action of God's Spirit.

To see the detail of this one needs, however, to look at further passages.

The Evidence of Peter

19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; to which ye do well that ye take heed, as to a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: 20 Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. 21 For prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet 1:19-21)

In this passage Peter is referring to the witnesses available to show that the apostles were teaching a true message. The first witness Peter describes is the apostles who were eyewitnesses of the doings and words of Jesus but this, he tells us, is supported by the certain evidence of the Old Testament Scriptures. He goes on to tell us that these cannot be interpreted haphazardly; they have a definite meaning of their own because they are given by God and not by the will of man. The prophets spoke what was given them by the Holy Spirit. This means that the words of the scriptures are the words of God.

This picture extends not only to the Old Testament and to the words of Jesus. According to the writings of Peter, the New Testament Epistles are also Scripture:-

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given to him hath written to you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction. (2 Pet 3:15-16)

This passage refers to the letters of Paul along side other Biblical writings. It calls these the other scriptures which means that the letters of Paul were also considered scriptures in exactly the same way as the Old Testament.

The Evidence of the Prophets

In the Old Testament prophets often introduce their revelations by words similar to these:-

1 Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 2 Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD... (Jer 2:1-2)

This passage uses the phrase “The word of the LORD came to me saying”... This phrase tells us that what follows is not the words of the prophet but the words of God. Another phrase also found in the passage above and many other passages is “Thus saith the LORD”. Again this phrase introduces words that are being described as coming directly from God.

The phrase “Saith the LORD” appears 802 times in the Old Testament (413 times in the form “Thus saith the LORD”) and the phrase The word of the LORD came to me occurs 92 times in the Old Testament. The idea that the words of the scripture come directly from God is found throughout the Bible; it is a general description of the way that the Bible was revealed. Indeed, there is an explicit statement by God that this is the way that he reveals himself through prophets:-

I will raise up to them a Prophet from among their brethren, like thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him. (Deut 18:18)

It is important to note that the prophet is to be made to speak all the words that God commands. Indeed God says that he will put his own words in the prophet’s mouth. Thus the words spoken (and written) by the prophets as revelations from God were not their own words but the words that God put in their mouth, as the passage states clearly.

This was clearly the experience of the prophets themselves as they wrote. David said, for example:- “The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and his word was on my tongue.” (2 Sam 23:2); a similar thought is expressed by Samuel in 1 Sam 28:17.

Other passages where it is explicitly stated that the words are God's include:-

And God spoke all these words, saying... (Ex 20:1)

And the LORD answered me, and said... (Hab 2:2)

How God Revealed Himself through a Prophet

The fact that the prophet spoke God's words is clearly attested in scripture. The mechanism that God used to do this is also described to some extent in the Bible.

There are three places in the Old Testament where the prophet describes his experience in hearing the word of God and proclaiming it to other people.

Balaam

Balaam was a prophet of God, but not an Israelite. He was required by Balak, king of Moab, to curse the Children of Israel as they ended their wanderings in the wilderness after the Exodus and were about to enter the promised land. However, Balaam explained to Balak that he would be unable to do anything as a prophet which had not originated with God.

And Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more. (Num 22:18)

The point was that Balaam knew that his prophecies simply repeated messages from God. He could not decide what they would contain. In spite of this Balak took him up to a mountain to curse Israel, but no curse came. Instead of a curse, Balaam's words were a blessing. When he was called on to answer for himself, Balaam said the following:-

If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the commandment of the LORD, to do either good or bad of my own mind; but what the LORD saith, that will I speak. (Num 24:13)

This describes the way that the prophet received revelation; the words were given him by God and he could not change them.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah was the writer of one of the largest books of the whole Bible. He describes this throughout as the Word of the LORD God. These verses are taken from the very start of Jeremiah and are all part of Jeremiah's claim to speak the word of God exactly as God gave it.

To whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. (Jer 1:2)

This records the claim that the Word of God came to Jeremiah. Thus the words of the prophecy are God's and not the prophet's own.

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,... (Jer 1:4)

This reveals the claim that the following words, at least, are the words of God rather than of the prophet. The passage is saying that these following words are the words of God exactly as God spoke them.

Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. (Jer 1:9)

Here we have the claim that the words of the prophecy are words that were placed in the prophet's mouth by God. They are thus words that originated with God and not with the prophet.

Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD... (Jer 2:1-2)

The passage here makes the claim that the following words are exactly God's. "Thus saith the LORD" is telling us that the words following are an exact repetition of what God has said to the prophet. Not only that but the words "Thus saith the LORD" are part of what the word of God originally said to Jeremiah. Even the witness to the words coming from God was given by God.

Having been given the words of God the prophet was constrained to deliver them to other people without omitting or changing any part of the text. Jeremiah's experience with this is also described in his prophecy:-

For since I spoke, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the LORD was made a reproach to me, and a derision, daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not refrain. (Jer 20:8-9)

Jeremiah did not want to deliver the words of God. They were unpopular words and Jeremiah was persecuted for them. He therefore attempted to leave them unsaid, but found that he could not do so. The words seem to have burned into his heart so that he could not ignore them or forget them and he was forced to deliver them to the people for whom they were intended.

Amos

Amos described the way that the word of God came irresistibly into his life by an analogy:-

The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy? (Amos 3:8)

What is being said here is that the words of God were fixed in the prophet's mind and he was then no more able to ignore them than he could fail to be afraid if he met a roaring lion. However, the prophets seem to have heard the word's spoken by God rather than to simply have found a strange message in their memories.

Visions and Events

Sometimes the prophets would receive a vision or would see a historical event and be required to describe it rather than to repeat words given by God. Even here, the words were not left to the prophets, but were given by God. An example which illustrates this is the way that Zechariah received his vision and wrote it down:-

Upon the four and twentieth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Sebat, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD to Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white. (Zech 1:7-8)

This is the start of the description of a vision which the prophet saw. However, Zechariah was not left to describe this in his own words. The words that God gave him to write include "I saw by night, and behold..."

Style

One of the objections to the teaching that all the words of the Bible come directly from God is the fact that the style of the words differs from book to book, and sometimes within single books. The objectors claim that if all the words were from God they should all have the same style.

This objection, of course, supposes that one knows the style of writing that God would use in particular circumstances. If one decides that the style is a part of the message, then there is no reason that God should not send different parts of his message in different styles. It is likely that he chose people to be prophets because their natural style fitted in with the message he wished to convey.

Predictive Prophecy - General Principles

The Bible claims that all its words are inspired by God. One piece of evidence that would support this claim would be if the Bible contained information that could not have been known to the people who wrote it, but which is nevertheless known to be true by others later. One particularly spectacular kind of information of this kind is fulfilled prophecy.

Principles of Predictive Prophecy

A predictive prophecy is a description of an event which has not happened at the time it was written down. Provided that there is a reasonable time lapse between the prophecy being given and its fulfilment it would not be possible for the prophet to have known what would happen, and the prophecy could be taken as evidence that the information in the prophecy came from some higher agency than the prophet's own mind. As such it is evidence of inspiration of the prophet's message.

The Bible contains a passage which tells us that fulfilled predictions will be a hallmark of a prophecy from God.

And if thou shalt say in thy heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing doth not follow, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him. (Deut 18:21-22)

This passage tells us that prophets of God will be able to produce fulfilled prophecy as evidence that their message is from God, and that this can be used to decide who is and who is not a real prophet from God (there is another test in Deut 13).

Requirements for Predictive Prophecy

For a prophecy to be of any use in determining whether a document is from God, the predictive material in it must fulfil the following conditions:-

1. It must be specific. This means that it must refer to a recognisable event or set of events which can be observed rather than to a general feeling or trend. Thus a prophecy which states that in general people will be happier cannot be used to verify a document as it is not sufficiently specific.
2. It must be detailed. The prophecy must contain detail which identifies uniquely to what or to whom it applies. Without this detail it is difficult to decide whether the prophecy has been fulfilled.
3. It must be unambiguous. This is an important part of a valid prediction. If the prophecy needs to be decoded before it can be understood it cannot be used as a test for inspiration as a different method of decoding or interpreting it would lead to a different prophecy.
4. It must be falsifiable. This means that there must be a possibility that the prophecy would go wrong. A prediction that king X will one day die is not of use as everyone

dies. Similarly a prophecy that city X will be rebuilt is not falsifiable on its own as, if the city is not rebuilt, one can simply say wait a little longer.

5. It must have been written before the events it describes were planned. If this is not the case the prophecy could easily be given without divine aid.
6. It must be fulfilled. A prophecy which is yet to be fulfilled may be of interest to those seeking to know the future, but is of no use in deciding whether a particular document is inspired by God.

Two Examples

These characteristics can be found in many Bible prophecies. For example, consider two prophecies from the Old Testament.

For dogs have surrounded me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. (Psa 22:16)

This prophecy of the crucifixion of Jesus was written by David about 1,000 years before it occurred; certainly it was written long before the death of Jesus as it appears in a scroll of the psalms found among the Dead Sea Scrolls and copied in about 100 BC. This fulfils the last two conditions. It is specific; it describes an action involved in Jesus' execution, the piercing of his hands and feet which took place when the nails were driven in. This detail makes it falsifiable; if Jesus had died of old age or by strangulation, for example, the prophecy would have failed. It is also particularly convincing because death by crucifixion was not invented at the time when David wrote the psalms.

