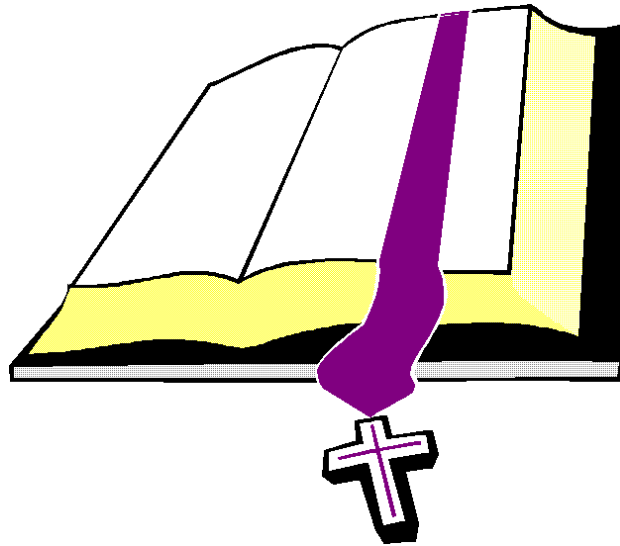


The Bible:

Is It A True and Accurate Account of Creation?

Should Biblical Creationism be Taught in
Science Classes?



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ABSTRACT

It has been suggested that biblical creationism should be taught in public school science classes as an addition to, or even as a replacement for, the study of evolution. Biblical creationism is inappropriate for public school science classes because:

- ◆ Most believers—Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Protestants, and Jews—accept scientific explanations of creation, and do not believe the Genesis narratives to be literal, historical fact.
- ◆ Many mainline denominations do not demand a belief in the Genesis accounts of creation as literal, historical fact, and do not consider evolution to be inconsistent with Christian belief.
- ◆ Many mainstream denominations do not accept the “inspiration” of the Bible as meaning that the Bible contains the literal word of God.
- ◆ The Bible itself is not a strong witness for a belief in the Genesis narratives as literal, historical fact.
- ◆ Many of the most highly respected modern theologians encourage alternative interpretations of Genesis, such as:
 - ◆ An allegory for the power of God.
 - ◆ The biblical creation narratives may have been contaminated by pagan beliefs during the centuries between their inspiration and the time that they were written.
 - ◆ The writers could not have known the scientific facts of creation, and produced the best creation narrative they could with the information available at the time.
- ◆ Alternative non-literal interpretations of the Bible have been in force since antiquity.
- ◆ The purposes of religion and of science are completely different. Religion is concerned with morality, righteousness, and salvation. Science is concerned with description, explanation, and prediction.
- ◆ The purposes of Genesis and the scientific description of evolution are entirely different. Science describes *how* creation occurred, and the Bible tells the *purpose* of creation.
- ◆ Biblical scholarship has shown that the Bible as we know it was a gradual accretion from many sources, that it has been edited several times before coming to us in its present form, that the oldest texts available had been copied and recopied many times, that the ancient texts disagree with each other in important particulars, and that the intentions of the original writers are unknown.
- ◆ The Genesis creation narratives disagree with well-established scientific facts, and are inconsistent with each other in important details.

Preface

The following essay was written by two people who consider themselves to be Christians in the true sense of the word. The essay is NOT an attack on the Bible NOR an attack on faith in God. We intend to show those with an open mind some truth, as we understand it, about what scripture is and is not. Are you willing to make a quest for truth?

Where does your faith reside? Is your faith centered on God? Or are you adamant about your beliefs in the Bible? If the latter, you will not enjoy reading this essay. Some people refuse to consider other points of view, and there are some who perceive any differences in belief as a threat to theirs. They should be warned that their faith is built on sand! This essay is a statement of OUR understanding and beliefs, and is not intended as an attack on anyone else's faith.

If, on the other hand, you believe that "the wise [should] listen and add to their learning, and ...the discerning [should] get guidance ... [while] fools despise wisdom and discipline ... [and] love ... simple ways ..." (Prov. ch. 1-4, 8-9), and if you search for understanding and truth with an open mind, read on. You may find that what you learn in this essay actually adds to your faith.

For the many who have been turned away from all religion because of an inability to accept extreme Fundamentalist beliefs, we hope that this essay will introduce you to the more moderate beliefs of the mainstream. You may find that the willingness of most believers to learn and adapt will change your mind about religion.

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AUTHORS' NOTE: the notations "BC" and "AD", which are familiar to most readers, have been replaced in this work by "BCE" (Before Common Era) and "CE" (Common Era), in line with the most authoritative usage of modern Biblical scholarship.

SUMMARY

The Bible is the foundation document of Judaism and Christianity. It is a basic ingredient of the collective culture of the Western world. It is extensively quoted in literature. It has inspired some of the world's greatest art. The moral and ethical teachings of the Bible are a principal cornerstone of Western legal and philosophical systems.

Some groups have proposed including biblical creationism in public school science classes as an addition to, or even as a replacement for, the study of evolution. These groups base their argument on a belief that the Bible, particularly the book of Genesis, offers a true, accurate, and complete account of creation.

However, the Bible is not an adequate scientific account of physical and biological origin and evolution. The creation stories of the Bible are seriously contradicted by well-verified facts. The implied age of the universe, the creation of the entire universe and all living creatures within six days (whether understood as a literal 24-hour day, years, or an age), the simultaneous creation of sun, moon and stars (after creation of the earth), and the near simultaneous arrival of all living things, are all contrary to scientific fact. There are actually two distinct, mutually inconsistent accounts of the creation in Genesis. Internal consistency and agreement with objective facts are absolute requirements of a scientific theory.

Arguments about conflict between the Bible and science are pointless. The Bible is not a science text; the scientific method was unknown in biblical times. Theology may use rigorous logic in a similar manner to science, but the subject matter, God, is not amenable to empirical testing. Science cannot give guidance on moral and spiritual questions, but the methods of science can be used to help determine the provenance and authenticity of the Bible. The purposes of religion and science are completely different. Science seeks to describe, explain, and predict. The Bible tries to tell the *purpose* of creation, and to point the way to morality, righteousness, and salvation. It should not be surprising that their methods are different and even incompatible.

Believers do not universally accept the Bible as an accurate account of all events. Although the majority of Fundamentalists and many Evangelicals do accept total biblical accuracy, most mainline denominations leave that up to individual conscience; the Bible is considered the "fallible human rendering of divine inspiration". "Inspiration" in this view is an illumination that helps the author to apply his wisdom and experience to writing.

Creationists believe the Bible to be INERRANT and PERSPICUOUS. Inerrancy means that the Bible has neither errors of fact nor internal contradictions. Perspicuity means that the Bible is clear, unambiguous, and not subject to interpretation. The belief in complete inerrancy is probably rooted in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The King James Version reads: "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 perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Fundamentalists interpret this verse to mean that every word in the Bible has been directly given by God, and is absolutely true. Most mainline denominations interpret this verse to mean that the Bible is useful as a moral guide.

Another verse used to justify a belief in complete inerrancy is Matthew 5:18. "I tell you this: so long as heaven and earth endure, not a letter, not a stroke, will disappear from the Law until all that must happen has happened". An alternate reading of the last phrase of this verse is "before all that it stands for is achieved." The Fundamentalist view of this verse is that every word and punctuation mark must be followed. The mainstream view is that the verse is ambiguous, but that the moral precepts of the "law" are always binding on Christians. Other statements of Jesus (for example Matthew 5:31-32, Matthew 10:1-12, Luke 16:18, and Mark 10: 2-12) seem to indicate that He did not consider some sections of the "Law" to be either divinely inspired or binding.

Biblical inerrancy is not a major concern for the majority of Roman Catholics, and Pope John Paul II has affirmed that evolution is a proper field of study for Catholics. Most Jews do not consider factual accuracy of the Genesis account to be an important point. Of course, inerrancy is not accepted at all by atheists, agnostics, and adherents of other faiths. The majority of Christians believe that the Bible, although inspired, is the work of human authors, and that it could have been influenced by the popular beliefs at the time of writing, and are not deeply troubled by evidence of inconsistency in some parts. However, those whose faith rests almost entirely on a firm belief in total, literal infallibility of every word naturally feel extreme dissonance when parts of the Bible are contradicted by scientific facts.

The doctrine of biblical inerrancy arose in the 19th century in opposition to scholarly study of the Bible and to the growth of science. The question did not seriously trouble believers prior to the work of Hutton and Lyell; until the age of the earth was known, most Christians could accept the Genesis account. The belief in total inerrancy has grown especially since the 1920s, and is hence of relatively recent vintage. The doctrine is most strongly held in the rural South and border States.

Even the earliest commentaries asserted that the Bible was the product of human authors. The earliest Jewish and Christian scholars were principally concerned with resolving discrepancies and contradictions. The concept of "allegorism" (the literal interpretation of a passage is subsidiary to a deeper meaning) was espoused by the Jewish scholar Philo Judaeus at the beginning of the Christian era and was also accepted by early Christian scholars like Origen, for example. Saint Augustine of Hippo warned that a literal reading of Genesis could obscure the deeper meaning. He also warned that palpably illogical readings of Scripture could bring Christianity into disrepute among intelligent unbelievers.

Historical and interpretive study, although opposed by most Fundamentalists, has been accepted by the great majority of biblical scholars. This so-called "higher criticism" began in the 18th and 19th centuries and is still the major focus of scholarly biblical research. Pope Pius XII in "*Divino Afflante Spiritu*" encouraged Biblical research in 1943. Although most of the early scholars involved in higher criticism were respectful, even reverential, and many were clergymen, they were ferociously attacked during the 19th century.

Scholarly study of the Bible has raised many questions. What version, and which translation, is most faithful to the original? The earliest surviving complete versions date only from the early Christian era. The earliest surviving complete text of the Pentateuch is actually a copy of a Greek

translation dating from the third century BCE. Comparison of that version with the earliest surviving texts and fragments and with the Masorah and with the Qumran scrolls suggest that the Old Testament has been copied, recopied, and edited with reasonable fidelity, but some major discrepancies do exist, variants were not uncommon in antiquity, and the accuracy of the entire text is open to question.

