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BIBLE OR QUR'ĀN? WHICH PASSES THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST

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Abstract

A customary interrogation tactic used against Christians is to question the transmissional accuracy of the Bible from the Apostle's writing to the present. Muslims are especially antagonistic in this accusation while asserting the superiority of the Qur'ān to near perfect transmissional accuracy. However, they are egregiously mistaken in these assertions. Though on the surface, the bibliographical test might begin to look like the Qur'ān may surpass the Bible, a more in-depth investigation proves otherwise. The fact that the Qur'ān does not, and never has, had a sole autograph but, instead, many varying writings attempting to preserve Mohammad's teachings. Then later attempts to create a canonical book melding these various readings into one makes it impossible to trace what the original writings stated at all. Whereas the Bible can be recreated nearly word for word accuracy of the writers' original autographs. Furthermore, few of the Muslim assertions of manuscript numbers and dates can be backed up by scholarly research, instead, they come from estimations or poor scholarship. These poorly done scholarly works break down the Qur'ān's strength in the bibliographical test even further, yet the Bible's numbers and dates have been diligently studied and recorded by scholars both from within the faith and outside with minuscule deviations.

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Introduction

Today's culture expresses passionate cynicism over the accurate transmission of religious teachings. Politicians, celebrities, and even professors confront people of faith on the accuracy of their individual teachings. Often these confrontations start with questioning the accurate transmission of the original writings. Ironically many of the same people doing the confronting will also be exhorting the writings of other ancient philosophers, scientists, and historians without the same questions. However, what one learns from these ancient writings is also foundational for the accurate transmission of the teachings of the original writers. Nevertheless, this is a valid question. How can one be certain of the accurate transmission of one's foundational teachings?

After all, Christian trust in the Bible's reliability is vital since the Bible's authority is the fundamental instruction for being a follower of Christ. For a Christian, the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Thus, it should be trusted as an uncorrupted instruction for the tenets of the faith. There are many people who wish to tear down a Christian's faith. This motivation may be because of a false understanding of what the Bible teaches or because they believe their own religion is correct and Christianity is wrong. However, one of the key steps used to make believers doubt, is eroding trust in the Bible's reliability. It is often ignited by attacking the reliability of the Bible's manuscripts.

Muslims are one of the central groups to attack the accuracy of the Biblical manuscripts, yet they claim “[t]he original texts of most of the former Divine Books were lost all together, and only their translations exist today. The Qur’an, on the other hand, exists exactly as it had been revealed to the Prophet; not a word – nay, not a dot of it – has been changed. It is available in its

original text and the Word of God has been preserved for all times to come.”¹ If modern Muslim scholars do acknowledge variants in the manuscripts, it is in acknowledging that scribes sometimes make unintentional errors.² However, this was not always the case. Ibn Khaldūn admitted, during the Middle Ages, that problems in the Qur’ān were due to poor writing skills among the Companions as they were recording the revelations from Mohammad.³

Since both the Christians and the Muslims rely on trust in the historical accuracy of the transmission of their scripture as the foundation of their perspective faiths, it would seem imperative to analyze it. When ancient historical documents are analyzed for historical reliability, they all go through three principal tests: the bibliographical, the internal evidence, and the external evidence tests. Religious texts are no different from other ancient historical texts as they also document the history of early people in those religions and how they interacted with their deity or deities. These documents claim they are documenting actual historical events, not fables. Only outsiders claim these stories are fables. Thus, if the claim by specific religions is historical and truthful documentation, then the religious texts should also be evaluated under the same scrutiny as other historical texts. Therefore, these documents should also be evaluated using the bibliographical, internal evidence, and external evidence tests. The purpose of this thesis is to compare and contrast the historical accuracy of the Hebrew Scriptures, New Testament, and Qur’ān early manuscripts through the use of the bibliographical test, to prove the superior reliability of the Biblical manuscripts over that of the Qur’ān through these criteria.

¹ Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding Islam* (Leicestershire: The Islamic Foundation, 2013), 109.

² Keith Small “Mapping a New Country: Textual Criticism and Qur’ān Manuscripts.” PhD diss. (Brunel University, 2008), 103.

³ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah* (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1967), 2:392.

Though the internal and external tests are also vital to evaluate the historical accuracy of these manuscripts thoroughly, they will not be in the scope of this thesis.

Defining the Process

Bibliographical Test

The bibliographical test is the standard tool used to measure the reliability of ancient manuscripts through an examination of the textual transmission of the documents. Since original documents are not available, one must be able to test the reliability of the copies. This process is done by looking at the number of manuscripts available, the quality of those manuscripts, the distance in time from the original autograph's writing to the date of the manuscript's writing, and the accuracy in recreating the original documents from the available manuscripts.

The greater the number of manuscripts, the more they can be compared to recreate the original writings by finding scribal errors, whether intentional or accidental, can be detected. These scribal errors may be benign, like spelling variations, word changes, missed words, accidental marks, or paraphrasing that does not alter the teaching, but there is always the chance they could corrupt the meaning of the writing. Likewise, the closer a manuscript is to the original writing, the less chance of errors being copied into future manuscripts and then added to and copied again. Additionally, the closer to the original writings, the fewer scribes have had the chance to corrupt the original writing. A higher quality manuscript means it can be read and examined more accurately. The quality of the manuscript is influenced by many factors, including the material they were written on, how old they are, and how they were stored, handled, and used. Thus, the greater the quantity, the higher the quality, and the less time between originals and copies, the more accurately textual variants can be evaluated and the higher the accuracy in recreating the original documents from the available manuscripts.

Early Manuscripts, Preservation, and Dating

Introduction

Throughout history, historical documents of all sorts have gone through similar processes. First, autographs are written. If the autograph is determined to be valuable enough, scribes make manuscripts of the autographs. The quality of these autographs varies depending on the intended purpose of why the manuscripts were commissioned and the professionalism of the scribe. Then many autographs and manuscripts get lost or destroyed. Frequently, more manuscripts are written, and the process repeats. Eventually, historians come along and try to collect the manuscripts, preserve them, authenticate them, study them, and attempt to find the exact wording of the original autographs.

This process means the number of discovered manuscripts is constantly changing. In the current age, the number of manuscripts discovered is usually increasing because of new discoveries combined with improved preservation methods for the existing manuscripts. Additionally, digital copies are now available for many of the manuscripts, decreasing the frequency that the physical manuscripts need to be handled for study, thus, less wear on them. However, sometimes it can decrease, too. Wars are often when manuscripts are lost because they are destroyed or stolen in the fighting. However, fires, natural disasters, environmental damage, and purposeful destruction of poor or worn manuscripts are other reasons manuscripts numbers may decrease.

The quantity, quality, early dating, and accuracy of ancient manuscripts in recreating autographs all play integral roles in establishing the historical accuracy of ancient documents. The higher quantity of documents, then the more comparisons can be examined to recreate the original autographs' wording. Additionally, a high quantity generally indicates that the

information in the document was considered valuable and accurate at the time of writing, or so many copies would not have been made, nor would they have been given the care to preserve them. When tallying the number of manuscripts available, generally, a manuscript is only counted if it is published or cataloged. Those in private collections that have not been studied for authenticity cannot be counted because it cannot be known if it is a forgery. The Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Qur'ān manuscripts all have uncounted copies because they are in private collections and have not been confirmed.