A second example is from the prophecy of Micah and again prophecies part of the life of Jesus:-

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou art little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth to me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. (Mic 5:2)

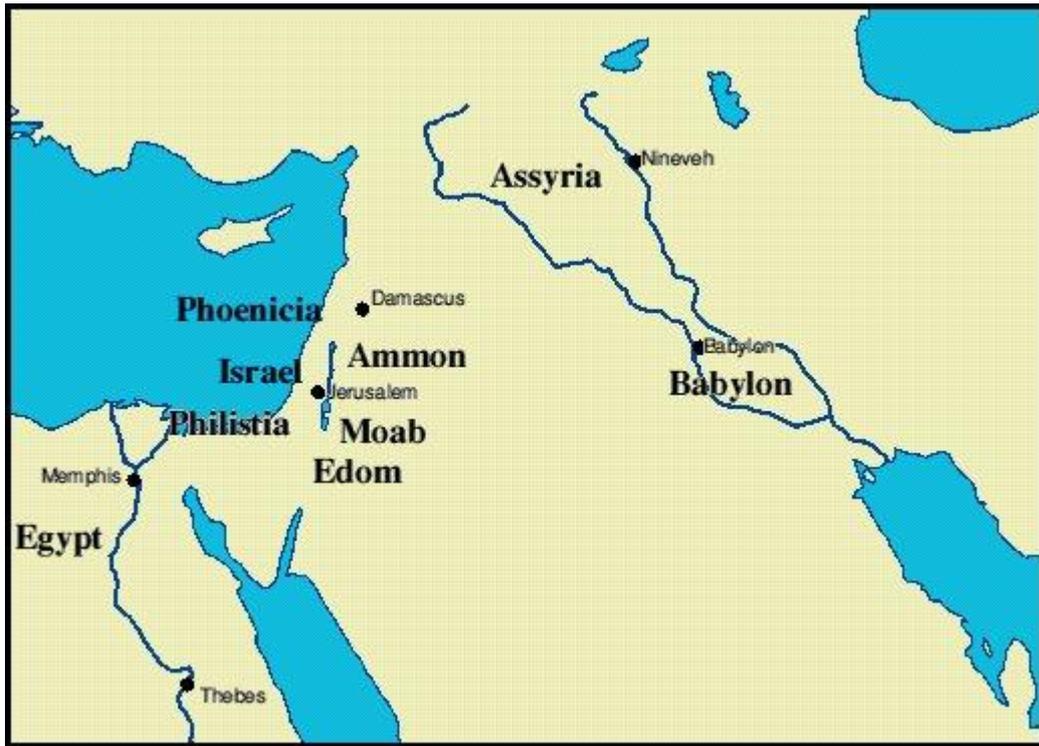
This prophecy was also written some centuries before the time of Jesus. However, it has now been fulfilled and is a testimony to the inspiration of Scripture. It is specific; not only does it mention Bethlehem, it indicates which of the Bethlehems. This one was the one in Judah.

Statistical Survey

According to one survey of biblical predictions, the Bible contains 8,352 verses of predictive material out of a total of 31,124 verses, or 27% of the total. Of this 1,556 verses (19%) of the predictive verses relates to events at or after the time of the return of Jesus, leaving 6,796 verses predicting events which could already have happened. All of these have been fulfilled, a 100% success rate.

The predictive prophecies cover 1,817 events. This is a remarkable degree of accuracy in prediction, far higher than one might expect by chance predictions.

Further Example - Prophecies of the nations



One kind of prophecy that appears in the Bible predicts the fate of the various nations in the Bible area. Here is a summary of a few of these prophecies.

Ammon

Son of man, set thy face against the Ammonites, and prophesy against them..... Behold, therefore I will stretch out my hand upon thee, and will deliver thee for a spoil to the nations; and I will cut thee off from the people, and I will cause thee to perish out of the countries: I will destroy thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD. (Ezek 25:2,7)

Ammon was to be destroyed from among the nations. This happened when it was invaded by the Nabateans in the first century B.C.

Assyria

The burden of Nineveh..... What do ye imagine against the LORD? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time..... Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions: and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard. (Nahum 1:1,9; 2:13)

The Assyrian empire fell suddenly in 612 BC when Nineveh was sacked by the Babylonians with the Medes and Scythians. The river Tigris was diverted to cover the ruins of Nineveh. The site was buried for many centuries until it was discovered by Archaeologists in the nineteenth century. The Assyrian empire has never risen again.

Babylon

And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. (Isa 13:19-20)

The Babylonian empire was superseded by the Persians and the glory of Babylon gradually faded away until the city became a ruin in the desert. It has never been rebuilt, although there have been several attempts to do so.

Edom

The vision of Obadiah. Thus saith the Lord GOD concerning Edom; We have heard a rumour from the LORD, and an ambassador is sent among the nations, Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle..... And thy mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter. For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever. (Obad 1:1,9-10)

By 500 BC Edom had ceased to exist as a nation. The Idumean tribes were pushed out by the Nabateans and many Idumeans went to live in Judea. Edom has never been restored as a nation.

Egypt

And I will bring again the captives of Egypt, and will cause them to return into the land of Pathros, into the land of their habitation; and they shall be there a base kingdom. It shall be the basest of the kingdoms; neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations: for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations. (Ezek 29:14-15)

Egypt has declined in power and has never again reached the superpower status it enjoyed in Bible times.

Moab

Therefore as I live, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the possession of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the remainder of my people shall lay them waste, and the remnant of my people shall possess them. (Zeph 2:9)

Moab was completely destroyed.

Philistia

And I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and him that holdeth the sceptre from Ashkelon, and I will turn my hand against Ekron: and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish, saith the Lord GOD. (Amos 1:8)

After 165 B.C. the Philistine cities had become Greek and the Philistines were no longer in them. The cities were overrun by the Maccabees in the late second century B.C.

Phoenicia

And Tyre built herself a strong hold, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets. Behold, the LORD will cast her out, and he will smite her power in the sea; and she shall be devoured with fire. (Zech 9:3-4)

Tyre was finally destroyed by Alexander the Great and Sidon by the Persian Artaxerxes III.

Israel

For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished. (Jer 30:11)

Jews have been scattered into all the world and regathered in part twice since this prophecy was written. They have endured 20 centuries of persecution and repression but they still exist.

Conclusion

The Bible has predicted the fate of every one of the nations surrounding Israel, and done so correctly. The probability of predicting the survival or otherwise of these nations by chance alone is $(1/2)^9$ which is one in 512. In fact the predictions contain other information and are therefore more unlikely to be fulfilled by chance. This means that some more intelligent power is behind the prophecies of the Bible.

Archaeology and the Bible

The events described in the Bible did not take place on another planet. They took place in the real world and have left traces behind to show what happened. Archaeologists have visited a wide range of sites in the Middle East which have connections with the Bible. Their excavations have brought a variety of different kinds of evidence to light. The more common types can be summarised as follows:-

1. The Bible sometimes describes cities or buildings in some detail. By comparing the detail recorded in the Bible with the detail dug up by archaeologists one can see whether the Biblical record of the detail is accurate.
2. Some of the events described in the Bible have left physical traces. A battle may leave arrow-heads or spear-points in the ground and one can find graves left by war or epidemic.
3. Some of the events recorded in the Bible were recorded by other people on inscriptions. Where a correspondence like this occurs one has a good way of checking the accuracy of the Bible account, although it needs to be borne in mind that the other accounts are often from a different point of view and may be inaccurate themselves.
4. Various objects contain the names of their owners. Some objects found by archaeologists contain the names and titles of biblical characters.

Details of Places

The detailed description of places in the Bible includes several details which surprised the Archaeologists when they were discovered. The detail of the description of the pool of Bethesda as being a healing sanctuary with five porches (Jn 5:2) was considered to be late as it was felt that a pagan shrine such as this could not have been built so close to the temple. Excavations have shown that it does exist. The description of the walls of the temple in 1 Ki 6:36 describes them as having been built with a course of timber between every three courses of stone; some of the walls of Megiddo, which was built by the same king, Solomon, were built in exactly this way. The plans of the gateways of Gezer, Megiddo and Hazor are the same, which is not surprising as they were all built by Solomon (1 Ki 9:15). The details of the governments of the various cities of Asia minor and Greece, described by Luke in Acts have been shown to have been exactly correct.

What this wealth of accurate detail shows is that the Bible contains an accurate description of the events that it portrays. The places soon changed as new buildings were built or as they were sacked by invaders. If the description had been incorrect it would have been impossible to correct it later. Similarly, if there were copying errors one would expect this description to become inaccurate.

Traces of Events

Almost all of these traces are of the destruction caused by Battles. The occupation of the promised land under Joshua is marked by the destruction of many Canaanite cities. Similarly the invasions of the Assyrians and the Babylonians left their marks on the landscape.

Inscriptions

Some of the events in the history of Israel were sufficiently major to be recorded on inscriptions by people from other nations. For example, the war between Mesha king of Moab and the combined armies of Jehoram of Israel and Jehoshaphat of Judah is recorded in 2 Kings 3:4-27; The Moabites also recorded the same war on a stone monument (known as a stele). This monument has been discovered and is now in the Louvre in Paris; it has been called the Moabite stone. As another example, the black obelisk of Shalmanezar, now in the British Museum, records the payment of tribute to the Assyrians by various monarchs including Jehu the king of Israel. The obelisk even contains a picture of Jehu bowing down before the Assyrian king, the only known picture of an Old Testament Hebrew monarch.

People

Besides descriptions of events and places the Bible contains the doings of a large number of named individuals. Among the archaeological finds there are items with the names of some of these individuals inscribed on them. For example, in the time of Hezekiah, a court official called Shebna was found to be constructing a tomb for himself when he should have been building the defences of the city. The account of this is found in Isa 22:15,16. The tomb of Shebna has been found in Jerusalem with most of his name inscribed on the lintel that was over the entrance. The Assyrian chronicle contains the name of king Azariah of Judah, of Menahem of Israel, and of Hezekiah king of Judah. Bullae (baked seal inscriptions) have been found with the names of various biblical characters including Gedaliah (2 Ki 25:22) Baruch the son of Neriah (Jer 36:4) and Jerahmeel the king's son (Jer 36:26). Not only are the events of the Bible recorded elsewhere but even the names of the people who took part in them have been found.

The Assyrian Invasion of Israel

One episode that is well chronicled from Archaeological sources as well as in the Bible is the invasion of Israel by the Assyrians and the siege of Jerusalem which followed. The invasion occurred in three phases, each led by a different Assyrian king. Fortunately the Assyrian chronicle of this period was found in excavations of the Assyrian palace at Khorsabad in Iraq in 1842. There are also other archaeological finds that have bearing on the biblical accounts. Here is a summary of the events of the invasions and the archaeological that have a bearing on them.

1. Tiglath Pileser III reaches Israel and extracts tribute from Menahem (2 Ki 15:19) Archaeological evidence - Ostraca containing tax accounts from the taxation made to pay this tribute.
2. Ahaz sends tribute to Assyria to persuade them to fight against the Syrians and Israelites. (2 Ki 16:7,8). An account of this is found in the chronicles of TiglathPileser.
3. Tiglath Pileser captures Damascus (2 Ki 16:9). An account is in the Assyrian chronicles
4. Tiglath Pileser takes Northern Israel into captivity (2 Ki 15:29) This is attested by various archaeological finds including the Chronicle of Tiglath Pileser, and a layer of rubble and ash at

Hazor corresponding to the destruction of this city by the Assyrians. This layer contains an Ostraca which mentions Pekah the king of Israel at the time.

5. Tiglath Pileser helps Hoshea to overthrow Pekah (2 Ki 15:30) This appears in the Assyrian Chronicle.

6. Shalmanezar V besieges Samaria, which is finally captured after three years of siege by his successor, Sargon II. (2 Ki 17:4-6) An account appears in the Chronicle of Sargon II.

7. The Assyrians send an expeditionary force against Ashdod (Isa 20:1). This is found in the Chronicle of Sargon II.

8. Merodach Baladan of Babylon attempts to raise a rebellion against Assyria from the states surrounding the Assyrian empire (2 Ki 20:12-14; Isa 39:1).