Other questions that have arisen are:

- (1) Who wrote what? It is impossible to verify the authorship of most parts of the Bible. Some sections clearly have several authors, and their accounts are often intertwined.
- (2) What sources did the authors use, and how reliable were they? Oral tradition probably played an important role, with a high likelihood of being garbled during its interpretation and repetition over the years.
- (3) How was the content transmitted and edited, and how was it altered in editing? For example, all of the Pentateuch is an amalgamation from many different sources. Was it altered in putting it together?
- (4) What were the purposes of the authors? Was a section ever intended to be taken literally?

Research has found discrepancies with historical and archaeological evidence, and the persons to whom authorship has been traditionally ascribed could not possibly have written some passages. The forms of many passages (poetry, essays, prophecies, visions, etc.) influenced the content. The writers of many passages probably never intended them to be read as accurate historical and scientific accounts.

Biblical scholarship has suggested some alternative readings for the Genesis account of creation:

- (1) The Genesis account should be read as an allegory for the power of God.
- (2) The Genesis account is a monotheistic updating of Mesopotamian creation myths.
- (3) The Genesis account represents the early cosmogony of a primitive nomadic desert tribe, and, as such, should not be taken seriously today. There is a marked difference between the anthropomorphic God of Genesis and the later more sophisticated concepts of a transcendent, immaterial, unknowable God.
- (4) The Genesis account became contaminated by error in transmission or by pagan mythology during the many centuries that elapsed between the original conception and the time that the book was committed to writing. The Bible has many accounts of intrusion of polytheistic beliefs into the early worship of Yahweh (Exodus 32:1-5, Numbers 25:1-5, Judges 3:7-8).
- (5) The writers of the Genesis narratives could not have known either the age of the earth or the order of appearance of plants and animals; they wrote the best account they could with the knowledge available to them.

Alternatives suggested in the past include the "day-age" hypothesis (each "day" represents a very long epoch) and the "gap" hypothesis (there are enormous gaps between the "days" of creation). By the middle of the 19th century, approximately half of all Christians had accepted one of these alternative beliefs. Both of these hypotheses are inconsistent with many scientific facts of evolution, astronomy, and geology, and they are not highly regarded today.

The majority of believers now accepts some form of alternative reading. However, most Fundamentalists categorically reject all interpretations except completely literal, factual accuracy.

In summary, views of the Bible have varied over time, and now vary across sectarian lines. Interpretation of the Bible as exact history is far from universal even among believers. Scholarly research has opened up many questions about the accuracy of some sections of the Bible, even as faithful renditions of the authors' beliefs. Only a minority of Christians holds a strong belief in total inerrancy. Most religious people are not seriously concerned by the mythic character of some parts of the Bible, which are not seen as detracting from its valuable moral and spiritual lessons. The account of creation in Genesis as a scientific, historical description is seriously contradicted by well-verified scientific facts. The Bible is inappropriate as a science text in schools, because the creation narrative is in contradiction with so many scientific facts, because it was never intended as a scientific account, and because only a small minority of believers accepts biblical creationism. However, it may be a proper vehicle for the study of comparative religion or philosophy.

THE BIBLE AS A WITNESS TO INSPIRATION, INFALLIBILITY, INDEFECTABILITY, AND INERRANCY

INSPIRATION has distinctly different meanings for different theologians. The meaning accepted by Fundamentalists is that all Scriptures found in the Holy Bible today (*sans* Apocrypha) were directly given by God, which also gives rise to the ideas of inerrancy and infallibility. In the view of the majority of modern theologians, inspiration is an illumination that aided the writer in applying his wisdom to writing the Scriptures. In most modern branches of Christianity, readers are to accept the GUIDANCE of the Holy Spirit in interpreting Scripture. Roman Catholics (since the Council of Trent, 1545-63) are enjoined to use Holy Scripture along with the guidance of tradition. In some branches of Christianity the "higher criticism" of biblical scholarship is also specifically encouraged as a guide to understanding.

Most people who write about the inspiration of the Bible focus on one scripture -- 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The King James Version reads:

"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 perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

The New English Bible is not as definite:

"Every inspired scripture has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, or for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good works of every kind."

Literally, the first part of v.16 reads something more like:

"All writings God-breathed and/even/also profitable to/towards teaching, to/toward"

Like verse 17 (see above) the whole of 2 Timothy 3 is referring to finding the knowledge required for living a moral life, using the "God-breathed writings," inspired Scriptures, as the guide. This may be a play on man/Adam; Genesis 2:7 says that God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life".

This seems to be consistent with the idea of INFALLIBILITY: the Bible is reliable and trustworthy to those searching for God's truth. However, it should be noted that infallibility can not strictly be deduced from this scripture alone. Some assumptions must be made about what "God's truth" is. In the context of 2 Timothy 3 it has to do with right living -- being righteous; in a Christian context to this must be added the concept of salvation (simply put that man can not achieve righteousness on his own, rather it comes from God through faith in the Christ). If a different assumption is made (e.g., the Bible is a scientifically accurate book) this scripture provides no support. As a source of truth, the Bible is also claimed to be INDEFECTABLE: it can not fall away or defect from truth. Consequently it will never fail or deceive anyone who trusts it in matters of developing a personal knowledge of God and in matters of salvation. Both

of these ideas (infallibility and indefectability) seem to be reasonable statements **if** they retain the context of 2 Tim 3:16, although there would seem to be a question of to what materials do the terms really apply?

These writings are not defined in the letter to Timothy, but PRESUMABLY they are the "Scriptures," whatever that meant to the writer. If one wants to apply this in a broad sense to all that might be considered a Scripture at the time the letter was written, the best candidate would be what passed for a Bible to most New Testament (NT) Christians (who spoke Greek): the Septuagint (LXX: referring to the 70, or 72 translators, according to one tradition, or to 70 years of work, according to another). The LXX was a Greek translation of Hebrew scriptures in use by the Jews and Christians alike during NT times. Its use is readily attested by many of the Old Testament (OT) quotations found in the NT that could only have come from the LXX (e.g., Hebrews 1:6 and Acts 15:17).

Several questions come to mind at this point:

1. How do you go from the idea that Scriptures are useful for guiding moral behavior to saying that they are completely factual when it comes to their scientific and historical accuracy?
2. How do you shift from using the LXX to using the Masoretic text as the best witness for the true Old Testament (the oldest known individual books of the Masorah date from no earlier than the 6th century CE, and the oldest known complete text dates from no earlier than the 10th century CE)? The translators of the Septuagint in the 3rd century BCE may have been able to work from older Hebrew texts that were not available to the Masoretes, so that Paul might have had Scriptures that were more faithful to the original documents than those in use today. The LXX also had a number of books that no longer appear in most versions of the Protestant Bible (although early editions of the King James Version were required to include them); when they are included they are grouped under the heading of "Apocrypha" and the reader is told they are "for example of life" but that they are not to be held equal to the sacred scriptures. However, it should be noted that allusions and literary echoes of these books can be found in Romans, Corinthians, and James. In addition, apocryphal works not found in the existing copies of the LXX were also in use by the New Testament writers (e.g., Enoch 1:9 as quoted in Jude 14-15). Did Paul and the other early Christians categorize all of these writings as "God breathed"? Most Greek and Latin Church Fathers from the first several centuries of the Common Era did -- people such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement, and Cyprian -- and they quoted apocrypha as "scripture," "divine scripture," and "inspired."

The same type of problem occurs with the texts of the New Testament. As one example consider that it took hundreds of years before the Church settled on the canon list that is in use in Bibles today. There are a number of other works by early Christians that were originally in widespread use in the Church, yet they were not adopted as "scripture." Why? There are also differences in the content of the texts. There are many examples of such variations, but perhaps the best example comes from additions made to Mark (16:9-20) and John (7:53-8:11); besides textual evidence, there is the fact that neither of these passages are included in the earliest manuscripts.

3. What parts of Scripture are to be used? The Anglican Articles of Religion say: "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation", and a similar belief is held by most mainstream Protestant denominations. This Article does not seem to imply that ALL things in Holy Scripture are necessary for salvation. In fact, Article VII specifically excludes all but the MORAL writings of the Old Testament. Most Protestant denominations hold a similar doctrine, and similarly require obedience only to the moral teachings of the Old Testament.

INERRANCY is a concept whereby the Bible is said to contain neither errors of fact (material errors) nor internal contradictions (formal errors); that is the Bible has been transmitted accurately. Creationists also believe the Bible to be PERSPICUOUS, that is, clear, unambiguous, and not requiring interpretation. If the Bible does not require interpretation, how does one deal with obvious contradictions, such as between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2? Creationists sometimes say that Genesis 2 is an interpretation or amplification of Genesis 1. How could this be true, when Genesis 1 was written centuries *after* Genesis 2? And how does one explain Acts 8:26-31, which implies that the guidance of a learned person is required for understanding Scripture? This idea seems to be opposed to the New Covenant prophesied in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 31:31-34) that was to be written on our hearts (presumably replacing physical writings) and was to do away with all teachers. If you believe in the literal interpretation of the prophesied version of the New Covenant OR in the idea of the Bible being perspicuous, why do you have preachers and teachers and Bible schools and instruction books?

Another popular scripture that is used to justify inerrancy is Matthew 5:18, which reads (REB):

"Truly I tell you: so long as heaven and earth endure, not a letter, not a dot, will disappear from the law until all that must happen has happened."

Assuming that "all that must happen" is a reference to the end of the world or time (at least the future) or to the crucifixion and resurrection, we can focus on "the law." That this is not a reference to the entire Bible is easily verified by looking at verse 17, where Jesus said:

"I have not come to abolish the law and the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to complete." ["To complete" is translated as "to fulfill" in the NKJ, and is perhaps better translated as "to clarify the true meaning of."]

In fact, if you read all of Jesus' words you will find that He differentiates between the Law, Prophets, tradition, commandments, Psalms, and the Word of the Lord/God. Even today the Hebrew Bible is divided into three major sections: the Law (Torah), the Prophets (Nebiim), and the Writings (Ketubim). Here it would seem that Jesus is giving a special place to the law and the prophets (i.e., not all of the Bible).

Paul evidently held a similar view to what is reported in Matthew 5:17, for he wrote (Acts 24:14):

" I believe all that is written in the law and the prophets..."