The higher quality documents allow for improved, more accurate assessment of the words and easier comparisons. It also indicates that the scribes used higher quality materials, more care in copying them, and the documents were well preserved after they were made because of their reputation. Generally, higher quality indicates more value was placed on the document's contents, or such great commissions or care would not have been used to reproduce the information. However, there are exceptions to the idea that higher quality indicates more importance; for example, if the document was deemed illegal or controversial and people were attempting to destroy it, then cheaper copies may be made but in higher quantities to ensure it was not lost and could be spread more easily. Then the value would come in that one was willing to risk being caught with the manuscript despite the persecution risk.

Further, manuscripts that have been accurately dated very close to the time the autographs are given heavier accuracy weight because they are less likely to be copies of copies allowing for fewer transcription errors. These errors most often are simple copying errors, but they could be actual attempts to corrupt the documents. Additionally, suppose very early manuscripts closely match later ones; in that case, it shows that they have not been corrupted

over time. Especially when the very early copies are lost for an extended period and then unearthed and used for comparison.

Finally, scholars often scrutinize ancient manuscripts to recreate the original autographs. By comparing textual variants in the various manuscripts, paleographers are able to decipher the original writings to a certain percentage. The higher that percentage, the more reliable the historical document is deemed. Through the sections of this thesis, each set of manuscripts, Old Testament, New Testament, and Qur'ān, will be evaluated on the basis of each criterion of the bibliographic test: quantity, quality, dating distances, and accuracy as compared to the autographs.

Quantity of Available Manuscripts

Old Testament

In the past approximately a hundred years, the quantity of early manuscripts of the Old Testament, New Testament, and the Qur'ān have all increased. Though the Old Testament had a relatively low number of manuscripts before the start of the twentieth century, the ones available were in excellent condition. This scarcity of Old Testament manuscripts before the twentieth century is due to the extreme distance in time from the autographs' writing to the current time, the fact that Jerusalem has been conquered forty-seven times since 1800 BC, and the Talmudic tradition of ceremonial destruction of worn and imperfect manuscripts. Many of these ancient manuscripts were destroyed after the fifth and sixth centuries Masoretic standardization of the Hebrew Scriptures because they were considered imperfect after the standardization.⁴ Some people may question this practice as allowing for destroying evidence of altered manuscripts.

⁴ Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *From God to Us Revised and Expanded: How We Got Our Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2012), 180.

How can one be sure of the accuracy and purity of the remaining copies if the ones that disagreed with them were destroyed? However, with the twentieth-century discoveries of manuscripts predating this standardization, one can compare later documents with earlier ones and see that they have been preserved. In fact, by comparing the Isaiah A and B scrolls from Qumran Cave 1, dated 100 BC, to the current Hebrew Bible are word-for-word identical by more than 95%.⁵ Moreover, the majority of 5% of variation can be attributed to quill slips or alternative spellings of the same word.⁶ Many of these spelling errors were due to changes in spelling as the Hebrew language changed over time and the addition of vowels to the written form of Hebrew, which is what the Masoretes were named for, the standardization of the written Hebrew language to match the exact pronunciation and grammatical form.⁷ Additionally, of the few variations that are not scribal slips or spelling changes, most have some interesting connections to other Biblical manuscripts. Some from the DSS may not align with the Masoretic Text but do align with the LXX or New Testament references to the Old Testament. For example, Exodus 1:5 reads "seventy souls" in the Masoretic Text, whereas the LXX and when Acts 7:14 quotes Exodus read "seventy-five souls." The seventy-five aligns with a fragment found in the Qumran Scrolls.⁸ More will be discussed in a later section of this topic.

With the discovery of the Cairo Genizah storehouse, the Basatin cemetery, the Dead Sea Caves, Judean Desert Ruins, and a few other more minor discoveries since the 1890 AD, the

⁵ Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press 1974), 25.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Geisler and Nix, *From God to Us*, 147; Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 44.

⁸ Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 367.

number of published Old Testament manuscripts has increased from 731⁹ to hundreds of thousands of manuscripts and fragments.¹⁰ Though the actual number of manuscripts is lower due to many of the fragments being from the same manuscript, the exact count is still being evaluated as it is determined what fragments go together. The thousands of DSS fragments are estimated to add up to approximately 600 manuscripts alone.¹¹ These fragments have been dispersed into multiple collections, with 193,000 in the Taylor-Schechter collection at Cambridge, eleven thousand at the John Rylands Library in Manchester, and 31,000 at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.¹² Whereas the Cairo Genizah storehouse had over ten thousand Old Testament manuscripts and fragments among the 200,000 manuscripts found in the attic there.¹³ Josh D. McDowell and Clay Jones estimated in 2014, that there were over forty-two thousand Old Testament manuscripts in these collections, though only seventeen thousand of those are prior to the nineteenth century.¹⁴

New Testament

The New Testament similarly had increases, but not as drastic as the Old Testament. However, the New Testament has increased accuracy in the count. In 1964 Bruce Metzger cited

⁹ Geisler and Nix, *From God to Us*, 178.

¹⁰ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* bid., 357-358, 361, 364.

¹¹ Geisler and Nix, *From God to Us*, 184.

¹² Ibid., 191 n. 5.

¹³ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 358-360.

¹⁴ Josh D. McDowell and Clay Jones, "The Bibliographical Test," Josh McDowell A Cru Ministry, August 13, 2014, accessed September 1, 2022, https://ibs.cru.org/files/6314/2108/7768/Bibliographical_Test_Josh_McDowell.pdf, 7-8.

4,969 New Testament Greek manuscripts.¹⁵ In 1986, Norman L Geisler and William E. Nix updated that number to 5,366.¹⁶ Then Clay Jones updated the number again in 2013 to 5,795 Greek New Testament manuscripts.¹⁷ Then Jones and McDowell updated it again in 2014 to 5,838.¹⁸ This includes 2,926 minuscules, 322 majuscules, 128 papyri and 2,462 lectionaries.¹⁹ All three of these scholars used the work of Kurt and Barbara Aland at the Institute of New Testament Textual Research to base their numbers at each successive time. Additionally, Jones accounted for an additional approximately 2,587 plus Armenian, 975 plus Coptic, six Gothic, six hundred plus Ethiopian, ten thousand plus Latin, 350 plus Syriac, forty-three plus Georgian, and four thousand plus Slavic.²⁰ These numbers are approximate because Jones used conservative numbers. All of them, except the Gothic, are known to have more, but some are not counted for various reasons. For example, the uncounted Armenian ones may also include commentaries or lectionaries in the same manuscript.²¹ While the Ethiopian ones count the six hundred plus outside of Ethiopia, but there are an estimated five thousand undocumented inside Ethiopia.²² Additionally, some MSS are believed to exist in countries where scholars cannot get access to

¹⁵ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 31-33.

¹⁶ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 387.

¹⁷ Clay Jones, "The Biographical Test Updated," *Christian Research Journal* 35, no 3 (June 29, 2012): updated October 1, 2013, Accessed April 1, 2022, <https://www.equip.org/articles/the-bibliographical-test-updated/>.

¹⁸ Josh D. McDowell and Clay Jones, "The Bibliographical Test," *Josh McDowell A Cru Ministry*, August 13, 2014, accessed September 1, 2022, https://ibs.cru.org/files/6314/2108/7768/Bibliographical_Test_Josh_McDowell.pdf, 7.