9. Hezekiah strengthens the defences of Jerusalem (2 Chr 32:2-5; Isa 22:9,10). Strengthened defences have been found in Jerusalem at a site known as Hezekiah's broad wall.

10. Hezekiah builds a tunnel to bring water into Jerusalem. (2 Ki 20:20; 2 Chr 32:30). This is the Siloam tunnel; an inscription found in it describes the tunnelling process.

11. Shebna builds his own tomb instead of strengthening the defences of Jerusalem (Isa 22:15-29). The tomb has been found with a lintel containing part of the name and the title of Shebna.

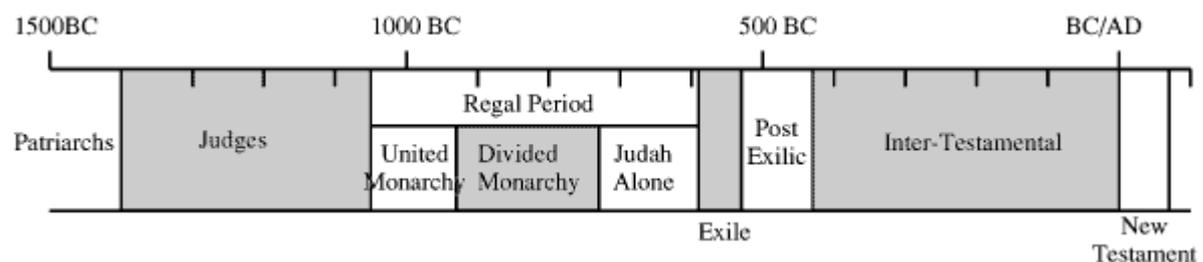
12. Sennacherib invades Judah. Lachish falls to the Assyrians (2 Chr 32:9). Evidence is available in a layer of destruction in Lachish and in a set of bas-reliefs depicting the event.

13. Sennacherib besieges Jerusalem but does not capture it (2 Kings 18:17-19:36). An account of this is found on the Taylor Prism.

14. The Assyrian army suffers large casualties from a non-military source, thus forcing them to retire from the siege (2 Ki 19:35). This is attested by mass graves of Assyrian soldiers at Lachish, probably plague victims.

Summary of Bible History and Archaeology

In order to appreciate the archaeology of the Bible one has to have a general idea of Bible history. One can divide the history of the land of Israel into periods along the following lines:-



These periods exhibit different types of Archaeological evidence.

Patriarchal The Patriarchs were mostly nomads who lived in tents and left little trace of their passing. As a result there is little direct evidence about the Patriarchs. However, the accounts of the patriarchs fit very well into life and customs of their time.

Judges The period of the Judges is very confusing and marked by both violence and change. The Archaeological study of the period shows that it was violent and uncertain and that the Israelites gradually subdued their enemies.

Regal Period From the start of the reigns of the great kings of Israel onwards there is a wealth of detail which confirms the whole of the Biblical narrative of the time.

Exile Details here are mainly of the city of Babylon which has been thoroughly excavated in places.

Post-Exilic The main evidence here is from Persian sites. There is a considerable wealth of detail in terms of inscriptions and decrees of Persian kings. The amount of biblical writing about the history of Israel in this period is small compared to the writing about the regal period, so there is less scope for correspondence between histories of the Persian Empire and what was, at the time, a backwater.

Inter-Testamental There is some information about the inter-testamental period in books of history written at the time or soon after. This is interesting to the Bible student as background material but there is no corresponding Bible history with which to compare the archaeology.

New Testament Here there is a wealth of Archaeological evidence, both in terms of the excavations of places and written documents about the period. Only a little of this bears directly on events in the New Testament, but the whole picture shows how the New Testament fits into its time and place.

What does Archaeology Show?

There is plenty of evidence to show that the Bible is a true and accurate record of the events it describes without recourse to evidence based on archaeology. Indeed, the Bible record of history has shown itself to be more reliable than the picture produced by past archaeology. In the few instances where the Bible and archaeology have disagreed in the past, further investigations have shown that the Bible was, in fact, correct and that the archaeologists had made mistakes.

However, the evidence of archaeology shows beyond doubt that the sceptics about the Bible are wrong. The events the Bible describes did happen in the way that the Bible describes them. The places depicted are real places described accurately, the people characterised are real characters, the chronology of the Bible is correct and even the details are accurate. In short, the events narrated in the Bible are real events.

The correspondence of the Bible with archaeology shows more than this. We can be certain that the descriptions of places found in the Bible are accurate, even though those places are long gone, and therefore we can be certain that other things are recorded accurately. We can be certain that even the details of places and people described in the Bible are correct, and therefore we have a check that even the details of the Bible accounts has not changed over the centuries since it was written. Because the Bible is so accurate in describing irrelevant detail we can be certain that its more major themes have also not been added since the Bible was written.

It would be too simple to say that archaeology proves the Bible to be true, because there is enough internal evidence to show that the Bible has been recorded and copied accurately. Rather the correspondence between the Bible and archaeology shows how good modern archaeology is becoming.

Undesigned Scriptural Coincidences

Many of the events in the Bible are described in two or more different accounts. There are four gospel accounts of the ministry of Jesus, the books of Kings and Chronicles give parallel accounts of much of the history of Israel, augmented by the books of various prophets, and the Acts of the Apostles covers a period also described in the epistles. The reason for this is possibly to allow their witnesses to support one another: By the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. (Deut 19:15; Mt 18:16; 2 Cor 13:1) This gives one an opportunity to compare the accounts of the different witnesses to discover whether they are accurate.

If one were considering the evidence which forms a case in a court of law, one would compare all the pieces of evidence together and see whether it was consistent. The important comparisons here would not be the main points of the evidence, but the insignificant details. If these details are sufficiently insignificant there will be a large number of them and it would be impossible for anyone making the story up to keep track of all the tiny details. There would thus be a discrepancy in the details or the detail would be completely absent. If, on the other hand, the testimony of the witnesses is authentic then there would be any amount of corroborative detail present within it.

This is true of the Bible accounts. Where there are several different witnesses to the same events one can see a tremendous harmony in the insignificant details of the stories. These harmonies of detail are called Undesigned Coincidences as it would be impossible to insert them into the text if the accounts were fabricated. Even if the accounts were all fabricated by the same person, it would still be difficult to ensure that the correct undesigned coincidences were present within the text.

Examples

Ahitophel, Absalom and Uriah.

King David was, for most of his life, a man of great faith. However, he fell from his high standard when he committed adultery with Bathsheba the wife of Uriah and then had Uriah killed. God's judgement on David was that he was not to be allowed peace, and that his wives would be taken from him. The fulfilment of the sentence came in a great degree when Absalom the Son of David rebelled against him and tried to take the kingdom from him.

Absalom proclaimed his rulership of Israel from Hebron and David as forced to flee for his life. The people of Israel tended to follow Absalom, but David's warriors and companions went with David into hiding. The exception was Ahitophel.

And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom. (2 Sam 15:12)

The question here is why Ahitophel should turn away from David when all David's other companions remained loyal. The answer is found in the lists of the names of David's mighty

men in 2 Sam 23. Among these we find Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite (2 Sam 23:34) and Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam 23:39). It seems that this group of thirty seven fighting men was one of the elite units of David's army. There would be close comradeship between them and they would be expected to stand up for one another. Thus when David had Uriah killed it is likely that the members of this unit were shaken in their loyalty to him, and Ahitophel had such strong connections to the unit that it is likely that he also was affected by this.

But there was a closer connection still between Eliam and Uriah the Hittite; it seems that Uriah married Eliam's daughter: And David... enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? (2 Sam 11:3) When David seduced Bathsheba he was seducing the daughter of Eliam and the granddaughter of Ahithophel. It seems that the episode had turned Ahithophel against David so that he was willing to support Absalom's revolt.

When one sees the connection between Ahithophel, Uriah and David one can appreciate why events happened the way they did. However, it seems very unlikely that the writer of 2 Kings would have made up these details; they are separated by a considerable number of pages and it would take a cunning writer to insert the details so that they could be found under only a close inspection. Had they been devised to create a false impression one would have expected their presence to have been more clearly pointed out.

Philistines in Gibbethon

According to 1 Kings the city of Gibbethon belonged to the Philistines in the reign of King Baasha of Israel:-

And Baasha the son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him; and Baasha smote him at Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines; for Nadab and all Israel laid siege to Gibbethon. (1 Ki 15:27)

However, Gibbethon was not always a Philistine city. In the account of the division of the land of Canaan Gibbethon was in the portion awarded to the tribe of Dan, although it was itself given to the Kohathites, one of the divisions of the Levites:-

20 And the families of the children of Kohath, the Levites who remained of the children of Kohath, even they had the cities of their lot out of the tribe of Ephraim.... 23 And out of the tribe of Dan, Eltekeh with its common lands, Gibbethon with its common lands... (Josh 21:20,23)

One is left to wonder why it is described in 1 Kings as belonging to the Philistines.

The answer is given in an obscure passage in Chronicles.

And the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him from all their territories. For the Levites left their common lands and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest's office to the LORD: (2 Chron 11:13,14)

During the reign of Jereboam of Israel the Levites found themselves without employment, as Jereboam had set up an alternative form of worship for the people. They therefore left their cities and travelled to Judah, bringing with them the more faithful of Jereboam's subjects. As a result the Levitical cities were left empty. Among these would be Gibbethon, which would thus become an easy conquest for the Philistines.

The history of Gibbethon is fairly complex and requires three different books to explain it. In each of these books the account of Gibbethon is a trivial detail of no importance to the main story. In spite of this there is a clear account which is wholly consistent. The only possible explanation for this is that the account is an accurate record of real events.

Hezekiah's Wealth

This coincidence has been chosen from among the many available because the period in which it occurred has already been discussed in the Archaeology section.

In the book of Isaiah we read of a visit of Merodach-Baladan, the rebel king of Babylon, to Jerusalem:

At that time Merodachbaladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah: for he had heard that he had been sick, and had recovered. And Hezekiah was glad of them, and showed them the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasuries: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah did not show them. (Isa 39:1-2)

The description of Hezekiah's treasure is emphatic; at this time Hezekiah was very wealthy indeed. This event can be dated fairly easily. Isa 39:1 tells us that it happened shortly after Hezekiah had recovered from sickness. We know from Isa 38:5 that Hezekiah recovered from his sickness 15 years before his eventual death, and as he reigned for 29 years (2 Ki 18:2) this is the 14th year of his reign.

We now come to the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib.

Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah, and took them. (Isa 36:1)

This happened in the 14th year of Hezekiah's reign, the same year in which he recovered from his illness. This is consistent with the picture we have in the account of the illness: I will deliver thee and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria... (Isa 38:6) When Sennacherib invaded, Hezekiah tried to buy him off (2 Ki 18:13,14) The tribute required from him by Sennacherib was large and left Hezekiah quite without resources. He was even reduced to stripping the gold leaf off the temple doors to pay it:-

And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasuries of the king's house. At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria. (2 Kings 18:15-16)

The sequence of events is that Hezekiah was forced to give his entire wealth to the king of Assyria (who attacked anyway) and was therefore impoverished. Shortly after in the same year he was showing off his great wealth to the king of Babylon.

This would seem to be a contradiction and there would seem to be great problems with it were it not for another account of the same times. However, 2 Chronicles gives the explanation:-

Thus the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all others, and guided them on every side. And many brought gifts to the LORD to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that from then on he was magnified in the sight of all nations. In those days Hezekiah was sick and near to death... (2 Chr 32:22-24)

This explains the problem. After the defeat of the Assyrian armies many of the other nations (who would presumably have been victims of the Assyrians next) brought gifts to Jerusalem, for God and for Hezekiah. These must have replenished the royal treasury (and presumably replaced the gold leaf on the temple). This is why there was an abundance of wealth to show to Merodach-Baladan.

This coincidence appears in an account that covers three different books. It is an incidental detail, which means that it is unlikely that the authors could invent it. Thus it is excellent evidence for the authenticity and accuracy of the books concerned.

The Death of Joseph

The last mention of Joseph the husband of Mary and step-father of Jesus is in Lk 2:43 where Jesus goes with his family to Jerusalem for the Passover. After this there are several passages which enumerate the members of Jesus' family and all of them omit Joseph completely.

For example, consider the following:-

Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Judas, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. (Mk 6:3)

This verse lists Mary the mother of Jesus, all four of Jesus' half brothers and even his sisters (although not by name). There are other similar passages:

Matt 12:46 refers to Jesus' mother and brethren who come to speak to Jesus

Lk 8:19 also refers to the mother and brethren of Jesus.

Jn 2:12 tells of Jesus' mother, brethren and disciples.

None of the accounts where Jesus' family are present mentions Joseph, not even the wedding at Cana in Galilee or the crucifixion.

Jn 19:26,27 is where Jesus tells John to care for Mary and she goes to live in John's house. Why does she not go home to Joseph?

Acts 1:13,14 tells us that Jesus' mother and brethren continued to live in Jerusalem, which would have been odd if Joseph had still been plying his trade in Galilee.

There is a simple explanation for these points, which is that Joseph died sometime between the time when Jesus was 12 and when he began his ministry at the age of 30 years. There is no statement of this in the gospels but it is consistent across all four Gospels and the Acts. If there had been errors in the accounts or if they had been invented then this consistency would have been lost.

Manuscript Evidence

The Bible is probably the most copied of all books ever written. Since it has completed it has been the most widely owned book in the world; the number of copies produced is many times that of its next competitor, Euclid's Elements. As a result of the popularity of the Bible there are a great many manuscripts available which are copies of its text. This allows us to make two checks on the Bible:-

Text - We can compare the text of the various manuscripts against one another and against the modern text of the Bible and discover how reliable the modern text is.

Date - As the Bible must have been written before its oldest copy, the date of the various manuscripts can help us to date the writing of the Bible.

Both of these are of value today because they help to show that we can have confidence in our modern copies of the Bible. Because of other sessions later on in the seminar this session will concentrate mainly on the manuscripts of the four gospels.

How the Bible was Written

The English versions of the Bible that we commonly use are not strictly Bibles at all. The original Bible was written in Hebrew with some Aramaic (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament). What we have is translation of the text of the Bible into English so that we can read it. Almost all modern translations are accurate enough for one to be able to learn the gospel from them, although some are more accurate than others.

The Bible was written by hand and early copies were made on parchment (paper made from animal skin), vellum (parchment from an unborn animal) or papyrus (a paper-like material made from a species of reed). In order to allow Bibles to be used throughout the world, copies were made of these manuscripts by hand, and further copies were made of these copies. By studying the material used and the style of handwriting it is possible to date manuscripts fairly precisely; where the manuscript concerned is large it is sometimes possible to supplement the dating made in this way with a radio-Carbon date.

The Oldest New Testament Manuscripts

Until recently the oldest New Testament Manuscript was a fragment of John's Gospel found in the Fayyum in Egypt and preserved in the Rylands Library in Manchester. However, new discoveries have produced even earlier manuscript fragments.

The Magdalen Fragment

This is three fragments of the Gospel of Matthew which was found in Egypt in the last century. It was recently examined by a paleographer and dated at 65 AD \pm 15 years. This means that it is probably from before 70AD. There are several other fragments known to be similar to this one, so it is possible that other, even earlier, manuscripts will be found in the

world's museums or libraries. It is the oldest fragment in the world to mention the name of Jesus.

7Q5

This is one of a set of fragments of New Testament documents found in Cave Seven of the Dead Sea Scrolls caves. It only contains a few letters, but a search of known ancient documents shows that it can only credibly be identified as coming from Mark 6:52,53. As the Dead Sea finds were buried in 68AD as the Romans occupied the area in the Jewish War, it is clear that the fragments are from before this time. Paleographical analysis (comparison of the style of writing with other documents) suggests that the document was written no later than 50AD. Various fragments of other New Testament books were found in the same cave; the set had been kept together in the same jar, fragments of which were also found. Together there were nine fragments representing six different books of the New Testament (Mark, Acts, Romans, 1 Timothy, 2 Peter, James).

These manuscript finds confirm something that was worked out by Bible scholars in the 1970s. The whole of the Bible must have been completed before 70 AD. This means that the events it describes were written in the lifetimes of the people who took part in them. Some of the people who saw Jesus preach were among those who read the first gospels. This means that there is little scope for errors of fact or outright invention to have worked its way into the gospels.

Manuscripts are known by a serial number. Those discovered in the Dead Sea caves have numbers which contain the letter Q for Qumran, a settlement in the area where many of them were copied. 7Q5 was discovered in cave 7 or the Dead Sea caves. Papyrus fragments have numbers prefixed with p for Papyrus. Thus the Rylands fragment (copied in about 125 AD) is called p52. The earliest substantial fragments are:-

p45 A substantial document purchased by an American business man called Chester Beatty. It was copied between 150 and 250 AD and contains: Matthew chs 20,21,25,26; Mark chs 4-9,11,12; Luke chs 6,7,9-14; John chs 10,11 and Acts chs 4-17.

p46 Another of the Chester Beatty Papyri, this time copied between 90 and 175 AD. It contains: Romans chs 5,6,8-16; the whole of 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colosians, 1 Thessalonians chs 1,2,5 and the whole of Hebrews.

p66 This papyrus was bought by Martin Bodmer, another philanthropic businessman. It was copied between 150 and 200 AD and contains the Gospel of John, almost complete.

p72 Is another of the Bodmer papyri. This one was written in the 200s AD and contains 1 and 2 Peter and Jude.

p75 A third Bodmer papyrus, this time written between 175 and 200 AD and containing part of the gospel of Luke (chs 3-18 & 22-24) and John chs 1-5.

The Number of Manuscripts

One thing that is very impressive about the New Testament is the tremendous number of manuscripts available against which the modern text can be compared. Copies were made throughout the Roman Empire and later on throughout Christendom. Manuscripts were rarely destroyed deliberately, and a good random sample has survived. One can summarise the available manuscripts as follows:-

Greek Bibles These are copies of part or all of the New Testament in the Greek in which it was written. Some of these manuscripts contain only one Gospel; others contain not only the whole New Testament but also the Old Testament translated into Greek. There are about six thousand of these ancient Greek Bibles.

Ancient Versions The Bible was translated into other languages than Greek very soon after it was written. There were early translations into Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian and Ethiopic so that people who did not speak Greek could read the Scriptures for themselves. Copies of these Bibles were made independently of the Greek New Testament.

Lectionaries A lectionary is a copy of the Bible made to be read out in church services. As the readings were not in the order in which the Bible was written, a Lectionary will contain the Bible with its chapters re-arranged into a non-standard order.

Citations The Bible was quoted in other writings by members of the early church. Especially fruitful in the search for citations are commentaries on the Bible, but other works also had quotations written in them. These citations from a body of literature which can be compared to the Bible. Geisler and Nix have produced an analysis of these citations and conclude that there are over 32,000 citations from before the Council of Nicea (325 AD)

All together about 24,000 manuscripts of the New Testament are available for examination by scholars, excluding citations. The majority of these have few variations; nearly all the variations are found within 1,000 manuscripts. The manuscript evidence is enough to establish a very good text; there are only a very small number of places where there is any serious dispute.

Comparison with other Books

It is worth comparing the manuscript witnesses to the text of the Bible with the manuscript witnesses to the text of other ancient books. The following table contains details of some ancient works.

Work	When Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	Number of Copies
Caesar's Gallic Wars	100-44 BC	900 AD	1,000 Years	10
Plato's Tetralogies	427-347 BC	900 AD	1,200 Years	7
Tacitus Annals	100 AD	1,100 AD	1,000 Years	20

Pliny's Histories	61-113 AD	850 AD	750 Years	7
Herodotus	480-425 BC	900 AD	1,300 Years	8
New Testament	40-70 AD	180 AD	120 Years	24,000

In spite of the superior numbers of biblical manuscripts and the closeness of these manuscripts to the original writing of the Bible, no-one challenges the text of the other works.

Old Testament Manuscripts

The oldest manuscript of any part of the Old Testament is a silver scroll excavated in a tomb on the flank of the valley of Hinnom on the Western side of Jerusalem. This scroll contains the blessing of Numbers 6:24-26; it was buried shortly before 600 BC, and before the Jews were carried captive to Babylon. We thus have a manuscript of a part of the Bible which was buried at least a century before the critics of the Bible say that it was written.

The Old Testament was mainly written in Hebrew, although a small part of it was written in Aramaic. The modern Hebrew text is called the Massoretic Text because the rules for copying it were devised by a school of Jewish scholars called the Massorettes. These scholars generated exceedingly precise methods of checking the text of a copy to see whether it was accurate, looking for the middle letter in a book, counting the number of occurrences of each letter in a column and so on. As a result one would expect their work to be very accurate.

However, the oldest manuscripts available to make a check were not, until the end of the nineteenth century, very old. The oldest available until this time would be the Aleppo codex, which was copied in about 900 AD; there were several other tenth century codices extant. However, in 1897 a wealth of old manuscripts from the previous century was found in the Geniza of the old Cairo synagogue. A Geniza is a room in which old and disused scrolls are kept; this one had not been cleared out since it was built in 882 AD.