Going back to what Jesus said in Matthew 5:18, in the context of v.17, He must have given extra credence to the law. But does Jesus, or Paul, really mean the Torah (Five Books of Moses) when speaking of the Law, or something else? A careful reading of the Torah itself suggests that "the Law" may only apply to the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments), although even it remains ambiguous. Deuteronomy 4:44-45 talks of laws, testimonies, statutes, and judgments. The stone tablets of Moses' fame contained both the law and commandments (Ex 24:12). Finally consider the fact that Joshua "engraved on blocks of stone a copy of the Law of Moses" (Joshua 8:32). It is incredible to think that the "Five Books of Moses" as we know them were chiseled out of stone. If we delve further into the New Testament records concerning Jesus' sayings on "the scriptures," it can be easily discovered that He did not consider the complete Torah to be inspired by God on many points. For example, regarding divorce, Jesus flatly states that what Moses said was not from God (compare Deuteronomy 24:1-4 with Matthew 5:31-32, Matthew 19:1-12, Luke 16:18, and Mark 10:2-12).

Another example concerns the observance of the Sabbath. (Compare Exodus 20:8-11, Exodus 34:21, and Deuteronomy 5:12-15 with Matthew 12:1-14, Mark 2:23-28, and Luke 6:1-11.) Basically, Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for man and not the other way around; at best He was stating that the strict Sabbath observances practiced by the Jews were not God's intent. A stronger reading places Jesus at odds with at least part of the Ten Commandments.

Still another example comes from the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 5 verses 38-42, where Jesus repudiates "Moses'" law calling for equal repayments due to physical injury that is found in Exodus 21:23-25, Leviticus 24:19-20, and Deuteronomy 19:21. Jesus said (REB):

"You have heard that they were told, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' But what I tell you is this: Do not resist those who wrong you. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn and offer him the other also."

For a final example consider the topic of ritual cleanliness, which was important to those who followed the Torah. In order to perform a successful sacrifice, it was required to have a pure, acceptable priest (e.g., Leviticus 8, 16, 21; 1 Kings 1:39-45) and a pure, acceptable sacrifice (Leviticus 1:3; 3:1, 6, 9; 4:3, 23, 28, 32; 5:15, 18, 25; 22:17-25; Deuteronomy 17:1). It was clearly recorded that an unacceptable person (e.g., Nadab and Abihu, Leviticus 10:1-3; Uzzah, 2 Samuel 6:6-7; Ashdod and Ekron, see at 1 Samuel 5:10; and King Uzziah (Azariah), 2 Chronicles 26:16) or sacrifice (Malachi 1:6-14) could lead to disaster in more than one way (both immediate, as in sickness or death, or long term, as in no forgiveness). Jesus, however, said that it was what came out of the mouth [AN INTERPRETATION: meaning what was spoken and implying what was in a person's "heart"] that defiles a man (Matt 15:1-20 and Mk 7:1-23).

From the testimony of Jesus' words as recorded in the Gospels, we can downplay or ignore the importance of the Writings, and the Torah and Decalogue apparently have significant problems when it comes to being inspired. And even forgetting the problems Jesus had with the Torah, how, for example, can the different versions of the Law (e.g., Exodus 20, Exodus 21, Exodus 34,

Numbers 28-30, and Deuteronomy 5) be reconciled? Since there are major differences in the details and content, we don't know God's laws word-for-word, letter-for-letter, punctuation-mark-by-punctuation mark. So what does this letter and dot that won't disappear really stand for anyway? (The Greek words are iota (commonly jot in English translations and presumed to mean yod in Hebrew context) and keraia (tittle in KJV and dot in RSV). Yod was certainly employed in the time of Jesus in Hebrew writings. Keraia, however, in referring to small "horns" attached to some letters to guard against confusion with each other, was only coming into use in the late first century BCE and was not widespread as of then; what it would have meant to the common person at the time of Jesus is unknown. In any case they certainly weren't employed in the original law.)

And then there are the Prophets. That Jesus thought well of at least some of the Prophets is attested by the fact that He said He was the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2 (e.g., Luke 4:18-21) and Isaiah 35:5-6 (e.g., Luke 7:21-23). But does all Biblical prophecy merit this high consideration? From the prophets (1 Kings 22:23) and the writings (2 Chronicles 18:22) we find that the Lord put a lying spirit into the prophets of King Ahab. So when is it truth? The Apostle Paul said it best (1 Corinthians 14:29):

"Of the prophets, two or three may speak, while the rest exercise their judgment upon what is said."

The New Testament is no different. Any close reading of the Gospels will illustrate differences in the specific details of the words and deeds of Jesus that have been reported. For example, a parallel Gospel text or source criticism will quickly illustrate that the "Evangelists" did not provide and were not obsessed with the literal words of Jesus. Rather they believed they had the authority to interpret the Gospel message, and they felt free to paraphrase Jesus' sayings and add details in order to convey to their intended audience the significance of what He taught. Sometimes there are even blatant errors. For example, Mark recorded that Abiathar was high priest when King David ate the sanctified bread in the Temple (Mark 2:26) when it was actually Ahimelech (1 Sam 21:1-6). Origen (ca. 185 - 254 CE), in his Commentary on John (10:2-4) wrote:

"The spiritual truth was often preserved, as one might say, in material falsehood."

Origen clearly believed that there were historical and chronological errors in the Gospel accounts, and that allegorical and analogical interpretations were required to find the truth they contained. Saint Augustine (354 - 430 CE), in discussing the differences between Matthew's "Sermon on the Mount" and Luke's "Sermon on the Plain" in his *De Consensu Evangelistarum* (2.19.44) wrote that the evangelists may have expressed "...these utterances in somewhat different terms, but without detriment to the integrity of the truth."

The arguments presented above have focused primarily on obvious examples of why the Bible should not be taken literally. With just a little more digging, any serious student can find further illustrations of this point. For example, a parallel Gospel text or source criticism will quickly illustrate that the "Evangelists" did not provide and were not obsessed with the literal words of

Jesus. Rather they believed they had the authority to interpret the Gospel message, and they felt free to paraphrase Jesus' sayings and add details in order to convey to their intended audience the significance of what He taught.

So it all boils down to finding the truths contained in the Bible and applying them to our lives. This REQUIRES interpretation and not a literal reading. In fact, the Bible uses interpretation on itself. Not only is it recorded that Jesus applied prophecies in Isaiah to himself, the apostles frequently found and wrote about the prophetic fulfillment of the OT in Jesus. Paul went so far as to say that trying to read the law of Moses without Christ is like reading it through a veil (2 Corinthians 3:14-16; cf. Exodus 34:33-35). The apostles did not limit themselves to literal interpretation; they employed at least three interpretive approaches (typological, cf. Mt 2:17 and Jeremiah 31:15; literal-contextual, cf. 1 Peter 5:5 and Proverbs 3:34; and principle/application cf. Romans 9:25-26 and Hosea 2:1, 23). But there is more. In Philippians 3:5 the Apostle Paul said of himself (RSV): "...as to the law a Pharisee..." or (NEB):

"... in my attitude to the law, a Pharisee ...".

The Sadducees went for a strict (literal) interpretation of the Torah (law), while the Pharisees developed an extensive set of interpretations of the law in order to apply it to the whole of life. This tradition began when the Israelites returned from exile in the late sixth century BCE. Since the common language of the people at this point was the Aramaic of Babylon instead of Hebrew, the priests had to explain to the crowd the Mosaic law as it was read (cf., the reading by Ezra in Nehemiah 8:7-8). It was Paul's background and willingness to interpret the law in non-literal ways, like a Pharisee, that led him to the radical interpretation of the OT that Christianity is the fulfillment of God's covenant with Israel, and that faith in Christ serves as the formal replacement for every major institution in Judaism.

The several other references that are sometimes used in defending the concepts of inerrancy in the Bible (John 10:35 "...Scripture cannot be set aside."; 2 Peter 1:21 "...prophecy came ... under the compulsion of the Holy Spirit..."; 1 Thessalonians 2:13 "... when we handed on God's message, you received it ... as ... the very word of God..." and 2 Peter 1:21 "... men prophesied of old [and] ... they spoke the words of God") provide no additional support. As we have seen, terms like "Scripture" are not defined, some Bible passages contain statements that are not inspired, prophecy must be judged, and the promoters of such ideas use the scriptures out of context. Finally, no book of the Old Testament claims to be the direct word of God, and so far as we know, none of the writers expected or intended that their work would be canonically accepted.

Perhaps this is a good time to digress for a moment. Earlier, when discussing 2 Timothy 3:16-17, it was pointed out that Paul may have been making a play on God's creation of man (Genesis 2:7) by referring to writings that were God-breathed. If we extend this analogy further, we might want to consider that Scripture, just like man, was originally created "perfect" but fell. In the case of the error in Scripture, it is a result of the work of fallen man -- the work of the prophets, copyists, redactors, committees, and translators. (If one claims that the Bible as we know it is inerrant, it requires a belief that humans can create perfect things! Some fundamentalists may, in fact, have such a belief that is beyond all reasoning. Others recognize that the Bible as we know

it has contradictions and imperfections, but place such belief in the ORIGINAL document.) And, in fact, the Bible itself warns against being deceived by men:

- "... Take heed that no one leads you astray." (Matthew 24:4)
- "For false Christs and false prophets will arise..." (Matthew 24:24)
- "...take note of those who create dissensions ... For such persons ... serve ... their own appetites, and by fair and flattering words they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded." (Romans 16:17,18)
- "Let no one deceive you with empty words..." (Ephesians 5:6)

The question is, who is deceiving whom?

EARLY SCHOLARS OF THE BIBLE

Philo Judaeus (ca. 20 BCE-50 CE) was an often quoted Jewish philosopher and exegete; he was also highly learned in Greek logic and philosophy. In modern times some works formerly attributed to him have been pronounced spurious by some authorities.

Origen (ca. 185-254 CE)—Origenes Adamantius—was a highly respected Christian theologian. He distinguished three distinct levels of interpretation of biblical texts. The highest interpretive level is "allegorical", the intermediate level is "moral", and the lowest and least valid level is "literal/historical". He was concerned that the Greek Septuagint may not have been a completely faithful rendering, and produced the "Hexapla", with parallel renderings of the Hebrew text, his translation from Hebrew to Greek, the Septuagint, and three other translations.

Jerome (ca. 347-419 CE) translated the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin. Because he used the form of Latin of contemporary everyday use (i.e., "vulgar" Latin) his translation was called the "Vulgate". The Vulgate was the standard Bible of Catholicism for many years.

Augustine (354-430 CE), Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, wrote a treatise "*De Genesi ad Litteram*" concerning the problems in a literal reading of Genesis. He also warned that a literal reading of Scripture would bring Christianity into disrepute:

"Now it is a disgraceful thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; and we should take all means to prevent such a situation, in which people show up vast ignorance in a Christian and laugh it to scorn."