¹⁹ McDowell and Jones, "The Bibliographical Test," 6.

²⁰ Clay Jones, "The Biographical Test Updated."

²¹ Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford, 2005), 117.

²² Clay Jones, "The Biographical Test Updated."

determine exact counts and examine their authenticity, or they may be in private collections. Thus, numbers are rounded down to the nearest known authenticated number.

Qur'ān

Finally, the Qur'ānic manuscripts have likewise experienced new discoveries of ancient manuscripts. However, it is unknown if that number is increasing or decreasing. This uncertainty is partly because the study of Qur'ānic manuscripts is still in its infancy compared to those of the Bible. There is not a precise computation made of all the Qur'ān manuscripts, nor is there a count of how many have been discovered in the past. Scholarly reports generally will not put a number to the Qur'ānic manuscripts. However, Alba Fedeli noted in one footnote that in 1934 Mingana had cataloged 818 manuscripts alone from the collections of Crawford, Bland, Hamilton, Rylands, and himself in the Rylands Library.²³ Furthermore, there exist many other reports of specific numbers of fragments or manuscripts discovered or stored in various locations. However, a completed scholarly computation of Qur'ānic manuscripts similar to what has been done with the Biblical manuscripts cannot be found. On the other hand, non-scholarly accounts and a few scholarly articles report ranges of manuscript counts from a few hundred to hundreds of thousands of manuscripts, but the numbers are not backed up. One such report comes from Muhammad Mustafā Al-A'zamī, who claims there are 250,000 manuscripts scattered all over the globe. However, when following his notes, you find this to be an estimate based on estimates from various known collections, and as he states, "there are many sizable collections in other parts of the world," but he does not prove or source where he got these numbers or where other

²³ Alba Fedeli, "Early Qur'ānic Manuscripts, Their Text, and the Alphonse Mingana Papers Held in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Birmingham," (PhD diss. University of Birmingham, 2014), 28 n108.

sizable locations are.²⁴ One reason for these wide-ranging reports is that the vast majority of manuscripts are housed in private collections or mosques. Most of these have yet to have the opportunity to be studied by scholars. Further, how they are counted can also vary greatly. Some Muslim leaders will not count any that are imperfect when compared to the Uthmān's cannon. While others will dismiss any not in Arabic or that may have been scripted by a different sect of Islam even if they are in Arabic. Nevertheless, it is possible that known Qur'ānic manuscript numbers far exceed those of the New Testament, but it is possible that many are counting many fragments from the same manuscript as individual manuscripts or inauthentic manuscripts as authentic ones. Additionally, if counts were done similarly to how the Old and New Testaments' manuscripts are counted, only manuscripts that are published and have been authenticated would be counted; thus, those in private collections not open to study and authentication would not be counted as official numbers. Unfortunately, until more studies can be done to authenticate, catalog, and tabulate the manuscripts, one cannot put an accurate number to them.

However, we do know that new discoveries of ancient manuscripts are happening. The Mingana Collection, for example, was acquired between 1924 and 1936 AD by Alphonse Mingana.²⁵ Some of these manuscripts have some controversy surrounding their dating, which will be discussed in a later section. Another great find was in 1972, while repairing a collapsed section of the Great Mosque of Ṣan'ā' in Yemen, twelve thousand Qur'ānic parchment fragments were discovered in a hidden area between the roof and the ceiling.²⁶ These fragments have since

²⁴ Muhammad Mustafā Al-A'zamī, *The History of the Quranic Text from Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with Old and New Testaments* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy: 2003), 315-316.

²⁵ Fedeli, "Early Qur'ānic Manuscripts, Their Text, and the Alphonse Mingana Papers Held in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Birmingham," 26.

²⁶ Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, "Ṣan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān," *Der Islam* 87, no. 1-2 (2012): 1-129. doi:10.1515/ISLAM-2011-0025, 9.

been studied and assigned to at least 926 separate Qur'ānic manuscripts and additional commentaries.²⁷ However, as controversial counts go, Al-A'zamī's count on this collection claims “about 40 thousand sheets of old parchment and paper of Qur'ānic text from the from the Great Mosque of San'ā'.”²⁸ That said, controversial count or not, some of the San'a' manuscripts may also be as valuable for Qur'ānic transmission and accuracy to original autographs studies as the Dead Sea Scrolls have been to the Old Testament.

Additionally, like the manuscripts of the Old and New Testament, those of the Qur'ān have also been subject to wars, fires, raiding, and so on.²⁹ Moreover, like the Old Testament, many manuscripts were destroyed because they did not agree with Uthmān's cannon.³⁰ Some known manuscripts are believed stolen, buried, or lost but may not be removed from counts due to the hope they were not destroyed. The Republic of Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism, for example, lists four Qur'ānic manuscripts which were Stolen from the Süleymaniye Library.³¹ However, since the Qur'ān is 600 years newer than the New Testament and many thousands of years newer than the Hebrew Scriptures, one would expect more early manuscripts to survive since the ravages of time have not had so long for them to be lost, worn out, or destroyed. Unfortunately, since they have not been cataloged and authenticated, any accurate comparison to other historical manuscripts cannot yet happen.

²⁷ Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, “Şan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān,” 9.

²⁸ Al-A'zamī, *The History of the Quranic Text from Revelation to Compilation*, 316.

²⁹ Ruth Stellhorn Mackensen, “Four Great Libraries of Medieval Baghdad” *The Library Quarterly* 2, No. 1 (January 1932), 279-299. 280, 288, 289, 290.

³⁰ Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2011), 165.

³¹ “Bibliographic List of Stolen Qur'āns Which Are Stolen From Süleymaniye Library” *Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism*, accessed November 20, 2022, <https://www.ktb.gov.tr/EN-120283/bibliographic-list-of-the-stolen-qurans-which-are-stole-.html>.

Quality of the Manuscripts

Old Testament

When analyzing the Old Testament manuscripts' quality, one must look at it in a multifaceted approach since there are multiple groups of manuscripts that each have significant evidence to be gained. However, each group without the other leaves questions regarding its accuracy, but they become a completed puzzle together.

The Masoretic manuscripts are the best-preserved manuscripts of the ancient world. The Masoretes were Jewish scribes who focused on preserving the Hebrew text. Through the fifth and sixth centuries AD, they standardized the Hebrew text, including standardizing and adding vowels and pronunciation marks to the text.³² The Masoretes are known for writing comments in the form of criticism and clarification of Hebrew text. They wanted to preserve the tradition of the Hebrew Bible. Thus, they standardized it and created manuscripts with extreme care and accuracy, as was prescribed in the Talmud, to their standardization.³³ Unfortunately, because scribal law demanded it, they also ritually destroyed all manuscripts that were worn beyond use, imperfect, or did not reflect the vowel and pronunciation marks to their uniformity.³⁴ However, because of this ceremonial destruction, most cataloged manuscripts before the twentieth century were immaculately preserved with minuscule textual variants. If an error was written, it was either fixed or the entire page was removed and rewritten.

Unfortunately, because the Masoretes destroyed so many older manuscripts, it raises the question of whether they corrupted God's Word since there was no way to look back and see if

³² Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 63.

³³ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 371. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 63-65.