These finds were dwarfed by importance by finds in the Judean Desert. In 1947 an Arab shepherd boy threw a stone into a cave and heard the breaking of pottery. On investigating he found the first of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Further discoveries followed, and soon manuscripts had been found of almost every Old Testament book, the exception being Esther. The manuscripts were extremely close in text to the modern Hebrew text of the Massorettes. One manuscript especially 1QIsa, a complete scroll of the book of Isaiah, was letter for letter the same as the modern equivalent. Other scrolls contained minor variations, but these were of very minor importance, changes in word order, the substitution of a pronoun for a noun and such like. The variants found were, in any case, already known from other sources.

A further source of information about the Hebrew text of the Old Testament comes in the translations made of that text. The oldest of these translations was the Septuagint, made in Alexandria between 285 and 246 BC, supposedly by seventy scholars. This version, which is often designated by the letters LXX (Roman numeral for 70), was copied quite independently of the Hebrew Old Testament and is thus an independent witness to its text. Complete texts

of it are available from the third century AD Another translation was made in about 130 AD by Aquila; this was a much more literal translation of the Hebrew than the Septuagint and is thus an even better textual witness. A complete text of it was found in the Cairo Geniza.

Taken together these witnesses show that there is no significant difference between the modern text of the Old Testament and the ancient text of the time of Jesus or before.

Conclusion

The text of the Bible is as well established as the text of any other book, and much better than the texts of other books of its age. The few small variations in text do not affect any belief of Christianity We can trust the text of the Bible to be accurate and to contain the teachings of those who wrote it down.

The manuscripts also show that the Bible was written much earlier than its critics would like to believe. The gospels, in particular, must have been written within 20 years of Jesus' resurrection.

Prophecy 2 - The History of Israel

The Bible contains predictions of the future history of many nations, but none more comprehensively than the nation of Israel. There is a wealth of detail of predictions about the future of Israel which provides an especially powerful test of the predictive prophecy found in the Bible.

Significant Events of Israel's History

Israel became a nation at the Exodus, when they escaped from the Egyptians in the miraculous parting of the Red Sea. At this point virtually none of the Old Testament was written. Forty years later the Children of Israel settled in the promised land, each tribe a separate identity and governed by Judges who rose from time to time in various parts of the land. The main events of their history after this time are:-

The Great Kings In about 1000 BC the nation of Israel started to be governed by a single King. Under the first of these, Saul, the nation was involved in a titanic struggle with the Philistines, but his successor, David, defeated Israel's adversaries, expanded the kingdom of Israel to a small empire, and started a period of peace. Solomon, the next king, ruled in peace and the nation reached levels of prosperity never again seen in its history.

The Divided Kingdom At the end of Solomon's reign the nation of Israel divided into two smaller kingdoms. The larger northern kingdom was called Israel and the smaller southern kingdom was called Judah.

The Assyrian Invasion Between 800 and 700 B.C. the Assyrians invaded the land of Israel in three waves. The northern kingdom of Israel was taken away captive into Assyria, but Judah survived the onslaught.

The Babylonian Captivity In 600 BC the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem and deported the Jews to Babylon. The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. As with the Assyrians the captivity of Judah came in three waves, each of which took captives to Babylon.

The Return to Judea Seventy years after the Jews were taken captive the Babylonian empire fell to the Persians. The Persian king allowed a remnant of the Jews in Babylon to return to their ancestral lands.

The Destruction of Jerusalem In the first century AD the Judea and Galilee had become parts of the Roman Empire. In 67 AD riots broke out against the Romans which became a full insurrection. In 70 AD the Romans again sacked Jerusalem and completely destroyed the temple. The process was completed in 135 AD when a further revolt from the few Jews left in Palestine caused the Romans to exclude all Jews from the area. However, this dispersion of Jews through the world did not destroy them as a nation, and they continued to be a recognisable people, distinct from the nations where they lived.

The Second Return In the twentieth century Jews fleeing from persecution in Europe founded a state in Israel. In spite of various wars against the surrounding nations they held on to their land.

The main events of Israel's history are predicted in the Bible in a number of passages. There is considerable detail in many of these passages and there is no doubt as to the accuracy of the prophecies. The following sections review some prophecies of some of the main events.

Isaiah's prophecy of Exile

The prophet Isaiah gave a prophecy of the first occasion on which Israelites would be taken away from their ancestral land. This prophecy is in three parts: a prophecy of the deliverance of Judah from the Assyrians, a prophecy of the captivity of Judah, and a prophecy of the return of a remnant under Cyrus.

Prophecy of Deliverance

...Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add to thy days fifteen years. And I will deliver thee and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city. (Isa 38:5,6)

This prophecy of Isaiah was already fulfilled when the book of Isaiah was completed, and cannot therefore be taken as a confirmation that the book of Isaiah came from God.

Prophecy of Exile

Then said Isaiah to Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: Behold, the days come, that all that is in thy house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. (Isa 39:5,6)

This prophecy was fulfilled about a century after the book of Isaiah was completed. There are some critics who would claim that this part of the book of Isaiah was written much later; however we have already seen how this particular prophecy forms a part of an undesigned coincidence which means that it could not have been made up later. Because of this coincidence one is forced to believe that the prophecy was given in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, which is 701 BC. The final exile of the kings of Judah to Babylon occurred in 586 BC, 115 years later.

Prophecy of Return.

Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer,... that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, and I will raise up her decayed places:... That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and he shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid. (Isa 44:24-28)

This prophecy of Isaiah is very specific. It not only predicts the return of Jews to Palestine, but gives the name of the Persian king who was to arrange this.

Deuteronomy 28 - the blessing and the curse

This chapter contains promises of two different futures for Israel. If they were faithful they were to be blessed in their land:-

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently to the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God. (Deut 28:1-2)

There follows a comprehensive list of blessings which can be summarised as blessings of peace, of prosperity, of independence and of the favour of God.

If Israel was to be unfaithful they were to suffer a series of disasters which would leave them defeated, separated from their land, under the domination of foreign powers and estranged from God:-

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee:... (Deut 28:15)

This section is described as a curse here in Deut 28:15 and elsewhere in the scripture. Deuteronomy 28 thus holds out a blessing and a curse for Israel.

The promises become a prophecy when taken together with Deuteronomy 30: And it shall come to pass, when all these things have come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee... (Deut 30:1) This verse predicts that both the blessings and the curse of chapter 28 would be fulfilled in the history of Israel.

Prosperity in the Promised Land

The first part of the prophecy to be fulfilled was the promise of prosperity:

The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thy hand to; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. The LORD shall open to thee his good treasure, the heaven to give rain to thy land in its season, and to bless all the work of thy hand: and thou shalt lend to many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. (Deut 28:8,12)

This promise was fulfilled in the reign of David, and especially in the reign of Solomon. These last two of the great kings of Israel ruled over a state of plenty and prosperity which was never again rivalled:-

And all king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none were of silver: it was not considered as any thing in the days of Solomon. (1 Kings 10:21)

And the king made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones, and cedar trees made he as the sycamore trees that are in the vale for abundance. (2 Chron 1:15)

This was a time of high prosperity for Israel which was never to occur again.

The Curse

The second part of the prophecy was that when Israel turned from God they were to be taken into captivity and dispersed among the nations:-

And it shall come to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land where thou goest to possess it. And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even to the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have no assurance of thy life: (Deut 28:63-66)

The LORD shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, to a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known; and there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone. And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations where the LORD shall lead thee. (Deut 28:36,37)

These words are echoed by another version of the blessings and the curse of Israel found in the book of Leviticus:

And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the nations, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. (Lev 26:32,33)

This prophecy has been fulfilled in every detail as the Jews have suffered persecution and expulsion at the hand of almost every nation in the world. From the first moments when the Romans sold their captives into slavery in 70 AD at the end of the Jewish war, Jews have been persecuted savagely and unjustly by those nations where they have found themselves. It is sometimes thought that the Nazi Holocaust, where an estimated six million Jews met their deaths, in concentration camps was an unusual aberration by supposedly "Christian" countries, but in fact there has hardly been a time when Jews were not being persecuted because of their faith or their descent.

The pictures below show scenes from various different persecutions. The first two are medieval woodcuts from the Liber Chronicarum Mundi of Nuremberg (1493) and the third is an image of the Nazi Holocaust.



The dispersion of Israel was foretold in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, but it was also predicted in other places. Among these we find:-

... they shall be wanderers among the nations. (Hos 9:17)

and:-

Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest. (Mic 3:12)

This prophecy was fulfilled to the letter when the emperor Hadrian did have Jerusalem ploughed with oxen and minted a coin to commemorate the event.

Jeremiah 31 - The Survival of Israel

The Bible clearly predicted that Israel would be torn up from their land and would be kept away from it, dispersed among the nations. However, this was not to be the end. God promised that Israel would continue to exist and to maintain a distinctive identity:-

Thus saith the LORD, who giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, who divideth the sea when its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD. (Jer 31:35-37)

This passage tells us that Israel would continue to be a nation for ever by comparing it with two natural phenomena. The first is with the stars and the moon or the roaring of waves in the sea. The nation of Israel is to last as long as these phenomena, which are a proverb for remaining unchanging through the ages. The other comparison is the distance to the heavens. We know that there is no distance to the sky; one can always go a little further in a skyward direction without meeting anything.

Again, this is not the only passage which firmly predicts that Israel is to continue to exist even after it had been dispersed among the other nations and kept away from its land. The following passages all tell a similar story:-

For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished. (Jer 30:11)

Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the LORD: for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations where I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in measure; yet will I not leave thee wholly unpunished. (Jer 46:28)

And yet for all that, when they shall be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the LORD their God. (Lev 26:44)

For most nations, being removed from their land, being dispersed in other nations, and being persecuted in their new countries for centuries would be the end of the nation. This is clearly not the case with the Jews, who have managed to maintain a national identity in the face of their dispersion. The prophecy that this would happen was a very brave one, as it has never occurred in any other nation.

Luke 21 - Jerusalem and the Gentiles

In Luke 21 there is another prophecy of the captivity of Israel under the Romans:-

And as some spoke of the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts, he said, "As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." (Lk 21:5,6)

This is a very bold prophecy; it not only tells us that Jerusalem was to be conquered, but that the temple was to be completely destroyed so that there would not be one stone left standing on another. It is very rare for destruction to be so complete. Usually there would be several courses of masonry left at the bottom of the walls.

In the case of Jerusalem the destruction was a result of greed. The temple was covered in gold; during the sack of Jerusalem in 70 AD it caught fire and the oil in it burned fiercely enough to melt the gold, which ran between the stones of the wall. Roman soldiers then pulled the walls apart, stone by stone, to recover the gold thus, incidentally, fulfilling the prophecy.