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE PENTATEUCH

The Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, has always held a special place in both Christianity and Judaism. Islam also owes much to these books. As the Torah (the "five books of Moses"), the books are especially venerated by Jews; they were the first part of the Bible to be admitted to the Hebrew canon. Christianity accepts the entire Hebrew Old Testament as found in the Masoretic text, including the Pentateuch, as canonical, although there is some variation in organization. Much of early Christian art depicts events from the Pentateuch. Almost everyone in the Western world is early exposed to stories of Noah and the ark, the passage across the Red Sea, and the story of Abraham and Isaac.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, it would have taken a brave person to deny that Moses personally wrote "his" five books. In the late Middle Ages Isaac ibn Yakush was ferociously excoriated for suggesting that Moses could not have been the author. Spinoza was excommunicated from Judaism and exiled from Amsterdam for the same offense. Simon, a French priest, was expelled from his order. There were even imprisonments and assassination attempts against those who suggested such a thing. Had not Flavius Josephus flatly stated that Moses was the author in his *Antiquity of the Jews*? Did not Philo Judaeus refer to the "Books of Moses"? And did not everyone know that these were books BY Moses? No one seems to have noticed that Moses was so busy leading his people around the wilderness that he scarcely had time for extensive writing!

However, three men (H. B. Witter, J. Alstruc, and J. G. Eichhorn) independently noticed "doublets", the same story being told twice in entirely different terms. In the nineteenth century a third set was found. Then, W. M. De Wette noticed that there was a fourth source; Deuteronomy was markedly different in language and style from the other three accounts.

Two of the accounts always differed in their name for God. One source always used "YHVH" (JHWH in German, which was incorrectly transliterated "Jehovah"), and the other always used "Elohim". The third source was principally concerned with rites, ceremonies, priestly duties, genealogy, and measurements. And, of course, the fourth source wrote Deuteronomy (and possibly a major part of Judges). The first source was called "J", the second "E", and the third "P" for priestly, and the Deuteronomist was called "D".

In the nineteenth century Julius Wellhausen carried out stylistic analyses, and was able to assign J and E to the nature and fertility stage of religion, D to the spiritual and ethical stage, and P to the priestly and legal stage. At the same time, historical analysis suggested that J was very early, E somewhat later, and D and P centuries later than J. The anger of the world was now almost boundless. Not only were there four authors (none of which was Moses) but these men were actually suggesting that the accounts were written at very different times, centuries removed from each other! The entire weight of Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism was arrayed against the scholars.

However, by the twentieth century, the fury had abated. Most mainline Protestants began to see that it really didn't matter who wrote the books; the content was the important part. The

opposition of Catholicism melted when Pope Pius XII published "*Divino Afflante Spiritu*" in 1943:

"Let the interpreter then, with all care . . . endeavor to determine . . . the sources, written or oral, to which he had recourse and the forms of expression he employed."

The nature of God differs greatly between the J and P accounts. God is decidedly anthropomorphic in J and more transcendent and unknowable in P. It has not been possible to separate J and E by style alone, but internal evidence places the author of J in Judah, and E in Israel. E must thus be sometime before 734-722 BC, when Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians. J could be as early as 1050 BCE, with a best estimate being about 950 BCE. Deuteronomy cannot have been written later than 622 BCE, and the weight of opinion is that it was not much earlier. The scroll was providentially "found" by a priest during repairs to the Temple. Because the sense of D is to increase the power of the priesthood and centralization of religion, there is a strong suspicion that it might have been planted. There is also a possibility that it was first written early in the reign of Josiah (ca. 640-609 BCE) and edited later, perhaps just before it was "discovered". Any or all of the versions could have been written either by single authors or by committees. Some versions may have been the gradual accretion of the work of several independent authors.

Until a few years ago, the weight of opinion was that P was later than D. There are now some experts who think it might have been contemporaneous with, or even earlier than D; however, it is definitely later than the fall of Israel in 722 BCE. The exact dates are not important. What is worth remembering is that J was very early, and may have been a recording of oral traditions from the dawn of monotheistic religion, and that E is from the early Jewish historical period, and P and D are from the relatively late pre-exilic period.

It is not a simple matter of one book being written by J, another by E and a third by P. The three accounts are so interleaved that any one book may have several sources. For example, in the story of the deluge, Genesis 7:1-5 and 7 are J, 8-9 are P, 10 is J, 11 is P, 12 is J, 13-16a are P, 16b-20 are J. To complicate matters more, the "Redactor", R, who carried out this remarkable scissors and paste work, puts in a line of his own at intervals! E appears for the first time in Genesis 20:1-18, the story of Abimelech. Of course, the entire book of Deuteronomy is by D (but with possible editing by P!).

The creation account is more clearly divided than the account of the deluge. Genesis 1:1 to 2:3 is a P account. Genesis 2:4a is by R, and J wrote 2:4b-25 and 3:1-24. There is mutual inconsistency in the two accounts of creation and also in the two accounts of the flood. It is possible that the reason both were included is that both were highly venerated, and the Redactor was unwilling to discard either one.

The "law" is just as confusing, perhaps more so. The Decalogue in Exodus 20:1-17 is by P, but it may have been altered to make it agree with the D version. The Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5 is by D, but it was conceivably copied from the P account. The Covenant Code and case law in Exodus 21 is by E, but there is some suspicion that it was copied from an earlier source. The primitive "law" of Exodus 34 is by J, and it does not agree with either the P or D documents. The case law in Numbers 5 and the religious law in Numbers 28-29 is of late origin—either P or even later, possibly post-exilic.

There are also different stories surrounding the "taking" of the Holy Land. Everyone is familiar with the Deuteronomistic view of the conquest of Israel found in Joshua 1-12. In that story we are told that the land fell in three swift and decisive military campaigns. However, a completely different picture emerges when Judges 1 is read. Here it sounds as if there were a series of independent tribal actions that did not result in a complete occupation of the land -- that it was a slow and complex process, which is more in line with archaeological findings. Chapters 2-16 tell of many setbacks and reverses in the process of consolidating control of Palestine. By the time of the monarchy the Canaanites had been completely absorbed into the Israelite population (incidentally providing them with the Hebrew language). The last part of Judges, Chapters 17-21, may have been rewritten in the post-exilic period.

The enslavement of the Hebrews in Egypt probably coincided with the fall of the Hyksos in the mid-sixteenth century BCE. There is no independent historical record of the Exodus, but it was probably at most a few centuries later, perhaps about 1400-1300 BCE. The very earliest of the books (the J account) was written 300-400 years after the death of Moses and the D account may have been written 300 years after that, at least 600 years after the events. It would not be impossible for oral tradition to have been carried for a few centuries with fair exactitude; Polynesian ancestral chants have been maintained intact for similar periods. However, it is also not inconceivable that the stories were altered either accidentally or intentionally during transmission, especially considering the length of the narratives.

In fact, there is no independent knowledge of Hebrew religious beliefs from the prehistoric period. Probably Abraham left Ur about 1900 BCE. The Aramaeans (whom Moses credited with being his ancestors, see Deuteronomy 26:5) did indeed live in Ur sometime around 2000 BCE. Ur was a principal city of Sumer, which had a polytheistic religion. It is possible, even likely, that Abraham's ancestors worshiped the Sumerian Gods in addition to YHVH, and it is almost certain that Abraham knew of them.

Although there is no direct historical confirmation of the events described, the general description of life in early biblical times is not inconsistent with what is known of the period from archaeological evidence. Unfortunately, the very nature of a nomadic tribal life style is that hard archaeological evidence is very sparse.

In summary, the Pentateuch is largely about Moses, but it is unlikely that any part of it is BY Moses (at least in the received form). The earliest versions were written centuries after the events they describe, and the versions are themselves separated by long periods, in some cases by centuries. There is a strong possibility that "editing" might have been used to make some versions more compatible with each other or more palatable to contemporary beliefs and political reality. Only those parts dealing with most recent times can be verified historically. The twisted authorship of the five books should not be construed as detracting from their content. The Ten Commandments are enormously valuable, no matter who wrote them.

THE QUMRAN (DEAD SEA) SCROLLS

The Qumran scrolls ("Dead Sea Scrolls") were discovered in caves near Khirbat Qumran, at the northwestern edge of the Dead Sea in Jordan. The first seven manuscripts that were found detailed the daily life and rules of conduct for an ascetic and monastic sect, believed by some archaeologists to be the Essenes. There were also "commentaries" (Hebrew "pesher") on the books of Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Psalm 37. The rules of the community referred to the priests as "Sons of Zadok". The reference should not be taken to indicate any relationship to the Sadducees (Hebr. "Zadoki") mentioned in the New Testament; the Sadducees were an elitist sect who were culturally and religiously far removed from the Qumran community.

The community used the interpretive method called "pesher" in order to show that the events of that day, especially those involving the community, fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. They saw themselves as the final generation about whom Bible prophecy speaks, and they expected the messianic age to begin shortly (along with God's judgment and all of the other events that come with teachings about the final apocalypse). Pesher, as applied by the Qumran community, uses three techniques: textual emendation; contemporization of prophecy; and textual atomization (interpret each word or phrase without considering context). The interpretations are idiosyncratic and often fanciful and imaginative. The authority for interpretation was "revelation to the leader".

The commentaries repeat lines of Scripture, and then give an interpretation. The interpretations are symbolic or allegorical, and are twisted to apply to the coming battle between light and darkness ("good", i.e., the community, and "evil", everyone else). There are differences between the lines quoted in the scrolls and the standard Old Testament texts. Some differences are subtle, but some are truly significant and drastically alter the meaning. For example, Nahum 2:12 in the New English Bible has: "The lion which killed to satisfy its whelps and for its mate broke the neck of its kill", whereas the scrolls have (Gaster's translation): "The lion rent the limbs of its own whelps, and strangled his own lionesses." The sense of the two versions is completely different, and it is apparent from the commentary that the writer of the scrolls either misread the biblical text, or was working from a variant copy, or deliberately misstated the biblical text. Other translators read the biblical quotation more in line with the standard text; however, the interpretation actually follows the variant reading above.

The commentary on Nahum is known to have been written sometime after 88 BCE, because a well-dated event is mentioned in the commentary. It is generally agreed that the scrolls were written before 68 CE, because the community was apparently destroyed or scattered in that year by elements of the Roman army. Carbon dating and paleographic analysis agree on dates between the second century BCE and the first century CE for almost all of the scrolls and fragments.