³⁴ Geisler and Nix, *From God to Us*, 180.

their ministrations had changed the words or meanings of older manuscripts. Fortunately, newer discoveries of Old Testament manuscripts that predated the Masoretic ministrations were unearthed.

The discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 were invaluable in proving that the beautiful Masoretic Texts had not been corrupted. Though many DDS manuscripts were in very poor condition, often tiny fragments that are extremely brittle are all that is left; however, they contained at least a readable portion of every book of the Old Testament except Esther, and some contained entire books.³⁵ Thus, they could be compared to the Masoretic Texts. As stated earlier, the first Qumran cave contained one complete scroll of Isaiah (Isaiah A) as well as a partial scroll (Isaiah B) containing the last chapters. When compared to the Masoretic Text, the number of meaningful textual variants was minuscule, less than a single percent, and none changed the religious doctrine.³⁶

Since the Dead Sea Scrolls were in such poor condition, which did not allow for complete scriptural comparisons due to missing and unreadable portions, and they did have a few variants that must be examined, one can then look at other groups of manuscripts to understand some of the other variants. The Septuagint and Samaritan Pentateuch manuscripts can add authenticity to the questions left by the DSS and MT. Though most manuscripts from both sources are dated much later than the Dead Sea Scrolls, they are largely in much better condition than most of the DSS, so they can fill in what is missing from them for textual comparison.³⁷ The Samaritan

³⁵ Walter C. Kaiser, *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable and Relevant?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 45.

³⁶ R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1969), 98-99.

³⁷ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 369.

Pentateuch manuscripts do date after the Masoretic standardization, with the earliest known manuscripts dating to the eleventh century, while many of Septuagint's manuscripts date much earlier but still after the Dead Sea Scrolls some were written as early as the third century. However, they are valuable because the groups that wrote them had split away from the Jewish people before the Masoretes standardized the Hebrew scriptures so that they can substantiate the authenticity, lack of change in the historical accuracy of the Old Testament, and remove doubt that the Masoretes altered the Hebrew Scripture during their standardization. Additionally, both give authenticity to the care in translations and changes to the Hebrew language while maintaining the accuracy of the Hebrew scriptures.

When the Samaritans separated from the Hebrew people around the fifth or sixth century BC, they took with them the scriptures as they existed then. From that point on, they used their own scribes to make new manuscripts. Though these manuscripts cannot be considered a translation or a version, it is written in paleo-Hebrew (there are also translations in Greek and Arabic) and are more closely related to the dialect on the Moabite Stone or some of the Biblical manuscripts from Qumran scrolls than that of the Hebrew used in writing the Masoretic Texts.³⁸ So, if changes in doctrine crept in, then comparing the Samaritan Pentateuch manuscripts with the MT and DSS scrolls, one would expect to find it there.

However, Samaritan Pentateuch manuscripts have very few significant variants compared to the Masoretic Text, once accounting for language changes. Those that are significant can be understood due to the Samaritans' exile. For example, the center of worship for the Samaritans was Mount Gerizim, not Jerusalem, because Samaritans were not welcome in Jerusalem to worship. Thus, Pentateuch reflects that change. However, because of these changes to update the

³⁸ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 368-369.

Hebrew scriptures to reflect Samaritan practices after the exile, one would expect that other changes may have crept into passages that might shine an unfavorable light on the Samaritans, but they are absent. This consistency between the manuscript division offers validity to verses like Nehemiah 13:23-31, which seem to have confusing timetables.

Additionally, there are a few places where compared to the Masoretic Texts, the Pentateuch has added text, but the Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint also have these longer passages of Exodus 20:2-16 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21 indicating that this is most likely the original text and sometime in between the DSS and LXX writings and the MT standardization of these passages may have been abbreviated.³⁹

Likewise, the Septuagint manuscripts also confirm the accuracy of Masoretic standardization. The Septuagint manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures came about after Ancient Greek became the dominant language in the known world because of Alexander the Great's conquest. Since the Jewish people began speaking Greek, a Greek translation of the Scriptures became needed. Thus, around 250 BC, the Torah was translated into Greek by a commission from Ptolemy II, and within approximately a hundred years, the rest of the TANAK was also translated.⁴⁰ Though it could possibly have happened as late as 132 BC, this later date is most often used for two reasons—first, an inscription on the prologue of Ecclesiasticus in the Apocrypha.⁴¹ However, this inscription could be referenced because it was when the entirety was completed, not just the Torah, thus this being the second reason for the later date. Either way, it predates the writings of the New Testament by hundreds of years and a split from the earliest

³⁹ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 368-369.

⁴⁰ James Karl Hoffmeier, *The Archaeology of the Bible* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2008), 26.

⁴¹ Harris. *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Scriptures*, 76.

available MT manuscripts by about a thousand years. These translations were called the Septuagint because, as the traditional legend goes, seventy-two scribes, all working independently, translated the Torah in seventy-two days in Alexandria during the reign of Ptolemy II.⁴² Septuagint means seventy. There is much debate whether this is just a fictitious story surrounding Ptolemy II's commission or not, but scholars generally agree there is little evidence, either way, to prove the seventy-two scribes in seventy-two days, but it is where its name originated.

The Septuagint manuscripts are considered less reliable than the Masoretic manuscripts regarding scholarly study because scribes took more liberties when translating them to make them more readable for the general public. Similar to today how there are translations designed for easy reading and Bible studies that do not change doctrine but may not be as detailed or may expand on a verse to make it more understandable. Further, they were often commissioned for non-synagogue use, so they may not have as many transcription and handling rules for the Greek scribes as was required for Jewish scribes, thus of poorer quality than those conscribed for the Temple. However, they are still valuable to textual studies of the transmission of the Old Testament because they can provide evidence of the stability of doctrine despite various groups' control over different sets of manuscripts.⁴³ So, the quality of the remaining Septuagint manuscripts varies greatly, from excellent for their age to dreadful. Obviously, since the Septuagint is in a different language than the autographs when analyzing the word quality, some words do not translate directly, so word-for-word counts cannot be compared. Thus, some

⁴² Hoffmeier, *The Archaeology of the Bible*, 26.

⁴³ Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 47.

passages may be longer or shorter because their words may not be directly translated and require more words to translate the idea into one language or the other.

Moreover, though the quality was inferior to the Hebrew scriptures of the time, the Septuagint was the preferred text for most Jews in the last century BC and first century AD, especially as an increasing number of them no longer spoke Hebrew as their primary language. It was not until the early Christians adopted it as their preferred text that the non-Messianic Jews rejected its text, most likely due to Early Christians using it for their apologetic works of the Christian faith when questioned by the first-century Jews.⁴⁴ Indicating the offense of the Septuagint was not so much its translation but with who was using it. Around that time, the Jewish people also had commissioned another Greek translation to be made, which they more readily embraced for scholarly work.⁴⁵

Additionally, the Septuagint was also the preferred script quoted by the writers of the New Testament books. The majority of the quotes of Jesus in the Gospels as well as the teachings of Peter, Paul, John, Jude, and James, come from the Septuagint. This fact alone gives credibility to the importance that Septuagint did not change the doctrine of the Hebrew Scriptures for the Christian and Jewish people.

New Testament

Though the New Testament has a vastness of manuscripts, many of the earliest manuscripts are not in good condition. Three categories of manuscripts are primarily used to determine the reliability of the New Testament: The Greek manuscripts, ancient translations, and

⁴⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments: Some Chapters on the Transmission of the Bible* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1950), 150.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

patristic citations. The Greek manuscripts can be further divided into papyri, uncials, minuscules, and lectionaries.