And when ye shall see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that her desolation is near... And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled. (Lk 21:20,24)

This prophecy tells us that Jerusalem was to be taken captive. It also tells us that Jerusalem was then to be ruled by Gentiles [non Jews] until their time came to an end. This means that there would be an end of the time that Jerusalem was ruled by Gentiles; in other words Jews would one day rule over it again.

This prophecy of Jerusalem can be seen as a key to a series of short prophecies in Zechariah 12 about Jerusalem in the "latter days". Two prophecies from this series :-

And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all nations: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered against it. (v3)

In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people around, on the right hand and on the left: and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem. (v6)

These prophecies speak of the time when Jerusalem should again be in Jewish hands as a time of great trouble. Holding on to Jerusalem will be a source of trouble in itself, according to v3, while v6 tells us that the governors of Jerusalem (the rulers of the Jews in v5) will prove to be inflammatory to the surrounding peoples. This prophecy shows a remarkable correspondence with the situation at the end of the twentieth century.

Details of the Return of Israel

The prophecy of the return of Jerusalem to Jewish hands is a part of a prophecy, repeated in several places in the Bible, which foretold that Jews would return to set up a restored nation in the land of Israel. This is spoken of in many places:-

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the isles of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. (Isa 11:11,12)

But fear not thou, O my servant Jacob, and be not dismayed, O Israel: for, behold, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and be in rest and at ease, and none shall make him afraid. Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the LORD: for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations where I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in measure; yet will I not leave thee wholly unpunished. (Jer 46:27,28)

Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Although I have cast them far off among the nations, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come. Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. (Ezek 11:16,17)

These prophecies are consistent in that they tell us that Israel was to be scattered widely among the nations but that they would survive as an identifiable people and that God would later cause at least a remnant to be restored to live as a nation in Palestine. Many of the prophecies mention a dispersion among many nations, not to be confused with the exile of Israel in one nation, Babylon. Isaiah tells us that this was to be the second regathering of Israel; the first was the return from Babylon.

The most detailed account of this return is in Ezekiel 36. This takes the whole chapter, but describes a wide variety of the details of Israel's return to their ancestral lands.

Therefore, ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD; Thus saith the Lord GOD to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes, and to the cities that are forsaken, which became a prey and derision to the rest of the nations that are on every side; (Ezek 36:4)

This verse (and the surrounding verses) tells us that the land of Israel was to become a desolate waste in the absence of the people of Israel. This did in fact happen. After the Roman captivity the land was less populous than it had been and without people to look after the irrigation systems it tended to become dry wilderness. Under Turkish rule at the end of the Gentile domination of the land it was ignored by absentee landlords and tended to be barren.

For, behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and ye shall be tilled and sown: And I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, even all of it: and the cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be built: And I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bring fruit: and I will settle you according to your old estates, and will do better to you than at your beginnings: and ye shall know that I am the LORD. Yea, I will cause men to walk upon you, even my people Israel; and they shall possess thee, and thou shalt be their inheritance, and thou shalt no more henceforth bereave them of men. (Ezek 36:9,12)

This is a standard prediction of the return of Jews to Palestine, but it is coupled with a new prediction that the land will increase in fertility at their return. The prophecy does not specify a miracle and there was nothing miraculous about the way that it was fulfilled. As the Jewish settlers set up farms and Kibbutzim in Israel they returned to the practice of irrigating the land and planting trees. This brought about an increase in the fertility of the land and allowed crops to be grown there and even exported.

Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for my holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the nations, where ye went. (Ezek 36:22)

This passage shows that the return of Jews to Palestine was not to be a religious crusade, or even the response of a righteous people to the command of their God. It was to be a movement brought about by the usual political forces and philosophies that govern the behaviour of people. They were to return in unbelief from their captivity.

Coin commemorating the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 AD.



Linguistic Fossils

Linguistic fossils provide another means of deciding whether a particular document fits its time and whether it has been copied from generation to generation with accuracy, and in this it is similar to the argument from undesigned coincidences. An argument based on linguistic fossils is founded on the observation that languages change in time. An account written at the time of Chaucer (14th century) would be written in a different language to that of Shakespeare (16th century) or Kipling (19th century). Thus, if an account purporting to be from Chaucer's time was excavated in an archaeological dig, one could gain a good idea of when it was written by its grammatical and linguistic form. Not only that, but if the manuscript had been copied many times one would expect any corrections or interpolations to be in the language of the time when they were interpolated.

In the case of the Old Testament this is all there is to go on, but in the gospels there is an additional factor. Some of the speech recorded in the gospels may have been written down in translation. If the translation was very literal one would thus find foreign linguistic forms in the Greek text of the gospels. For example, if one reads the sentence:

"I have, for fifteen years, in Manchester lived."

one might conclude that it was originally delivered in German and translated literally into English without correcting the word order. The sentence:

"I am going to House"

contains the phrase "to House" in place of the word "Home." This is because a German would use the phrase "zu Haus" to describe the action of going home. Finally the sentence:

"I gave him a wave with a fence-post"

shows signs of being translated from German as it contains a German idiom.

The Linguistic Background to the Gospels

The Gospels were, it seems, written in Greek. Not only are the oldest manuscripts of the gospels in Greek, including some written before 70AD, but there are no very early manuscripts of the gospels in any other feasible language. However, Greek was not the only language spoken in New Testament Palestine; it was not even the most commonly spoken language.

In fact four different languages were used in the area before 70 AD. These were:-

Greek This was the common language of the Eastern Roman Empire, used in trade and government. Its use in Palestine in the time of the gospels is attested by inscriptions and documents dug up by Archaeologists. Even the Dead Sea Scrolls contain a considerable number of Greek documents. That the use of Greek was common can also be seen from the existence of Greek theatres in several towns such as Sepphoris and Beth Shan. These

theatres were large enough to hold audiences of several thousand; over a matter of several nights most of the inhabitants of these towns and the surrounding countryside must have visited them. As the only plays in existence in any quantity were in Greek, nearly everyone in the area must have been a competent Greek speaker.

Aramaic Aramaic was the language of the Syrians, Assyrians and Babylonians. It was closely related to Hebrew and used the same system of letters. As many of the words in Aramaic are the same as those in Hebrew it is easy to confuse the two. The use of Aramaic in New Testament times is also attested by inscriptions and documents from the time. The language also appears in the Gospels with phrases such as Talitha Cumi [Mk 5:41], Ephphatha [Mk 7:34] and Rabboni [Jn 20:16].

Hebrew This was the language of the Bible and of scholarly Judaism. As such it would be spoken by the Scribes and Pharisees at any rate. More and more evidence is coming to light to show that it was understood by a large proportion of the population, especially in Judea; many of the Dead Sea Scrolls are in Hebrew and Hebrew inscriptions outnumber other language inscriptions in Jerusalem, where they appear on private objects such as in funerary inscriptions as well as in public inscriptions.

Latin This was the language of Rome, although most educated Romans would use Greek in preference. When the inscription was placed on Jesus' cross it was written in Greek, Latin and Hebrew [Lk 23:38].

This leads on to the question of what language Jesus spoke in his ministry. It would probably have been a mixture of languages as Jesus, and the other characters in the gospels, would be multilingual. The Gospels are written in Greek. We would, however, expect evidence to show that some of the words were translated from other languages, especially Hebrew and/or Aramaic.

Hebrew and Aramaic in the Gospels

Hebraic Forms The text of the gospels does, in fact, provide evidence of the use of at least two languages by those whose speech is recorded in them.

For example, consider the form of many of Hebrew/Aramaic poetry. Unlike European poetry, including Greek poetry, this does not rely on rhyme. Instead it relies on forms which repeat very similar ideas in parallel with each other. For example, consider the form of Psalm 27:

*The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*
(Psa 27:1)

In Hebrew this parallelism is even more marked:-

יְהוָה אֹרֵי וְיִשְׁעֵי
 יְהוָה מְעוֹז־חַיֵּי
 מִמִּי אֵירָא
 מִמִּי אֶפְחָד:
 (Ps 27:1)

The same kind of structure can be found in the words of Jesus in the Gospels:-

*Love your enemies, do good to them who hate you,
 Bless them that curse you, and pray for them who despitefully use you.*
 (Lk 6:27,28)

Again, translated into Aramaic or Hebrew this parallel structure is much more marked, and there is some metre to the result.

Plays on Words

The Gospels contain plays on words which work in Hebrew and Aramaic, but which do not work in Greek. For example, consider the saying:-

Ye blind guides, who strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel. (Mt 23:24)

In Greek this is unremarkable:

οδηγοι τυφλοι οι διυλιζοντες τον κωνωπα, την δε καμηλοσ καταπινοντες.

But when translated into Aramaic it contains a play on words:-

מְנַהֲלִים עֹרְרִים הַסְּגָנִים אַתְּ הַפְּסֵל וּבֹלְעִים אַתְּ הַגְּמֵל

The Aramaic word for a camel is gamla and the Aramaic word for a gnat is camla. Jesus said: "you blind guides who strain out a camla and swallow a gamla." This play on words must have originated in Aramaic. It does not work in Greek, or even in Hebrew.

Hebraic Idiom

The words of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, also contain turns of phrase which are characteristically hebraic (or Aramaic). These are further evidence that these words of Jesus were originally delivered in Hebrew (or Aramaic). Examples of these are:-

cast out your name as evil. (Lk 6:22)

The appearance of his countenance was altered. (Lk 9:29)

Lay these sayings in your ears. (Luke 9:44)

Again these are characteristically Hebrew. In the Authorised Version the other gospels contain similar phraseology, but the translators have rendered them in English in a way which conceals their Hebrew origin.

Greek Sayings

Not every word spoken by Jesus or the disciples was in Hebrew/Aramaic. The same evidence that points to a Hebrew/Aramaic original for some sayings points to a Greek original in others. For example:-

Mt 5:17 Think not [Me nomisete] that I am come to destroy the law [nomon] or .

Lk 8:15 But that on the good [kale] ground are they, who in an honest [kale] and good heart.

Lk 21:11 famines [limoi] and pestilences [loimoi]

It is even possible to find passages where the characters change from one language to another. For example:-

Jesus saith to her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith to him, Sir, if thou hast borne him away, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith to her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith to him, Rabboni.(Jn 20:15,16)

The first part of the passage (Sir, if thou hast borne him away, tell me where thou hast laid.) is in stylish Greek and was probably first delivered in Greek. Here Mary is being formally polite to a stranger. Mary then recognises Jesus and addresses him in Aramaic (Rabboni), the language in which she was accustomed to talk with him.

Conclusion for the Gospels

The gospels were written in Greek because they were for a Greek speaking readership to whom Hebrew or Aramaic would mean little. The fact that many of the sayings of Jesus have an underlying Hebraic form shows that they were not made up by the person who wrote the gospel. Why make up an Aramaic form when writing a gospel in Greek? The people who read the gospel initially would be completely unaware of the Hebraisms within it. It would take a very astute linguist indeed to concoct a passage like Jn 20 where Mary changes language part way through a conversation.