Since the discovery of the first seven scrolls, more than 800 additional scrolls or fragments of scrolls have been found, including enough fragments to form a nearly complete text of Isaiah, fragments of every book of the Old Testament except Esther (although some recent work identifies several of the fragments as possibly coming from a proto- or variant form of Esther),

and many apocryphal and pseudepigraphic works. There are books, or references to books, which are not in our canon but were obviously honored by the sect. Some of the materials strongly indicate that the sect was schismatic or even heretical by Jewish standards of the time, although there is no specific record of such a declaration.

The majority of the fragments are in Hebrew, one sixth are in Aramaic, and a few are in Greek. Most of the fragments are in such poor condition that interpretation is exceedingly difficult. Because of the poor condition of the fragments, and in some cases the nearly illegible script, there is no single, authoritative translation.

The Isaiah fragments have many discrepancies with the Septuagint and the Masorah. Some of the discrepancies appear to be due to mistakes in reading the original, some may be more faithful to the original than the Masoretic text, and some may have been deliberate variants.

Although many archaeologists believe that the Qumran community may have been a branch of the Essenes, others consider the evidence too scanty to make a judgment. Philo Judaeus said of the Essenes "they philosophize on most things by construing them symbolically, in accordance with ancient usage." which suggests that a nonliteral reading of Scripture was common among the Jews of antiquity.

Throughout the scrolls the coming of a messiah is prophesied. It is clear from the context, however, that the "messiah" was to be an earthly king and military leader, subservient to the high priest in religious matters. The life and beliefs of the community were similar in many respects to those of John the Baptist. However, neither he nor Jesus is mentioned anywhere in the scrolls.

The importance of the Qumran scrolls is not only that they contain clues to ancient versions of the Old Testament, or that they give a description of this schismatic Jewish sect, but also that they show that variant readings and symbolic or figurative interpretations of scripture were common in biblical times.

VERSIONS OF THE BIBLE

LANGUAGES

Much of the difficulty and ambiguity of interpretation of the Bible hinges on the language of the original. Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. Classical Hebrew, which became differentiated from Canaanite North Semitic in about the 12th century BCE, was replaced by Aramaic (another Semitic language) during and after the captivity in Babylon, and had essentially died out as a spoken language by the 2nd century BCE. The language has been resurrected, and is now the official language of Israel. Thousands of new words had to be coined from Hebrew roots to make the language useful for modern life because of the limited vocabulary of ancient Hebrew.

Classical Hebrew was vastly different from Indo-European languages. Poverty of vocabulary, tense structure, and connectives required circumlocutions for expressing complex ideas. The enormous gulf in linguistic structure leads to entirely different modes of thinking and expression. Translation into modern languages is always tentative, and an exact or unique translation can seldom be assured.

The classical Hebrew alphabet leads to even more ambiguity. The alphabet is descended from a proto-Semitic script, which originated on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean about the 18th to 15th centuries BCE. The alphabet evolved into the "square" script of biblical usage about the 11th century BCE.

There were no characters for most vowels during ancient times. The typical Semitic word is a trilateral: three consonants connected by vowels. Grammatical inflexion is indicated by manipulation of the vowels; this is illustrated in English by the words sing, sang, sung, song. Because only consonants were used, the pronunciation, meaning, and usage of each word had to be inferred from the context. Writing was also probably used as an aid to memory; the reader already knew the story and the written form merely confirmed what had previously been transmitted orally.

The difficulty of interpretation can be seen in the English trilateral g-r-t. This could be read as great, girt, greet, grout, or groat, or with some license, as grate or even gyrate. Probably a reader could deduce the intended word from the context, but there would always be some uncertainty and ambiguity. If the handwriting is difficult to decipher or the manuscript is in poor condition, so that one is unsure whether we have g-r-t or g-r-l, the uncertainty is even greater.

Vowel markings began to be added about the 5th century CE, by which time Hebrew had been extinct as a spoken language for seven or more centuries. The scholars engaged in the task, the "Masoretes", had the assistance of older explanatory commentaries and paraphrases (the "Targums") in Aramaic, which was still a spoken language. However, Aramaic also lacked written vowels, so the Aramaic version was not always helpful.

At the beginning of the Common Era, most Jews outside Palestine spoke the language of their country of residence. Even in the Middle East most people were bilingual in Aramaic and Greek, and some (the Hellenists) probably felt more at home in Greek than in their own language. It was therefore natural that the Bible would be translated into Greek; early Christians used the Greek Bible, and the New Testament was first written in that language.

Many educated Europeans throughout the Middle Ages, and even into recent times, knew classical Greek. However, the dialect of Greek used in Western Asia at the beginning of the Common Era, the "koinê", had changed in many respects from the Greek of the classical period. Although Greek was a relatively well known language, a translator needed to be a specialist in the dialects of antiquity to be able to capture all the nuances of the language. Translations even between languages as closely allied as German and English often do not capture the complete flavor of the original. Greek and English are not as closely related, and the difficulty of translation is even greater.

Adding to the difficulty is the natural change and evolution of languages over time. Eight centuries elapsed between the time the first Bible writings were set down and the time that Hebrew died out as a spoken language. Imagine the difficulty in understanding an Englishman of the time of the Norman Conquest! Word usage—even the meanings of words—can change radically over such a time. When one considers that invaders using other languages repeatedly overran the Holy Land during that period, the possibility of confusion of meaning between the earliest and latest entries in the Bible becomes obvious.

TEXTS

Another one of the problems with the idea of inerrancy is the mistaken assumption that the Bible text as received is composed of autographs (the original writings; inspiration and canonicity are related but separate topics).

As discussed above, the Exile and Diaspora of the Jews brought us a Bible that was originally written in a mixture of Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. With the spread of Christianity, the scriptures were translated into various languages. By the 5th century CE, portions of the Bible were available in seven additional languages. At the time of the Reformation there were Bibles or portions of it in 33 languages (out of 6000!). With the passing of the centuries the original documents were lost. (It is not even clear that anyone in those days considered that their preservation was important.) Most versions of the Bible available were retranslations of translations (or worse).

The Reformation gave rise to the recognition of the problems these translations could cause, especially since all Protestant doctrine was to be strictly Bible based (Church tradition was rejected). Thus by the 16th Century, Bible scholars began trying to recover the original text. These efforts gave rise to what eventually became the discipline of textual criticism.

Initial efforts began by providing translations directly from the available Hebrew and Greek texts. However, it was recognized early that existing texts in these languages were deficient, and

efforts expanded to try and locate ancient texts. Over the years (and especially in the 20th Century) thousands of fragments from the first millenium of the CE have been recovered. A brief review of some of the texts presently available follows below. However, as is often the case with new knowledge, these discoveries have served to complicate the picture and to point out how much we don't know. Some scholars believe that the content of the original autographs will never be known with any degree of certainty. What is known is that:

- The concept of error free transmission is wrong. Copyists make mistakes.
- Sectarian biases resulted in alterations, deletions, and additions to the text.
- In spite of any official or deduced canon (which has changed through the years), a diversity of "scriptures" have been used throughout much of history (important for context and interpretation of canonical scriptures, if nothing else):
 - until sometime after the fall of the 2nd temple for the Jews
 - until sometime near the close of the first millenium of the CE for the Christians

Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS)

This find of hundreds of thousands of scroll fragments (Figure 1) provides the earliest witness of Old Testament texts (including Apocrypha and other religious writings). The DSS give evidence of three different but coexisting families of textual tradition: Babylonian, Alexandrian, and Palestinian. The Masoretic Text grew out of the Babylonian family.

One of the important documents from the DSS is an essentially complete text of Isaiah dating from ca. 100 BCE. This text differs from the Masoretic Text by a large number of insignificant differences (e.g., spelling) and 13 significant variants (ignoring the fact that all of the vowel markings are from centuries later than the DSS were written). Other texts with notable differences include 1 and 2 Samuel, Jeremiah, and Exodus.



Figure 1. One of the Dead Sea Scrolls, containing an extracanonical Psalm. This scroll is one of the most legible; many are in small fragments and barely recognizable as writing.

Papyri in Greek

The oldest manuscripts of the New Testament that have survived were written on papyrus. Something like 88 different New Testament papyri have been found, and all are quite fragmentary.

The earliest of these, "P52," dates from the first half of the 2nd Century and contains parts of five verses from John (18:31-33,37-38).

Five papyri date from ca. 200: "P32" has fragments from Titus. "P46" (Figure 2) originally [apparently] contained all the Pauline Epistles (except the pastorals, i.e., 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) -- fragments from Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Phillipians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, and Hebrews. Most scholars accept the date of 200 CE for P46; one recent critic claims ca. 100 CE. "P64 and 67" have fragments from Matthew. "P66" has fragments from John.

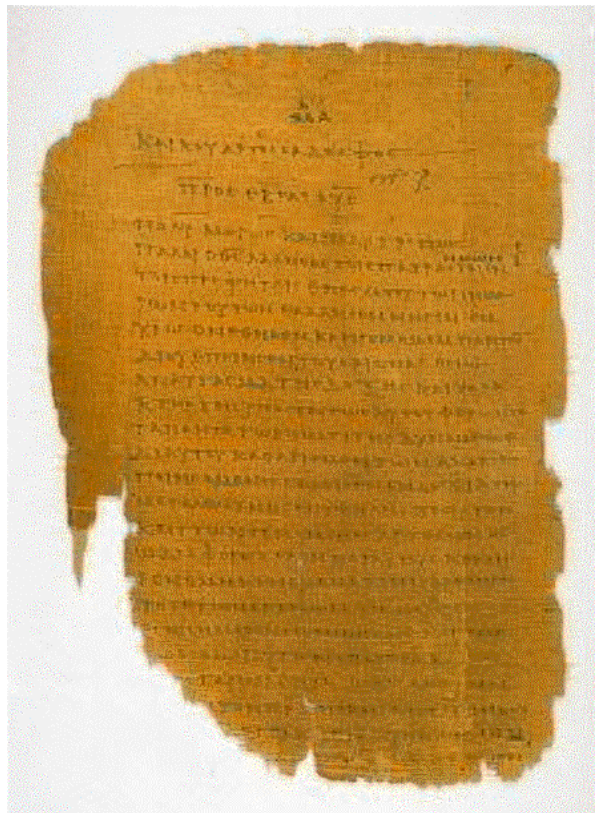


Figure 2. A fragment of papyrus "P46", containing a portion of Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews in Greek.