Though papyri manuscripts are categorized separately because they are written on papyrus instead of vellum like the uncial script, they are both written with the uncial script. Currently, there are 128 known papyri manuscripts.⁴⁶ They date between the second and eighth centuries.⁴⁷ These manuscripts are generally of very poor quality. There are various reasons for these shoddier qualities. For the earliest of manuscripts, they predate all but the Dead Sea Scrolls of the Old Testament, many of which are also in a very disheveled state. So, they have had more time to deteriorate. Then they were evidently produced on papyrus because Christianity was illegal to practice but spreading quickly. It became vital to get the Scriptures out to the various regions so people could grow in understanding of their faith. Thus, scribes needed to produce them more swiftly, cost-effectively, and often in secrecy.⁴⁸ To quickly produce these manuscripts, they were written onto materials that were readily available, most often papyrus and possibly by less highly trained and practices scribes. Further, they were not stored in controlled temples and only used by scholars and teachers. They were carried across the region, shared among home churches, and used by many people. Thus, few of the earliest manuscripts are of good quality today. The fact that we have any examples of papyrus manuscripts from such an early age is remarkable. It is probable that there were higher quality manuscripts made just as early, but they were mostly destroyed during the persecution and wars since then. Despite the

⁴⁶ McDowell and Jones, "The Bibliographical Test," 6.

⁴⁷ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 387.

⁴⁸ Geisler and Nix, *From God to Us*, 186.

papyri manuscripts being of poor quality, they are extremely valuable to the historical reliability of the New Testament.

The Uncial manuscripts (also sometimes called majuscules) are named such because they were written with the uncial script. This script is a formal printed style used in formal writing of the time. These manuscripts date primarily between the third and tenth centuries. Though the uncial manuscripts were written in the same style as the papyri, they were written on vellum instead of papyrus. Thus, they survived better intact than the papyri ones, though due to age and improper storage, many of the 322 are still of an inferior quality to those of the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament.⁴⁹ However, many are still in fantastic condition considering their ages range from the third to tenth centuries.⁵⁰ Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲛ), dated roughly AD 340, for example, is made of fine antelope skin in excellent condition with clear writing and contains nearly the entirety of the New Testament. At one time, Ⲛ was a complete Bible with the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha; unfortunately, it was discovered being burned to keep the monks warm and now only contains about half the Old Testament.⁵¹ In fact, at one time, four of the uncial manuscripts that survived contained the entire Bible, both New and Old Testaments; unfortunately, none endured completely. Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (C) only contains parts of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon of the Old Testament, plus some Apocrypha books. Whereas the New Testament contains at least part of every book except 2 Thessalonians and 2 John.⁵² Unfortunately, C is barely legible. Luckily, Codex Vaticanus (B) is much better

⁴⁹ McDowell and Jones, "The Bibliographical Test," 6.

⁵⁰ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 387.

⁵¹ Fredrick Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* (New York: Harper, 1958), 59, 124-126.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 138-139.

preserved, containing much of the Greek Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha. From its original writing, it is missing only Genesis 1:1-46:28, 2 Kings 2:5-7 and 10-13, Psalms 106:27-138:6, 1 Timothy through Philemon, and Hebrews 9:14 to the end of the New Testament. It is also missing 1 and 2 Maccabees and the Prayer of Manasseh of the Apocrypha.⁵³ Likewise, Codex Alexandrinus (A) is excellently preserved for a fifth-century manuscript containing all of the Old Testament. However, it does have sections that have been defaced. It also comprises most of the New Testament. A is missing just Matthew 1:1-25:6, John 6:50-8:52, and 2 Corinthians 4:13-12:6.⁵⁴

As for the minuscules, they are dated later than the papyri and uncial, the vast majority of them after the tenth century all the way through the nineteenth century though a handful do date from the fourth through the ninth centuries.⁵⁵ Minuscules adopted the Greeks' cursive writing, which was usually used for informal writing like letters until it proved more practical and was adopted by much of Western Europe. They were written on a mix of vellum and parchment. This is the class where most New Testament manuscripts reside, with 2,926 currently cataloged.⁵⁶ The minuscules are usually considered of lesser quality than the uncial and papyri. However, their value comes in the vast number of them available to understand textual families and trace the originals. Further, they provide a continuous transmission line for Biblical text right up into the ninetieth century.

⁵³ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 391-392.

⁵⁴ Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscript*, 128-130.

⁵⁵ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 387.

⁵⁶ McDowell and Jones, "The Bibliographical Test," 6.

Qur'ān

Like the Old and New Testament manuscripts, there is believed to be a vast quantity of the Qur'ānic manuscripts and likewise in their quality. However, due to its much more recent dates and the fact that the common practice was to destroy imperfect manuscripts, many early Qur'ānic manuscripts are in a higher quality bracket, and among the post Uthmān standardization, there are relatively few variants among them. Nevertheless, like the other sets of manuscripts, there have been discoveries of fragments and deteriorated manuscripts, too. Some of these have been found in storage marked for destruction, private ownership that passed through markets, or antiquity dealers and may not have been preserved as well as if they were used in mosques or universities. Other ancient manuscripts were often in poor condition due to excess use, but with Qur'ānic manuscripts, this is not always the case, as those that wore out were expected to be destroyed. Instead, many are ones that were either stored for destruction due to being imperfect, their parchment cleaned and reused for future use, or were lost then rediscovered much later. These circumstances mean some of these less preserved manuscripts could be invaluable in understanding the transmissions and changes the Qur'ān has experienced through its multiple standardizations because some contain a script that was pre-standardization and escaped their planned destructions. A common claim among Islamic leaders is that no non-Uthāmanic manuscripts have survived, and all early manuscripts are of excellent or even perfect quality. Any manuscripts that were not perfect were allowed to be destroyed by Allah because they were not perfect copies. Those critical of Uthmān's standardization also use this claim to bolster the concept that Uthmān corrupted the manuscripts and destroyed previous evidence to variants of earlier copies. However, either claim is void as there are some very early Qur'ānic manuscripts with qualities well enough preserved that they can be used to compare with later

manuscripts to determine if the copies are perfectly preserved or if Uthmān corrupted them. Though some manuscripts have not yet had the chance to be studied, others are showing remarkable insight into the variants that occurred before the first standardization of the Qur'ān.

Some of these lower-quality manuscripts come from very early dates, and though there are many polemics that Qur'ānic manuscripts do not exist before Uthmān's standardization, this is a myth. There have been manuscripts discovered from the period before the first standardization, like one discovered at the Great Mosque in San'ā, the San'ā' 1 manuscript. This paper will refer to it strictly as the San'ā' 1 because it refers to all the folios that have been separated and given separate manuscript numbers or names, but collectively, they are the San'ā' 1 folios or palimpsest. Though, as a whole, despite its age, it is of reasonable quality, this manuscript has two levels of writing. Both levels were complete manuscripts of the Qur'ān. It appears that after Uthmān completed the first standardization sometime in the late seventh or early eighth century, the first writing was washed or scraped clean then the parchment was reused with a standard textualization.⁵⁷ Then, as time passed, the residue of the metals in the erased ink had a chemical reaction changing its color.⁵⁸ This reaction caused the writing to reappear. This lower writing is of the non-Uthmānic tradition, classified as C-1 tradition.⁵⁹ Additionally, the radiocarbon dating indicates a 75.1% likelihood the parchment was before AD 646. In this case the C-1 tradition writing also supports that date.⁶⁰ This dating and nonstandard tradition of the San'ā' 1 manuscript makes it a very valuable manuscript for the

⁵⁷ Sadeghi and Goudarzi, “Ṣan‘ā’ 1 and the Origins of the Qur’ān,” 5, 7.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-7.