The reporting of these Hebraisms shows that the speech of the people in the Gospels has been recorded accurately. If there had been flaws in the memory of those who wrote them down, or if the speech had been made up the Hebraisms would have disappeared. The Hellenisms show that the entirety of the Gospels was not written in Hebrew or they too would have disappeared. Finally the Gospels were copied for generations by people who

hardly understood Greek, and certainly would not recognise the Hebraisms. If there had been even tiny and subtle errors in the copying the Hebraisms would have vanished.

Thus we can be confident that the Gospels contain an accurate record of the various events and sayings that they contain, and that they have been transmitted with accuracy down the ages to the modern day.

Linguistic Fossils in the Old Testament

The Hebrew language in which most of the Old Testament was written changed from the time of Abraham to the time of Jesus. This change can be used to show the ages of the various books in the Old Testament.

For example, the book of Daniel contains accurate prophecies of the future, so accurate that some critics have claimed that the book must have been written after the prophecies were fulfilled. However, an analysis of the Aramaic of the book of Daniel shows that it comes from a period very close to the one in which the book purports to have been written.

Another example appears in the Book of Genesis. Here many of the names of the people reported from about Abraham's days contain archaic forms. For example, Melchisedek is the king of righteousness. In classical Hebrew this would be Malak-zedek, but in ancient Hebrew it would have been Malki-Zedeku. The name thus preserves an old fashioned form, which suggests that it contains accurately reported subject matter from before its completion date.

Harmony

The Bible contains sixty-six books. These were written over a long period of time (almost one and a half thousand years) by a large number of different people (at least 36 and possibly 47 writers were involved). The books were written over a wide geographical spread (from Rome to Babylon). Three different languages were involved. In spite of this the book contains a unified message. This is the basis of the argument from Harmony. How could a book, or collection of books, like the Bible be written by so many different people over such a long period and still show such unity?

The Chronology of the Bible

The oldest book of the Bible is probably Job, which seems to have been written before the exodus. This would place it in 1500 BC or (most probably) even earlier. However, even if this book is ignored the oldest books of the Bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers were written before the Children of Israel entered the promised land in about 1400 BC. The book of Deuteronomy was probably finished shortly after the Israelites crossed the river Jordan, and was therefore also completed in about 1400 BC. At the other end of the range we have the Gospel of John and the Book of the Revelation, both of which were probably written shortly before the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 AD. The following table illustrates this chronological spread:-

The Number and Variety of Writers.

The number of writers of the Bible is large. There are nine New Testament writers and 22 writers of Old Testament books after Job. The number of writers of the historical books is more difficult to estimate as it is not clear exactly who wrote them. Assuming one writer each and one writer for the first four books of the Bible we have another 13 writers (Ezra and Nehemiah being counted as one book) bringing the total to 35 writers for the Old Testament. However, the historical books show signs of having been written by a succession of people, raising the number still further.

Not only were there a large number of different writers, but they were from a wide variety of walks of life, from Kings to Peasants and from Scholars to Tax Collectors. Again, the variety can be illustrated by a table which gives a sample of the different walks of life:-

Old Testament		New Testament	
Job	C 1500 BC	James	40 - 47 AD
Exodus	C 1400 BC	Galatians	47 / 48 AD
Ecclesiastes	C 1000 BC	Mark	Before 50 AD

Isaiah	700 BC	Luke	58 - 60 AD
Daniel	600 BC	Acts	62 AD
Nehemiah	430 BC	Hebrews	64 AD

New Testament		Old Testament	
Writer	Profession	Writer	Profession
Moses	Slave who became a prince	Matthew	Tax collector
David	Shepherd who became a king	Mark	Rich man's son
Nehemiah	Civil Servant	Luke	Doctor
Amos	Farm Labourer	Paul	Scholar
Zephaniah	nobleman	Peter	Fisherman
Daniel	Civil Servant	John	Small business man

Given that there is 1500 years or more between Moses and John one can imagine the difference in their outlook. A first century AD fish dealer would have nothing in common with a fifteenth century BC ruler of people, especially as Moses came from Egypt having been brought up in the ways of the Egyptian court.

Geography and Language

Not only were the books of the Bible written over a very long period by a large number of different writers with different outlooks, there is also a wide geographical separation between the places in which they were written. Even in the first century the difference of outlook between Jerusalem and R



ome was

great, as it was between either city and Babylon or Antioch.

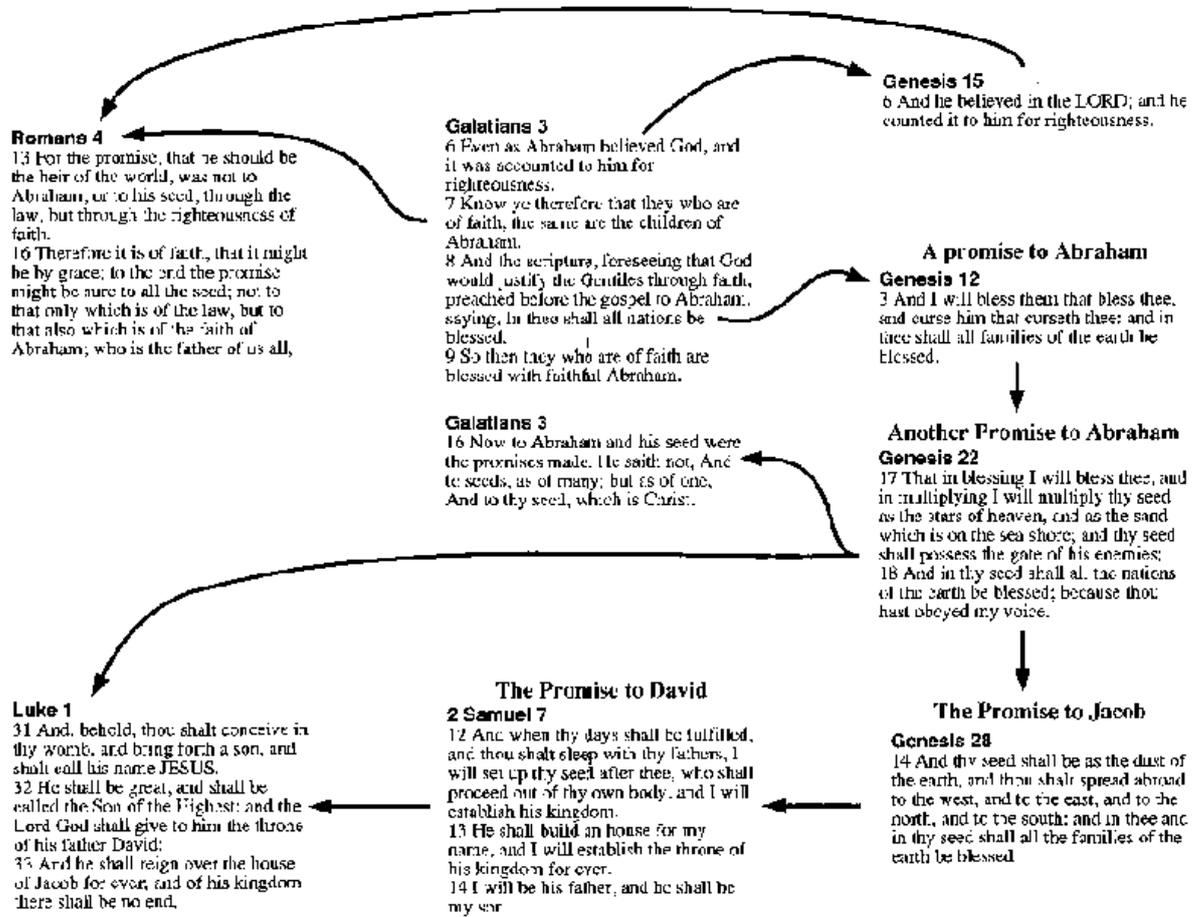
In fact the different writers of the Bible did not all speak one another's languages. Moses would not have understood New Testament Greek and Nebuchadnezzar (who is credited with part of the book of Daniel) would probably not have spoken Hebrew. Even where the language remains the same in name it changed over the centuries so that the Hebrew of Malachi is not quite the same as the Hebrew of Job.

Unity

In spite of all this variety, the Bible is a very united book (or, more correctly, set of books). The scope of this unity can be seen by exploring almost any theme in it. By following a concordance and the marginal references one soon finds oneself in a chain of passages which covers the whole Bible.

Consider, for example, Gal 3:6-9. This refers to the promises made to Abraham in Gen 15:6 and Gen 12:3. The promise of Gal 15:6 is also referred to in Rom 4:13,16 and there is a cross reference between Gal 3:7 and Rom 4:13-16. Following through the promises to Abraham one finds another promise in Gen 22:17,18 which is a specific promise about one special descendent of Abraham, the Messiah. This is referred to in Gal 3:16, a little further down the page from our original reference. Following the promises to the descendants of Abraham shows that they were given to Jacob in much the same words as to Abraham, and that they later rested on David (2 Sam 7:12-14). The promise of a descendent of David who would sit on David's throne and establish it forever continues through the Old Testament, being found also in Ezek 21:32; it is commented on in Luke 1:31-33 where the birth of Jesus is being foretold. This birth was itself in fulfilment of Gen 22:17, already mentioned.

The process is outlined in the diagram below, but it could go on to cover much more of the Bible. A different starting point will produce a different network of connections but in the end it will grow to cover a large portion of the Bible. What is interesting is that these chains never end up contradicting themselves (provided that one is prepared to relax one's assumptions as directed by the Bible). The Bible is clearly one united whole.



Conclusion

The content of the Bible is united over fifteen centuries, three languages, upwards of 36 writers from completely different backgrounds who wouldn't have all understood each other if they had been put together by a time machine.

For this to happen there needs to be a single controlling interest. This has to span fifteen hundred years and two thousand miles. It has to have the power to make all the different writers produce a unified message. There is only one possible candidate for this controlling interest. It has to be the will of God. This means that the Bible must have been produced by men writing for God under God's direction. In other words, the Bible must have been inspired by God.

The Witness of Jesus

Jesus is the Son of God. This fact is at the core of the Gospel and God himself has given witness to it. God declared Jesus to be the son of God in several ways:-

In Prophecy God prophesied many details of one who would come who would not only be the descendent of David and the rightful king of the world, but also the Son of God. For example: I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said to me, Thou [art] my Son; this day have I begotten thee. (Ps 2:7)

In the witness of Miracles Jesus worked many miracles. In themselves these do not prove very much, but taken with the teaching of Jesus and the fulfilment of prophecy they are a witness that Jesus was sent from God. But I have greater witness than [that] of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness concerning me, that the Father hath sent me. (Jn 5:36)

By the Resurrection of Jesus Jesus was put to death, but on the third day he rose from the dead. Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead... (Rom 1:3,4)

Because of the relationship of Jesus with God we can trust the words of Jesus when he tells us how God has revealed himself to mankind. Jesus revealed God himself, and is uniquely qualified to tell us about the other ways in which God has revealed himself. In particular, Jesus is able to tell us how reliable the Bible is and how much it can be trusted to give a clear revelation of the mind of God. There is no-one with better qualifications on this score.