Twenty-six of the papyri date from the 3rd century. Most are just small fragments that contain a few verses. However, the most important of these manuscripts, "P45", has 30 leaves out of some 220 originally devoted to the Gospels and Acts.

The remaining papyri span the fourth through the eighth centuries.

None of the papyri contain a complete representation of the current New Testament canon. However, some do include apocryphal books such as the Nativity of Mary, the eleventh Ode of Solomon, and the Third Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. (All told there are about two dozen noncanonical gospels found in manuscripts dating from the second to the sixth centuries. Some of the extracanonical manuscripts are of special interest to scholars because they include quotations or paraphrases from canonical books.)

Parchments in Greek (Uncial)

Altogether 274 uncials have survived, but like the papyri, most are fragments. However there are several manuscripts that represent most of the Bible (witness to the Greek LXX plus New Testament and New Testament apocrypha). A number of textual variations exist between these manuscripts. Not only did scribal errors creep in as generations of these texts were copied, they also represent various revisions of the LXX (revision by Origen ca. 3rd century CE, and later revisions by Lucian of Samosata and Hesychius of Egypt).

4th Century

Codex Vaticanus (also B or 03). Contains both the Old Testament and New Testament, with 759 leaves out of 820 original remaining (617 Old Testament and 142 New Testament). The New Testament text breaks off in the middle of Hebrews 9:14. Also missing are parts of Genesis and Psalms, and all of the books of Maccabees.

Codex Sinaiticus (aleph or 01). Parts of LXX Old Testament text are missing. Also includes the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas.

5th Century

Codex Alexandrinus (A or 02). Contains both the Old Testament and New Testament, with 773 leaves out of about 820 original remaining (630 Old Testament and 143 New Testament). Textual critics consider this manuscript's Gospels to be inferior compared to 01 and 03. Parts of Matthew, John, and 2 Corinthians are missing from the New Testament section.

Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (D or 05). A Greek-Latin uncial. Contains the Gospels, Acts, and a small fragment from 3 John. In some places its text differs radically from the other uncials (e.g., Acts is 10% longer).

Codex C (or Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus). Recovered from a palimpsest. Remaining today are 64 Old Testament leaves and 145 New Testament leaves. The whole of 2 Thessalonians and 2 John are missing.

Codex Washingtonensis. Contains the four Gospels.

6th Century

Codex Claromontanus (Dp or 06). An important witness to the Pauline Epistles.

There are also 2795 minuscule manuscripts from the ninth century and later, 2209 lectionaries from the eighth century and later, and other documents such as the countless quotations found in the works of the early Church Fathers that are all used by textual critics in trying to develop an understanding of what the original Greek texts might have said. In addition, something like 10,000 manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate New Testament alone exist (originally translated ca. 400 CE), plus other early translations (by 5th century CE) of the Greek into Old Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Ethiopic, Armenian, Georgian, and Gothic to be considered in this effort.

On the basis of the differences in the text these parchments contain, they are generally grouped into four different families or types. These differences may be due to errors or deliberate changes. For example, Mark 9:29 quotes Jesus as he explained how he cast out a demon saying "this kind can come out only by prayer," as attested by the earliest texts. However, sometime between 300 and 600 CE the words "and fasting" were inserted, apparently by the desert fathers in the era when monasticism became popular in many Christian circles. The four family types are:

- Alexandrian (includes Codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus)
- Western (includes Codices Bezae and Washingtonensis)
- Caesarean
- Byzantine (includes Codex Alexandrinus)

Parchments in Hebrew

The DSS aside, the earliest principal texts available as a witness to the Hebrew Old Testament are much later than available in the Greek. These texts are a product of the Masoretic schools of Babylonia and Tiberias and are from one of two traditions.

Early witnesses to the Ben Asher tradition include:

- Cairo Codex of the Prophets (CE 894)
- Leningrad Codex (CE 1008)
- British Museum Codex of the Pentateuch (CE 950)

- Leningrad Codex of the Prophets (CE 1016)

From the Ben Naphthali tradition comes the:

- Reuchlin Codex of the Prophets (CE 1105).

Other witnesses to the early Hebrew scriptures (but NOT in Hebrew) include:

The Samaritan Pentateuch, which contains a redaction that extends back to the 5th century BCE when the Jews and the Samaritans began to part ways. The building of a rival Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim ca. 330 BCE exacerbated the break. The Samaritan Pentateuch differs from the Masoretic Text in about 6000 places, *mostly* grammar and spelling differences. The oldest existing Samaritan text is the Nablus Scroll, which dates to the early centuries of the Common Era. This text is a valuable witness to earlier Samaritan beliefs and is useful to textual critics in developing an understanding of early forms of the Pentateuch.

The Aramaic Targums, which include translations and paraphrases from the Hebrew text into Aramaic from the post-exilic era. The existing Targums are categorized as representing either a Palestinian or Babylonian provenance. It is interesting to note that some of the New Testament writers quoting the OT actually used the Targums rather than the Hebrew or Greek texts (e.g., Mark 4:12 and Ephesians 4:8).

The DSS and LXX discussed above.

Three other translations, in addition to the LXX, of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek from the 2nd century CE work of:

- Aquila of Sinope
- Theodotion
- Symmachus

ENGLISH VERSIONS OF THE BIBLE

Believe it or not, there are people who hold beliefs such as the Bible was originally written in English (and typically this is to be found in the King James Version). A summary of the real process whereby we have Bibles in English follows below simply to point out that they exist in great variety (and often with great variations in meaning).

- Ca. **650 CE**: Caedmon put some Bible books into verse from Latin
- Ca. **735**: Bede translated the Gospels from Latin
- **871-899**: King Alfred the Great (died 901) translated the Psalms and the 10 commandments from Latin
- Ca. **950**: The 7th century Lindisfarne Gospels translated into English
- **955-1020**: Aelfric translated various Latin Bible books into English
- **10th century**: Gospels translated into various regional dialects.

- Ca. **1325**: Both Richard Rolle and William Shoreham translated the Psalms from Latin into English verse.
- **14th century**: John **Wycliffe**, a theologian who was removed from his post at Oxford because of his criticisms of the Church, directed the translation of the Latin Vulgate Bible into English.
- **16th Century**:
 - William **Tyndale**, another scholar who was sharply critical of the Catholic Church, wrote an English translation of much of the Bible (the New Testament and the Old Testament to 2 Chronicles) before he was executed (1536). He based his work on Hebrew (Masoretic text--ben Asher's--which was only accepted in final form in the 12th century CE, and was printed in 1525) and Greek (Erasmus' 1516 publication, which in part was a translation of Latin because of the fragmentary Greek manuscript available to him) texts, and with the help of grammars and Latin and German translations. Some 90% of his words passed into the King James Version (KJV) and 75% into the Revised Standard Version (RSV).
 - After the Church of England made its break with the Catholic Church in 1534, Miles **Coverdale**, who had worked with Tyndale, produced an English version of the Bible, published in 1535. Parts of Coverdale's Bible were revisions of Tyndale and parts were new translations from German and Latin translations. As with all Bibles of the time, this translation still included the Apocrypha; however, it was the first to place these together in a section separated from the rest of the Old Testament, a practice followed in all subsequent Protestant English Bibles.
 - In 1537 John Rogers, a friend of Tyndale's, published a version of the Bible under the name of Thomas **Matthew** that followed Tyndale's work closer than Coverdale had.
 - In 1539 the first officially commissioned English Bible, the **Great Bible**, was published. Miles Coverdale served as the editor for this version that was, in essence, a revision of the Matthew Bible (and not Coverdale's!).
 - When Mary came to the throne in 1553, many militant Protestants fled to Geneva, where they produced a new translation, the **Geneva Bible**. Due to the scholarship available in producing this work, it provided considerable improvements over previous translations. However, like many of the scriptures copied down through the ages, religious interpretations and creeds influenced the text. For example, notes in the 1595 edition state that the beast coming out of the bottomless pit in Revelation 11:7 is "the Pope which hath his power out of hell and cometh thence."
 - When Elizabeth came to the throne a new translation was completed partially due to a desire to eliminate the controversial notes found in the Geneva Bible. This new version (1566) was called the **Bishop's Bible** because all of the translators either were or became Bishops. It was essentially a revision of the Great Bible with some guidance from the Geneva Bible.
 - In response to Protestant English efforts, exiled English priests developed the **Douai-Rheims Bible** (New Testament 1582, Old Testament ca. 1602) that was a literal translation (in opposition to the Protestants' "presumptuous boldness and

liberty in translating") of the Latin Vulgate. The Douai (or Douay) Version was for several centuries the most important Bible for English-speaking Catholics.

- **The King James Version.** After James I succeeded Elizabeth to the throne, work began on what is known as the King James Version (KJV). This new edition was a collaborative work of around 50 scholars that was to be a revision of the Bishop's Bible, changing it only where required by the original Hebrew or Greek. In actuality, the translators made extensive use of the Tyndale and Geneva Bibles and the Rheims New Testament. [As an interesting side note: Although King James I took an active part in organizing and approving the 1611 version of this Bible, he never made it the official Bible of England.] Several revisions appeared between its release and the last in 1638.

MODERN VERSIONS

English Translations: As English words became archaic or changed their meaning, as advances were made in knowledge of Biblical languages, customs, and history, and with the discovery of many inaccuracies in the Greek and Hebrew texts used for the KJV, there arose a need for further revisions. This led initially to the Revised Version (New Testament 1881, Old Testament 1885, and Apocrypha 1896). The 20th century has followed with an explosion of different English translations. The year 1901 saw the release of the American Standard Version. The following five decades saw the release of the Moffatt's, Knox's, Phillips', and Revised Standard Versions (RSV) of the Bible. Between release of the RSV in 1952 and the year 1990, 27 new translations of the Bible and another 25 translations of the New Testament were published. The New English Bible (1961-1970) was an ecumenical collaboration of scholars from the Anglican, Catholic, and five nonconformist Protestant Churches.