⁵⁹ Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, “The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur’ān of the Prophet,” *Arabica* 57, no. 4, (2010): 343-436, 344.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 353.

accuracy and preservation of the Qur'ān. Because of the nature of the reappearing writing, the lower writing is much lighter in color than the upper, and they both interfere with the reading of the other. However, scholars have been able to study both writings and use them for textual analysis.

Other discoveries from the Great Mosque in San'ā' include over twelve thousand parchment fragments that can be compiled into 926 incomplete manuscripts. Unfortunately, the quality of them can be best described by what the vault was alleged to be a discard or trash pile for flawed manuscripts.⁶¹ Though some of these fragments may prove valuable for research, more work must be done before that value is known.

Another interesting group is the Mingana collection stored at the Department of Special Collections of the University of Birmingham. This collection includes approximately 2000 Arabic Islamic manuscripts, including many Qur'āns such as Manuscript Mingana Islamic Arabic.⁶² It also includes 660 Syriac manuscripts and 270 Christian Arabic manuscripts. These were collected by Alphonse Mingana in the early twentieth century through expeditions to the Middle East, and antiquity dealers, most notably Erik von Scherling, and their correspondence was preserved with the collection. Though the collection has been at the University since the AD 1930s, few of the manuscripts have even begun to be studied until the last decade. Alba Fedeli describes these artifacts as "neglected witness in the study of the transmission of the Qur'ānic text from the beginning of Islam."⁶³ Though some of the manuscripts in this collection are remarkable works of art, highly preserved and incredibly readable for their age, the vast majority

⁶¹ Andrew Rippin, *The Qur'ān and its Interpretative Tradition* (Burlington, VT: Applegate, 2001), xv-xvi.

⁶² Fedeli, "Early Qur'ānic Manuscripts, Their Text, and the Alphonse Mingana Papers Held in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Birmingham," 2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

can be described as little more than fragments. According to Fedeli, Mingana described one of his acquisitions in a letter as “tiny morsels on which there is one word or two, and many others are so torn and dilapidated that it is hardly worth while spending any time on them.”⁶⁴ The biggest struggle with this collection is getting an accurate study of each manuscript. Many scholars say the works of Agnes Smith and Alphonse Mingana are highly inaccurate, and their interpretations are worse, and correcting their work is hampered by what some scholars describe as the difficulty of acquiring access to the manuscripts' microfiche, and other photographic techniques used on the manuscripts along with the confusion of titles of the manuscripts and the studies. All of these issues have created controversy with the manuscripts of the Mingana collection. However, in the controversy can emerge knowledge as it has also created interest in the manuscripts enticing others to study them. Since more access to the manuscripts is available now, especially due to the photographs, and many are readable even if in fragments, this can advance the textual variant understanding of the Qur'ān.

The Mingana and San'ā' collections are just a few of the collections of Qur'ānic manuscripts. These collections just tend to have many of the earlier dated manuscripts. Thus more of them are in worse condition, while later manuscripts tend to have higher quality manuscripts. François D'roche depicts these later Qur'ān manuscripts to vary from highly preserved condition with beautiful artwork and calligraphy to basic writing with no decoration or titles and divisions.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Fedeli, “Early Qur'ānic Manuscripts, Their Text, and the Alphonse Mingana Papers Held in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Birmingham,” 129.

⁶⁵ François D'roche “Manuscripts of the Qur'ān,” in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 254-274. 261-262.

Distance in Time from Manuscript Writing and When Autographs Were Written

It is foreseeable that autographs of any ancient manuscript would not survive. Often original writings are done on materials, namely, papyrus, that deteriorates over time, coupled with the vastness of time from their writing to the current time they are expected to be destroyed. Religious manuscripts are even more unsurprising as most religions, at their inception, go through a period of skepticism that often leads to persecution. Further, this persecution often continues when governments feel threatened by the teaching of the beliefs. The natural course of action then is to destroy the teachings, so many autographs would have been destroyed in the hope of stopping the spread of its teachings. In the case of the New Testament, there are known external sources directing imperial edicts that commanded the destruction of all sacred Christian books.⁶⁶ Thus, none of the Hebrew Scriptures, New Testament, or Qur'ān autographs are known to have survived. However, with internal and external evidence, it is possible to determine the date that the autographs were written, in some cases down to the very year, in others during a general time period.

Old Testament

With the Old Testament being the oldest by far of the three manuscripts in this discussion, it is expected to be the hardest one to narrow down autograph dates and, likewise, the one that will have the largest gap between autographs and surviving manuscripts. Additionally, it was also the collection that was written over the greatest length of time. The most accurate estimates put the earliest written autographs, those written by Moses, at about 1450 BC and the newest books, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Malachi, being written in the

⁶⁶ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 201, n1.

mid to early fifth century BC.⁶⁷ Though there are theories that contradict these dates, at times putting the entirety of autographs in the fifth century BC, the likelihood of this late date is not supported by archeological, internal, nor external evidence, and despite its late date making it easier to claim close timeframe to the earliest manuscripts, for proof of historical accuracy, the earlier dates are the one most notably supported by evidence. The most notable of the contradicting theories for the authorship of the Pentateuch is the JEDP theory. However, they are easily debunked as there is no evidence beyond the circumstantial reaches of the proponents of the theory through literary stylization to back it up. Many authors that use later dates of original writings do so, at least in part because they are skeptical of the possibility of accurate prophecies and claim that the prophesized passages were, in fact, written after the supposed prophetic events unfolded instead of when they were prophesied. Thus, they date the autographs later. This reason for later liberal dating is utilized in both the New and Old Testaments. Earlier conservative dating accepts prophecies and uses external references to the writings as their method of dating. In fact, Gleason Archer eloquently states that "[a]ny attorney who attempted to interpret a will or statute or deed of conveyance in the bizarre and irresponsible fashion of the Source Critics of the Pentateuch would find the case thrown out of court without delay."⁶⁸

Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the earliest manuscript of the Hebrew Scriptures was dated in the tenth century AD, which would have been thirteen hundred years after the last autographs were written and more than twenty-three hundred years after Moses wrote the Pentateuch. However, the Dead Sea Scrolls discoveries has significantly shrunk that

⁶⁷ Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 117-126, 450- 451, 457, 464, 478-479. And Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 375.