The witness that Jesus gives could not be clearer. It tells us that the words of the Bible are the words of God, and that the ultimate truth of God is revealed for us in the Bible.

The Old Testament

The only part of the Bible that existed in Jesus' day was the Old Testament. When Jesus spoke of the "Scriptures" it is the Old Testament to which he is referring. This was the Bible that Jesus used. The degree to which Jesus relied on the words of the Bible can be seen from the frequency with which he quotes it (See box below). Jesus referred to the Old Testament continually and about 10% of the recorded words of Jesus are quotations from the Old Testament.

Jesus Quotes the Old Testament

These statistics are a powerful case in their own right. Jesus claimed to speak from God and for God: ...the words that I speak to you I speak not from myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doth the works.... He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but that of the Father who sent me. (Jn 14:10,24) Either we accept this claim or we reject it. If we reject it we cannot call ourselves followers of Christ Jesus. If

we accept it we must believe that the Old Testament contains words from God and that it is fully authoritative.

Besides the amount of use Jesus made of the Old Testament he also gave direct teachings about its authority. This teaching makes it quite clear that Jesus regarded the Old Testament as inspired by God and as the final authority on teaching in all areas. The terms that Jesus used to describe the Bible show the extent to which he found it authoritative.

It is written Jesus uses this phrase 18 times to support his own teaching by reference to his Bible, the Old Testament. In every one of these cases the fact that something was written in the Bible was treated as a guarantee that it was true. Interestingly enough, other people realised that Jesus held the Bible to be fully authoritative and tried to convince him by quoting the scriptures. This occurs eight times in the gospels.

Have you never read? There are ten references in the Bible where Jesus teaches the people with the words Have you never read. When he does this it is because he is teaching that the contents of the scripture he quotes are fully authoritative. Jesus saith to them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? (Mt 21:42)

Search the Scripture Jesus said: Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. (Jn 5:39) This is an appeal to the Pharisees to find an authoritative description of him in the Old Testament. The way he gives it shows that he expects the quotation to complete the argument and thus regards it as authoritative.

Jesus answered and said to them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. (Mt 22:29) This explanation tells us that the people to whom Jesus was speaking were wrong in rejecting the idea that their Bible was God's word. It is also an appeal for them to find an authoritative description of Jesus in the Old Testament.

The Scripture must be fulfilled (Mk 14:49) The fact that something was predicted in the Bible was, for Jesus, enough to guarantee that it would happen. This is the case because the Bible contains the words of God.

O fools, and slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken. (Lk 24:25) This was spoken by Jesus to two of his doubting disciples after his resurrection. The important point he was making is that it is enough to find something written in the Old Testament to know that it is true. The disciples were forced to accept that Jesus was raised from the dead by a quotation of passages from the Old Testament rather than by Jesus revealing himself to them.

The sum of these statements is to show how Jesus taught that the scriptures to which he had access were inspired by God and were fully authoritative. Jesus quotes from all the sections of the Old Testament; no part is omitted, which shows that Jesus accepted all of it as God's word. The way that the quotations are used shows that Jesus did not only accept them as moral guides. He also accepted the Old Testament descriptions of history and its prediction of events yet to come. He treated the Bible he had as a complete source of true teaching from God.

The Gospels

The Gospels are our main record of Jesus. As such they contain an account of the words and actions of Jesus. These actions and words were, themselves, inspired by God. Two more verses which record occasions where Jesus stated unequivocally that his words came from God are:-

Jesus answered them, and said, My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. (Jn 7:16)

For I have not spoken from myself; but the Father who sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. (Jn 12:49)

As the Gospels contain the words of Jesus and these words are inspired by God the Gospels are clearly inspired by God to that extent.

However, the inspiration of the Gospels does not simply rest on the fact that the writers were reporting the words and doings of Jesus. There is a much stronger inspiration of the gospels in that the people who wrote them were writing directly under the control of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles and Evangelists who wrote the Gospels were given divine assistance in remembering the events that they were describing and the speech they were recording. The Spirit also told the Evangelists what episodes to include in the Gospels and what to omit from them. This is explained by Jesus:-

But the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit, ..., he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said to you. (Jn 14:26)

The Holy Spirit was to prompt the memories of the Apostles so that they would be able to give an exact account of what Jesus had said and done. The spirit was poured out on the Apostles at Pentecost (See Acts 2) and gave them the ability to teach the gospel among other things. Before these gifts were again withdrawn the Gospels had been written.

The Epistles

The epistles are the last section of the Bible to be considered here, letters from various Apostles to various churches or people. The Apostles who wrote them were chosen by, and filled with, the Holy Spirit of God.

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, various kinds of tongues. (1 Cor 12:28)

The Holy Spirit brought various responsibilities and abilities to people; these are called gifts. There were two types of gift, the administrative gifts which gave people particular tasks in the church, and the direct gifts such as healing or prophecy which gave people the ability to do certain special things. The Apostles were filled with the Spirit and acted as all the other gifts. It is the Apostles who in general wrote the epistles. We can therefore conclude that the words of the Epistles were inspired by God.

In fact there is another reason to believe that the Apostles were inspired by God:-

But the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit ... he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said to you. (Jn 14:26)

When Jesus was about to die, after the last supper, he gave the disciples the promise that the Holy Spirit would settle on them and give them various things. Among these is the promise that they would remember what Jesus had said to them, and that the Spirit would also teach them All Things.

Conclusion

The witness of Jesus is not only that the Bible reliable, but that it is also the word of God. Thus the Bible is a record written by God to tell us all how to live our lives and what truths we must accept. The words of the Bible were chosen by God, and we need to pay attention to them because of this. Jesus believed every part of the Scriptures to be inspired and that no part of the Bible can be ignored. If we are to be true followers of Jesus, true Christians, we must accept the teachings of Jesus, even those about the inspiration of Scripture.

Summary

The evidence presented so far falls into three broad categories. First of all there is evidence that the Bible contains an accurate account of the words, teachings and actions of the prophets and of Jesus Christ. Second, there is the evidence of the witness of these people to the Scriptures. Finally there is additional evidence that the Bible is inspired in the words that it contains.

Evidence that the Bible is Accurate

This evidence does not, in itself, prove that the Bible is inspired by God, but it does show that the Bible gives an accurate account of the histories that it contains and a full record of the words and teachings of the prophets and of Jesus. The evidence available includes the following:-

Archaeology The Bible contains detailed descriptions of many places, people and events which are also found in secular histories and in archaeological excavations. When the evidence outside the Bible is pieced together one can see that the Bible has an accurate account of the relevant history. The people concerned really existed at the right time, the events happened when they were supposed to and the descriptions of the places match the actual places as discovered by archaeologists. This is quite different from more recent forgeries like the apocryphal books or the Gospel of Barnabas.

Manuscript Evidence The oldest manuscripts of books from the New Testament come from the Dead Sea Scrolls (Cave seven). These were buried in 68 AD but must have been copied rather earlier. The fragment of the Gospel of Mark in this cave must have been copied in about 50 AD. This shows that the gospels were written within a very short time of the events they describe. It confirms that they could have been written by eyewitnesses, and that there would be many eyewitnesses available to correct them if they had been in error. The evidence of the early fragments is supported by the existence of many thousands of more recent, although still ancient, manuscripts. These confirm to us that we still have a text of the New Testament which is accurate enough for all practical purposes. The text of the Old Testament is even more firmly established, as can be seen from finds of Old Testament books among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Linguistic Fossils Although they were written in Greek, the Gospels contain reports of words that were originally spoken in another language, Aramaic. The people who originally read these Gospels, and later copied them, did not understand Aramaic. They would therefore have been unable to construct documents which contain evidence of an Aramaic original and any errors made in copying would not have been able to have been corrected. We can therefore tell that the Gospels contain an accurate record of the words of Jesus and that they have been faithfully copied. These linguistic fossils are especially marked in the Gospels, where a great deal of speech which was originally in a foreign language is recorded. However it occurs in the Old Testament as well, with archaisms in places which describe very early history and characteristic words from Assyrian and Babylonian sources (such as the titles Tartan and Rabshakeh [2 Ki 18:17])

Undesigned Scriptural Coincidences Finally there are coincidences of tiny detail. When one compares accounts of the same events in different places in the Bible it becomes clear that while some understanding may be necessary to piece together the story, the details do match one another in the different accounts. Often the correspondence is in details which are so insignificant that it is unlikely that they would be made up; these tiny details would also be the first to be lost if poor copying caused any significant degradation in the text of the books. This phenomenon is exhibited throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

The Witness of Jesus and the Prophets

There can be no doubt that the Bible contains the words of Jesus and that these words are reported accurately. Equally, there is no doubt that Jesus was a very special person who revealed what God is like and who spoke for God. If nothing else does, his resurrection from the dead shows that God recognises him and endorses his teaching.

One of the teachings of Jesus concerns the Bible. This is the teaching that the whole Bible, Old and New Testaments alike, is the direct word of God. If we wish to claim to be followers of Jesus, we must accept his teaching about the Bible. Even if we only revere him as a prophet or as an authority on spiritual matters we must accept this teaching. This leaves us only the option of rejecting Jesus' teaching or of accepting that the Bible is Inspired by God.

A similar witness is also given by the prophets. This can be found in the section about inspiration in general. If any of them were true prophets then the Bible must be the inspired word of God.

Direct Evidence

Having shown that the Bible is inspired by God, it is interesting to see some collateral evidence of this. This seminar has introduced two pieces of evidence here, fulfilled prophecy and harmony.

Fulfilled Prophecy The Bible contains a considerable quantity of predictive material. 27% of the Bible is prophecy and of the prophecy to be fulfilled before the immediate time of Jesus' return, 100% of this prophecy has been fulfilled. The predictions are detailed and they are specific. There is only one way of accounting for them, by accepting that God was responsible for the words of the Bible.

Harmony The Bible was written over a long time (about one and a half millennia) by a wide variety of people from very different backgrounds over half the ancient world, writing in three languages. In spite of this it has a single united message. There would have been no human way to have achieved this. We can therefore see that God was at hand in producing the Bible.

Thus the idea that the Bible was inspired by God is not just an idea from a few cranky and extreme people. It is clearly taught by the Bible itself and is supported by strong evidence.