Greek Versions: People who study the Bible these days often try to give additional credence to their interpretation by resorting to the "original" languages. If the discussions presented above did not convince you that scholars are a LONG way from reconstructing even the original NT texts, consider the following:

In the 20th Century there have been releases of seven different publications of the Greek NT: Tischendorf, Westcott-Hort, von Soden, Vogels, Merk, Bover, and Nestle-Aland. When a comparison is made between them verse-by-verse, only 62.9% come up variant free (note: orthographic details such as spelling, and verses that differ by only one word, were not counted as being variants). And scholars have yet to do more than just begin to understand and incorporate the flood of new manuscripts found in this century. Recent agreements between the latest editions of the Greek New Testament and the text of the Nestle-Aland edition (the officially recognized editions of the Catholic Church and the United Bible Societies) are only a result of the fact that they had the same editorial committees! So the next time you hear that someone "got it" right from the original Greek (or Hebrew), you should know better. This is not to say that use of Greek or Hebrew is not important, only that the notion that the texts are error-free is wrong.

SUMMARY

The important points to notice are:

- (1) Many different versions of the Bible, none autographic, have existed since antiquity;
- (2) Some of the versions differ significantly from each other;
- (3) It is virtually impossible to confirm which of several ancient variants is the most authentic (particularly true of the Old Testament);
- (4) The oldest manuscripts generally exist only as fragments (often in very poor condition); and
- (5) Translation from the original tongues is difficult and no single translation can be considered truly authentic.

It is therefore a reasonable conclusion that the Bible as we know it today does not necessarily correspond to what was intended by the original writers. Even if one grants that the first writers were divinely inspired, it does not follow that all the scribes, copyists, and redactors who followed were so inspired (else the differences and confusion would not exist).

CREATION STORIES

Two distinct stories of the creation of humanity are given in Genesis. Genesis 1 is believed to have been written by the "Priestly" author and Genesis 2 by the "Yahwist" author. (Both may well have been groups of authors). The Priestly author is believed to be the more recent, about the 7th to 5th centuries BCE, and the Yahwist story is more primitive, possibly dating from about the 10th century BCE. Scholars still debate these dates, but the majority accepts these, or something similar.

Genesis 1:27-30: "So God created man in his own image; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish in the sea, the birds of heaven, and every living thing that moves upon the earth.' God also said, 'I give you all plants that bear seed everywhere on earth, and every tree bearing fruit which yields seed: they shall be yours for food.'" Note that no exception is made for the fruit of any tree in this account

Genesis 2: 7-8: "Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Thus the man became a living creature." Gen. 2: 15-18: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and take care of it. He told the man 'You may eat from every tree in the garden, but not from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die.'" Gen. 2: 21-22: "And so the Lord God put the man into a trance, and while he slept, he took one of his ribs and closed the flesh over the place. The Lord God then built up the rib, which he had taken out of the man, into a woman,"

The order of creation in Genesis 1 is: heaven and earth, light, vault of heaven (i.e., separation of earthly and heavenly waters), seas and dry land, plants, sun and stars, fish and birds, land animals, and last humans. This order is the same as that of the Persian Zend-Avesta, the sacred book of the Zoroastrians. Zoroastrianism was a powerful religion at about the time of the priestly writer of Genesis. However, Zoroaster probably lived about 1000 BCE, and the Yahwist writer would be unlikely to have had any contact with the Avesta. The original Avesta has not survived; modern adherents of Zoroastrianism use a version that has been recreated from fragments, commentaries, and hymns. The order of creation in Egyptian mythology, which would surely have been familiar to the priestly author, is ocean, sun, atmosphere, earth, and sky.

The order of creation in Genesis 2 is: heaven and earth, man, trees and the Garden of Eden, animals and birds, woman. In Genesis 1 the earth is first covered by water. In Genesis 2 the earth is first dry and barren. In Genesis 1 God creates by simple command: "And God said, let there be light, and there was light." In Genesis 2 God manufactures his creations from dirt or earth, walks in the garden in the cool of the evening, and cannot find the humans when they are hiding. Not only are the creation stories inconsistent, but the conceptions of the power of the deity are utterly different.

There are hints of a third creation story in other parts of the Bible, for example Ps 74: 13-17, Ps 89:10, Is 51: 9-10; the struggle between God and Leviathan or Rahab in early creation is similar to the struggle between good and evil in Zoroastrianism. There are parallels in Mithraism,

Gnosticism, and Manichaeism. It is also possible that some of the struggles described do not refer to creation, but to the "Last Days", that is, to a future apocalypse.

There are some relics of polytheism in Genesis: the use of the plural form "Elohim" (literally gods) for God, and Genesis 3:22--"the man has become like one of us, knowing good from evil", implying that there were other gods. There are references to other gods throughout the Old Testament, for example, Psalm 95:3, "For the Lord is a great God, a great king over all gods". A religion that has one God for the nation, but acknowledges the existence of other gods, is called henotheistic rather than monotheistic.

The Koran refers to the biblical creation story. Sura 11 verse 6: "Throned above the waters, he made the heavens and earth in six days." There are several references in the Koran to "God, who made heaven and earth, and separated light from darkness." There is also an admonition to "Israelites" to follow their holy book. Devout Moslems believe every word of the Koran to have come directly from the hand of God. The first words, after the introduction, are "This is the book of which there is no doubt."

Abraham, by biblical account, came from Ur, which was invaded and settled by the Sumerians about the fourth millennium BCE. The Sumerians were the dominant ethnic group of Ur until the conquest of the city by Semitic nomads about 2000 BCE. The Sumerian religion was polytheistic. There are similarities between the creation story of Genesis 2 and the Sumerian creation myth.

In the Sumerian story, Enki, the water god, and Ninhursag, the mother goddess, are supposed to have created the first man from clay, which they mixed with the blood of a rebellious god. Being angry with humans, they withheld all hope of immortality from them. The gods determined to destroy mankind with a flood, but saved a few so that they and their descendants could serve the immortals.

In the Babylonian creation myth the primordial world had only the "two waters" (fresh and salt) until the birth of the gods. Marduk, king of the gods, defeated Tiamat, the goddess of chaos, split her in two, and then created heaven and earth from the two halves, and created humans from the blood of Tiamat's monster. "Chaos" could be read as similar to the biblical "without form and void". Chaos also figures in Greek mythology as the material from which the earth was made, even before the creation of the gods.

The fall of Adam is paralleled by a Persian myth in which Ahriman, or Angra Mainyu (the spirit of darkness and evil), acting through a serpent, causes the first man to fall into knowledge of good and evil. This story is also represented, with variations, in many myths of the Middle East. Babylonian carvings show a man, a woman, a serpent, and a tree. The "Tree of Knowledge" or "Tree of Life" is an almost universal element of Middle Eastern and North African mythology.

The creation stories of Genesis might well be a synthesis from polytheistic myths, which the Israelites rejected in general, even though some particulars were kept. Until quite recently most peoples almost universally believed the heavens to be a solid dome to which the stars were fastened, and across which the sun and the moon traveled. It would not be unusual for "darkness"

to be accepted not as the simple absence of light, but as a real quantity. The belief that naming a thing gives it a unique quality is common to many primitive peoples ("and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name"). "Breath" is synonymous with life or spirit to most primitive people.

Whatever the origin of the creation stories in Genesis, they are certainly in almost complete disagreement with well-established scientific and historical facts:

(1) The earth has been in existence for four to five billion years. The Genesis accounts would only allow an age of the earth of a few thousand years.

(2) Life first appeared approximately 3.5 billion years ago, a billion years after formation of the earth. In the Genesis 1 account, plants appear on the third day, sea life and birds on the fifth day, and animals and humans on the sixth day.

(3) Primates with some human characteristics first appeared in East Africa a few million years ago, and genus *Homo* developed, likewise in Africa, about 1.7 million years ago. True modern humans appeared about 200,000 to 500,000 years ago. The Genesis accounts have humans appearing in Mesopotamia only 6,000 years ago.

(4) The actual order of appearance of life forms--sea-dwelling life, land plants, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals--is different from the order in either Genesis account. Seed-bearing plants were not the first plants on land, but both Genesis accounts refer to trees and fruits in the initial creation of plants.

THE POSITION OF MAJOR CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS ON CREATION AND INERRANCY

The statements describing the churches' stance on inerrancy and evolution have been taken from their web pages or other official documents. Statements have been chosen that seemed to best describe the church position on inerrancy and that best fit the current position, regardless of historic beliefs. Other writings may indicate a stance either more conservative or more liberal than the statements quoted here. Most Protestant churches have historically placed a high value on individual autonomy, diversity of opinion, and questioning authority, so that the official position of a denomination may not fairly represent the beliefs of the membership.

CHURCHES THAT SPECIFICALLY DISCOURAGE A LITERAL READING OF THE GENESIS ACCOUNT:

Unitarian Universalist Church. "Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and science"

CHURCHES THAT IMPLICITLY OR EXPLICITLY ENCOURAGE OR PERMIT A NONLITERAL INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE, OR THAT RECOGNIZE THE TRUTH OF EVOLUTION:

The Catholic Church. "Today, more than a half century after this encyclical, new knowledge leads us to recognize in the theory of evolution more than a hypothesis. ... The convergence, neither sought nor induced, of results of work done independently one from the other, constitutes in itself a significant argument in favor of this theory."

Most Protestant churches hold the Bible to be the sole source of doctrine, but generally do not imply that the entire Bible is to be accepted as dogma.

Disciples of Christ. "Faith with understanding; rationality and faithfulness in action, approaching the scriptures with reverent intelligence." This church strongly supports congregational and individual autonomy, and the position of individual churches may vary from this statement.

The Episcopal Church USA. "The Bible, interpreted in accordance with the findings of modern biblical scholarship, is the sole criterion in matters of dogma."

United Church of Christ. "The right of private judgment and the liberty of conscience are rights and privileges for all." This church strongly supports congregational and individual autonomy, and the position of individual churches may vary somewhat,

United Methodist Church. "Methodists acknowledge that scriptural reflection is influenced by the processes of reason, tradition and experience, while aware that Scripture is the primary source and criterion of Christian doctrine."

Greek Orthodox. "While the Bible is the written testimony of God's revelation, Holy Tradition is the all-encompassing experience of the Church under the abiding guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit." Other Orthodox Churches hold similar positions.

CHURCHES THAT STRESS THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE, BUT MAKE NO CLEAR JUDGMENT ON INERRANCY:

Presbyterian Church USA. "For Presbyterians and others of the Reformed tradition the Bible is the means by which Christian believers come to understand how God has been present with humanity since the beginning of time and is present in our world today."