⁶⁸ Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 108-109.

time down to a mere one to two hundred years for the book of Malachi, as the 5Q10 manuscript is dated in the Hellenistic period,⁶⁹ as are several other manuscripts. They used several methods to date the Isaiah A scroll. According to Geisler and Nix,

“First, Carbon 14, 1950 process gave a 168 BCE to 233 CE DATE. Second, more recent (1991– 98) scientific dating from accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) placed the Isaiah scroll at 202 to 93 BCE. Third, paleography (writing form) and orthography (spelling) gave a 168 BCE to 233 CE range. Fourth, by use of pottery and coins, archaeologists provided a 150 BCE to 100 CE range. Finally, the self-dated later Murabba’at discoveries (of 1952) of 132– 135 CE reveal an early date for the DSS, as the other evidence indicates”⁷⁰

Thus, the Dead Sea Scrolls show that some books of the Old Testament date within 350 and 400 years of the autographs. While Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch have a longer distance from autograph to manuscript, it is still considerably shorter than before these discoveries, with about 1,150 years.

Additionally, other artifacts have been discovered since the DSS that add additional sources closer to that of the Pentateuch. In 1979, Gabriel Barkay and Judith Hadley discovered two silver scrolls that most likely had been worn as amulets. Inscribed on them was a microscopic-sized blessing that was notably similar to the blessing written in Numbers 6:24-26 and Deuteronomy 7:9, these dated between the sixth and seventh century BC,⁷¹ placing them within eight hundred years of Moses' autographs. Further, they provide just one of many sets of evidence to the earlier date of the autographs. To put that into comparison with other highly recognized ancient documents anywhere near that age, Plato's Tetralogies was written around

⁶⁹ “Apocryphon of Malachi,” The Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library, last modified 2021, accessed January 22, 2022, <https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/manuscript/5Q10-1>.

⁷⁰ Geisler and Nix, *From God to Us*, 185.

⁷¹ Gabriel Barkay, “The Riches of Ketef Hinnom” *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 35, no. 4 (2009).

400 BC, yet the earliest manuscript is dated AD 895, which is a thirteen-hundred-year gap, yet is still considered an accurate historical document.⁷²

New Testament

In dating the autographs of the New Testament, one comes to similar issues as was stated in the Old Testament section; there exists parallel dating controversies with the dates of when the books of the New Testament's autographs were written. However, the range in dating controversy is less extreme than in the Hebrew Scriptures. The controversy is likewise reflective of one's worldview, especially if the person doing the dating dismisses the possibility of accurate prophecies or, conversely is open to the possibility that prophecies can happen through divine intervention. A key example is the destruction of the Jerusalem temple that occurred in AD 70. In Matthew 24:1-2 Matthew writes of Jesus telling of its destruction. Conservative dating of Matthew puts the date of writing in the mid-60s AD partially because of the external source report by Irenaeus, that Matthew compiled the gospel "while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundation of the Church."⁷³ Peter and Paul were known to be together and working toward this cause in the mid-60s.⁷⁴ However, as John A. T. Robinson points out, those that contradict this date cite that it could not have been written that early because Matthew knew of the demise of the Temple.⁷⁵ Instead, they often date it between AD 80-100 because Matthew discusses Jesus' predicting the destruction of the Temple, and he would not have included that if

⁷² Clay Jones, "The Biographical Test Updated."

⁷³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III.1.1

⁷⁴ Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Life-Changing Truth for a Skeptical World* (Bletchley: Authentic Media, 2017), 43.

⁷⁵ John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), Chapter 2.

he was not certain of its demise, for it would bring uncertainty to the trust in Jesus. However, if one had true faith in who Jesus was, he would not doubt Jesus' ability to predict such events accurately. This worldview does not allow for the supernatural thus, a predictive prophecy of this nature is not possible, so they also ignore further external evidence. When discussing various religious texts, this is a dangerous precedent to take since all three of these historical documents have prophecies written in them, many of which still need to be fulfilled or were fulfilled later than even some of the manuscripts, much less the autographs. Therefore, if one dismisses external evidence based solely on prophecies, then to avoid hypocrisy, all dates must be dismissed till all the prophecies are fulfilled, or if just one is fulfilled after the known date of a manuscript, it disproves any previous argument.

Conversely, some will date all the New Testament's books quite early. Robinson, for example, dates all of the book's autographs before AD 70.⁷⁶ His points are well-reasoned and researched, both historically and theologically. However, even he repeatedly alludes that some connections are inconclusive. For example, when he is discussing the evidence of Paul and Peter being martyred at near the same time, he states, "But this theory is at best extremely hypothetical."⁷⁷ Thus, there is some controversy associated with his research. Such as, in the case of the Epistles of Peter, Robinson gives a date of AD 61 or 62 for the second epistle while dating the first later to around AD 65.⁷⁸ However, 2 Peter 3:1 states it is the second letter and therefore written later, not first. Then, it is known through Eusebius that Peter was crucified by Nero.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, Chapter 11.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 316-317.

⁷⁹ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), Book 2, Chapter 25, 5.

Furthermore, Nero only ruled between AD 54 and AD 67 before being killed. Then we know that the Bithynia church was formed (1 Pet 1:1), and this did not happen till after Luke wrote Acts as Paul and Timothy were blocked from going there (Acts 16:7). Additionally, Peter was imprisoned during his writings and Paul was most likely out of prison at the time it was written because Peter does not mention him also being in Rome despite mentioning being with Silvanus and Mark (1 Pet 5:12-13). Therefore, he must have been out of prison to have been out of Rome while Peter was writing the epistle or Paul was already dead, which may have been why he was writing to one of Paul's churches in Paul's stead. Thus, 1 Peter was most likely written between AD 62 and 64, with 2 Peter coming shortly after and close to his death (2 Pet 1:14), no later than AD 65, since that is the most likely date of Peter's death.⁸⁰

Therefore, since there is reason to question the very early date and the more liberal one, the conservative dates will be used as these dates are the ones that consider both internal and external evidence before conclusions are drawn. They place trust in other historical and archeological external evidence to determine the most conclusive and excepted evidence while denying those dates that are delayed simply because they reject the possibility of the supernatural for the autographs. Just keep in mind that the more liberal dates, as well as the extreme early ones, are within ten to thirty years of the conservative dates, unlike the hundreds of years for the Old Testament dates.

Though like the Old Testament and the Qur'ān none of the original autographs of the New Testament have been found and are suspected to not have survived. However, the New Testament has the shortest distance between autograph dates and the earliest discovered, authenticated, studied, and cataloged manuscripts of any manuscript of this era. Most of the New

⁸⁰ Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, 135.

Testament's earliest manuscripts are within two hundred years of the autograph, and the longest date from autograph to manuscript date is a mere three hundred years. In fact, two manuscripts are less than one hundred years from the autograph to the manuscript. The most shockingly early manuscript is of the Gospel of John, with the most recognized date of autograph being right around AD 85 and the earliest manuscript, Rylands Manuscript (P52), dating to about AD 117.⁸¹ This spread puts Rylands Manuscript (P52) within 32 years of its original writing and a mere two decades after the author, the Apostle John's death. Some scholars like Adolf Deissmann even argue that the AD 117 date is too late and it is even older than that.⁸² This manuscript, is a small fragment of the Gospel of John, is not only significant because of it having the shortest date span of any ancient manuscript from this early era, but it was also discovered in Egypt, showing how far and wide Christianity had spread in less than 90 years of Jesus' death, further confirming both the importance placed virtually immediately on the books of the New Testament and disproving those who wish to claim the New Testament books were not written till long after the apostles and all died. The chart below shows the most credible dates of the autographs of each book of the New Testament based on the earlier discussion of conservative dating followed by the date of the earliest published manuscript of each book.

⁸¹ Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 36-39.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 39.