Reformed Church USA. "We believe the Bible is God's Word for every person, made understandable and alive through the Holy Spirit's ministry. It is more than a textbook; it is the living Word of God, the source of all revelation of God's will, and the norm by which all teaching must be checked."

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. "The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world."

American Baptist Church, USA. "The Bible, interpreted by the individual, is regarded as the ultimate religious authority in matters of faith and practice."

Latter Day Saints (Mormons): "The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ is divinely inspired scripture, as is the Holy Bible." This church receives interpretation of the Bible from church leaders; interpretation is subject to change.

CHURCHES THAT STRESS INFALLIBILITY, BUT WITHOUT SPECIFIC MENTION OF THE GENESIS ACCOUNT (OTHER WRITINGS MAY TAKE A STAND ON CREATION):

Assemblies of God. "The Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, are verbally inspired of God and are the revelation of God to man, the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct."

Churches of Christ. "The original autographs of the sixty six books which make up the Bible are considered to have been divinely inspired, by which it is meant that they are infallible and authoritative. Reference to the scriptures is made in settling every religious question. A pronouncement from the scripture is considered the final word."

Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. "The Bible is God's inerrant and infallible Word, in which He reveals His Law and His Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. It is the sole rule and norm for Christian doctrine."

Southern Baptist Convention. "It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter." This church supports congregational and individual

autonomy, and some local congregations may take a position either more or less rigid than is quoted here. A position statement has not been found for either of the National Baptist Conventions. In most matters of faith, they tend to follow the Southern Baptists closely.

Church of the Nazarene. "We believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, by which we understand the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation, so that whatever is not contained therein is not to be enjoined as an article of faith."

Jehovah's Witnesses: "absolute obedience to biblical precepts".

CHURCHES THAT SPECIFICALLY MENTION BELIEF IN THE GENESIS CREATION ACCOUNT:

Seventh Day Adventist. "Believe the Genesis creation account: God is Creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made "the heaven and the earth" and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week."

Lutheran Church Wisconsin Synod. "Where Scripture speaks historically, as for example in Genesis 1 and 2, it must be understood as speaking of literal, historical facts."

Christian Science: "As adherents of Truth, we take the inspired Word of the Bible as our sufficient guide to eternal Life." "The true theory of the universe, including man, is not in material history but in spiritual development. Inspired thought relinquishes a material, sensual, and material theory of the universe, and adopts the spiritual and immortal." Some statements of the founder of this denomination appear to give at least partial credit to Darwinian evolution. However, on balance, the writings seem to tend more towards creationism.

SUMMARY, U. S. MEMBERS:

DENOMINATIONS NOT DEMANDING BELIEF IN INERRANCY	MEMBERS (MILLIONS)	DENOMINATIONS DEMANDING BELIEF IN INERRANCY	MEMBERS (MILLIONS)
Unitarian	0.21	Assemblies of God	2.37
Roman Catholic	60.28	Other Pentecostal	6.50
Disciples of Christ	0.93	Luth. Ch. Miss. Syn.	2.59
Episcopalian	2.54	Southern Baptist	15.66
United Church of Christ	1.47	Other conservative Baptist	11.70
United Methodist	8.54	Adventist	0.82
AME/AMEZion	4.73	Wisc. Evang. Luth. Synod	0.41
Antiochian Orthodox	0.30	Jehovah's Witnesses	0.71
Orthodox Church USA	2.00	Christian Science	(Est.) 0.50
Greek Orthodox	1.99		
Armenian Orthodox	0.41		
Presb. Church USA	3.67		
Presb Church America	0.26		
Reformed Church	0.31		
Evang. Luth. Ch. Amer.	5.19		
American Baptist	1.77		
Other liberal Baptist	2.50		
LDS (Mormons)	4.71		
TOTAL NOT PROFESSING INERRANCY	101.77	TOTAL PROFESSING INERRANCY	41.52

Other Faiths:

Jewish 5.88
 Islam 5.10
 Buddhist 0.78

Source of membership data: Current issues of *World Almanac*, and *Statistical Abstract of the United States*.

Of those denominations surveyed, membership in churches not demanding a belief in inerrancy outnumbers membership in those that do by more than 2:1. Membership in churches professing belief in inerrancy is 15% of total U.S. population. The actual number of members accepting this belief is expected to be lower, because there are typically more church members who tend to accept a less rigid stance, than those professing a more rigid posture than their church's official position.

STATEMENTS OF MODERN THEOLOGIANS

Karl Barth:

"The Bible gives to every man and every era such answers to their questions as they deserve. We shall always find in it as much as we seek and no more: high and divine content if it is high and divine content that we seek; transitory and historical content if it is transitory and historical content that we seek."

"It is not the right human thoughts about God which form the content of the Bible, but the right divine thoughts about men."

"...the Biblical idea of the Creation is never expanded into a cosmogony. It is intended for a solemn marking of the distance between the cosmos and the Creator, and precisely not for a metaphysical explanation of the world. God said, Let there be! That is all."

"The Bible tells us more, or less, according to the much or little that he are able to hear and translate into deed and truth...But the source even of our sense of problem is in God."

Barth, K. (1957). *The Word of God and the Word of Man (Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie)*. D. Horton, transl., original publication 1928. New York: Harper & Row.

Paul Tillich:

"Theology, above all, must leave to science the description of the whole of objects and their interdependence and history." Tillich, P. (1959). *Theology of Culture*. R. C. Kimball, Ed. London: Oxford University Press.

"There is no conflict between faith in its true nature and reason in its true nature." Tillich, P. (1957). *Dynamics of Faith*. New York: Harper & Row.

Søren Kierkegaard:

"When the Scriptures are viewed as a court of last resort for determining what is and what is not Christian doctrine, it becomes necessary to make sure of the Scriptures historically and critically." Kierkegaard, S. (1941). *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. D. F. Swenson, transl. Original Publication 1846. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Harry Emerson Fosdick:

"The fact is, that the process by which man came to be on the planet is a very important scientific problem, but is not a crucially important religious problem. Origins prove nothing in the realm of values." Kennedy, G., Ed. (1957). *Evolution and Religion: The Conflict between Science and Theology in Modern America*. Boston: D. C. Heath & Co.

Reinhold Niebuhr:

"Religion had no right to insist on the scientific accuracy of its mythic heritage." (*Ibid.*)

Lyman Abbott:

"The evolutionist believes that God's processes are processes of change, not of manufacture." Abbott, L. (1897). "The Theology of an Evolutionist", in Shaw, *et al.*, Eds. (1982). *Readings in Christian Humanism*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House.

Hans Küng:

"The six days of creation and the narrative of the creation of man are, as we are well aware today, *images* which do not describe the scientific course of the origin of the world; they proclaim--and still proclaim to man even today--the splendour and uniqueness of the Creator and the greatness, simplicity, and goodness of His work." Küng, H. (1967). *The Church*. R. Ockenden, transl. New York: Sheed and Row.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin:

"We must put in the forefront of our concrete preoccupations the systematic arrangement and exploration of our universe. The time has come to realize that research is the highest form of function, embracing the spirit of conflict and bright with the splendor of religion. To keep up a constant pressure on the real, is not that the supreme posture of faith in Being and therefore the highest form of adoration?" De Chardin, P. T. (1965). *Building the Earth*. New York: Avon.

"Though frightened for a moment by evolution, the Christian now perceives that what it offers him is nothing but a means of feeling more at one with God and of giving himself more to him."

"Narrowly bound to untenable myths, or steeped in a pessimistic and passive mysticism, they can adjust themselves neither to the precise immensities, nor to the constructive requirements of space-time." De Chardin, P. T. (1959). *The Phenomenon of Man*. B. Wall, transl. New York: Harper & Row.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

"Then God said 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'. This has nothing at all to do with Darwinism. We certainly have no wish to deny our connection with the animal world; rather it is just the opposite." Bonhoeffer, D. (1932). "Schöpfung und Fall" (Creation and Fall). In G. B. Kelly and F. B. Nelson, Eds. (1990). *A Testament to Freedom* San Francisco: Harper.

John A. O'Brien:

"Instead of lessening the dignity of man's origin, evolution actually exalts it, by placing it far above the moistened dirt or mud of the earth to living creatures endowed by God with sentiency and a form of intelligence. O'Brien, J. A. (1947). *The Origin of Man*.

Postscript

What is the Bible all about then? It is about faith, not in the Bible itself, but in God. That was the message from Abraham (Genesis 15:6) to Paul (Romans, Ch. 1-8).

What it is NOT is a message of religious dogma. It is not about the cult practices of the first and second temples in Jerusalem that kings and priests evidently put together in an attempt to unify the people; Scripture itself claims that such practices were not from God (despite the fact that it is "in the Bible"):

"For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing I commanded them saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you." (Jeremiah 7:22-23; cf., Isaiah 1:11-17, Jeremiah 6:20, Micah 6:6-8, Amos 5:21-25)

However, the prophets' words were apparently without avail. By the time of Jesus some people had lost the message of faith proclaimed by their fathers and replaced it with one of obedience for obedience's sake. All of the words found in the "Books of Moses" were sieved to find meanings that were interpreted into required behaviors. Jesus' views on this practice were perhaps best summed up as:

"Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel." (Matthew 23:24)

Rather, Jesus claimed that life's daily focus should be on love of God and man (cf. Matthew 22:36-40, Mark 12:28-31, Luke 10:25-28, John 15:17, 1 John 3:11-24).

Eventually the ideas of total obedience developed into the extreme notion that if perfect obedience could be achieved for one day, then the Messiah would come. These same types of ideas seem to have arisen in some Fundamentalist circles. Some of the more extreme Fundamentalists pick apart the Bible to the point of taking verses and even words out of context and developing aberrant theological ideas that *must* be embraced and followed. However, Paul's letters, for example, ought to be read and understood in the context of who they were addressed to and what the message was about. And whereas the ancients were looking for something that was missed in interpreting and practicing the Torah so that the Messiah would come, some groups today expend great amounts of energy in interpreting and reinterpreting the Bible in light of recent and current events in order to show that the Messiah will come in 1976, or 1984, or 1994, or 1997, or 1998 or especially the year 2000. The slightest idea that the Bible is not 100% the literal Word of God throws a monkey wrench in these prognostications. After all, God's plans will be carried out without our intervention! Think what a positive impact could be made in society if all of the efforts spent on millennialism and creationism were instead focused on matters of true faith, love, and understanding.

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