New Testament	Autograph	Earliest Manuscript	Dated	Most Probable Distance in Years	
Matthew	Early 50s-80	P104	Late 2nd century	125	1,3
Mark	Mid 40s - 60s	P137	150-250	100-200	1, 2, 4
Luke	Early 60s	P75	3rd Century	140-190	1, 2, 3
John	Mid 60s-80s	P52	117-138	32	1, 3
Acts	62-64	GA0189	Late 2nd or Early 3rd Century	100-150	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Romans	57	P46	200	143	3, 5
1 Cor.	54-56	P46	200	144	2, 3, 5
2 Cor.	54-56	P46	200	144	3, 5
Galatians	48	P46	200	152	3, 5
Ephesians	60	P46	200	140	3, 5
Philippians	60	P46	200	140	3, 5
Colossians	60	P46	200	140	3, 5
1 Thess.	50	P46	200	150	3, 5
2 Thess.	50	P30	3rd Century	200	3, 5, 6
1 Timothy	63-65	N	340	276	3, 5, 7
2 Timothy	63-65	N	340	276	3, 5, 7
Titus	63-65	P32	200	136	3, 5,
Philemon	60	P87	Late 2nd or Early 3rd Century	120-150	3, 5, 6
Hebrews	65-69	P46	200	140	3, see paper
James	mid 30s to 49	P20	Early 3rd Century	less than 200 years	3, 8, 9
1 Peter	62-64	P72	Late 3rd or Early 4th Century	240	3, 6, see paper
2 Peter	65	P72	Late 3rd or Early 4th Century	240	3, 6, see paper
1 John	90s	P9	3rd Century	140-150	3, 10, 11, 12
2 John	90s	N	340	140-150	3, 7, 10, 11, 12
3 John	90s	N	340	140-150	3, 7, 10, 11, 12
Jude	50s-62	P72, P78	Late 3rd or Early 4th Century	240-250	3, 6, 13
Revelations	95-96	P98	2nd Century	less than 100	3, 14

1. Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Life-Changing Truth for a Skeptical World* (Bletchley: Authentic Media, 2017), 43-46.

2. James Porter Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defence of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1987), 148-157.

3. *The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts*, last modified 2022, accessed November 2, 2022. <http://www.csntm.org>.

4. Elijah Hixson, "Despite Disappointing Some, New Mark Manuscript is Earliest Yet." *Christianity Today*. May 30, 2018. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/may-web-only/mark-manuscript-earliest-not-first-century-fem.html>.

5. F. F Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 6-8.

6. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 97-101.
7. Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 388-405.
8. Z. C. Hodges, A. L. Farstad and R. N. Wilkin, *The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing, vol 16* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994), 10.
9. D. J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 36.
10. Stephen S. Smalley, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1, 2, and 3 John*, vol. 51 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), xxxiii.
11. Marianne Meye Thompson, *1-3 John* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 20-21.
12. Thomas Floyd Johnson, *1, 2, and 3 John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 4.
13. Richard Bauckham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jude-2 Peter*, vol. 50 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 14-16.
14. Mark L. Hitchcock, "A Defense of the Domitianic Date of the Book of Revelation" (PhD diss. Dallas Theological Seminary, 2006).

Since the Old and New Testaments were written by individual authors and at varying times, an additional aspect that should be considered when evaluating Old and New Testament manuscripts dating is when were all the books of the current Bible first compiled as one collection. Thus, one last set of manuscripts that must be examined when evaluating the autographs to manuscripts distance is the earliest manuscripts of the New and Old Testament compiled as one book. The Codices of Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus, as discussed earlier, are three of the earliest complete commissioned Bibles known to still exist. Though there are earlier collections of books put together, these three show how early on, the entirety of the Bible we know today was being commissioned as one complete works. Codex Vaticanus (B) is dated between AD 325 and 350. It originally contained all of the New and Old Testament books and most of the Apocrypha. Upon its rediscovery, it is missing only parts of Genesis, 2 Kings, and Psalms, as well as 1 Timothy through Philemon and part of Hebrews through Revelation from its original copy due to deterioration. Additionally, its scribe omitted Mark 16:9-29 and John 7:53-8:11.⁸³ Likewise, Codex Sinaiticus (N) is dated only slightly later at AD 340 due to its

⁸³ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 391-392.

more artful script.⁸⁴ Moreover, according to Bruce Metzger, it is believed both may have been part of the 50 copies of Scripture Emperor Constantine commissioned Eusebius to have written.⁸⁵ Additionally, Codex Sinaiticus, despite being very close in age to Codex Vaticanus, is more complete containing all of the New Testament and over half of the Old Testament as well as the Apocrypha, the *Epistle of Barnabas* and part of the *Shepherd of Hermas*. The scribe here also omitted Mark 16:9-29 and John 7:53-8:11.⁸⁶ These two manuscripts are considered the two most accurately transcribed and trustworthy manuscripts of the Bible.⁸⁷ Finally, Codex Alexandrinus (A), which is dated slightly later, about AD 450, unlike the previous two codices, which are missing large portions of the Old Testament, Codex Alexandrinus is nearly complete, with the Old Testament not missing anything. However, it does have some mutilated sections. Additionally, it is only missing a few small portions of the New Testament, including Matthew 1:1-25:6, John 6:50-8:52, and 2 Corinthians 4:13-12:6.⁸⁸ Thus, within 360 years of the New Testament books being written, there is a completed compiled manuscript of its entirety. Additionally, the Old Testament was being commissioned with the New Testament as a completed work.

Qur'ān

The Qur'ān was developed through oral tradition in a time that did not commonly view that religious texts should have formal writing but should instead be preserved through recitation,

⁸⁴ Ibid., 392-393.

⁸⁵ Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 47.

⁸⁶ Geisler and Nix, *From God to Us*, 188.

⁸⁷ McDowell and Sean McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 62.

⁸⁸ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 394.

performance, and memorization.⁸⁹ Religious texts were mainly used as memory aids for recitations by memory. They were without precise phonics, grammar, or syntactical meaning.⁹⁰ Muhammad claimed to have received revelations that were recited and memorized. Written materials of these revelations were written during his lifetime, but there was not one original autograph, nor were the written copies uniformed in Mohammad's life. Razvan describes them as "several versions of the text related to different traditions of transmission."⁹¹ However, they were considered the authoritative religious texts at the time.

Since, there was no one autograph, and Muhammad revealed his revelations throughout his life and disseminated them likewise, there is no way to set an exact date on these original copies as they developed over the life of Muhammad.⁹² Some were even later as the Companions continued to compile them, possibly up until the time Uthmān began to establish a standardized version.⁹³ Thus, the dates of the earliest authoritative text can be dated between approximately AD 610 and the early 650s, but they cannot be deemed autographs nor can an author be credited as there can be with other ancient writings had autographs and authors.

⁸⁹ Alan Jones, "Orality and Writing in Arabia," in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Washington DC: Georgetown University, 2003), 587-93, 593.

⁹⁰ Fred M. Donner, "Orality and Writing in Arabia," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, edited Fred M. Donner (London: Routledge, 2008), 29-50, 40.

⁹¹ Eřim A. Rezvan, "The Qur'ān: Between *Textus Receptus* and Critical Edition," in *Les Problemes Poses par L'edition Critique des Text Anciens et Medievaux: Volume en Collaboration International Institut d' Etudes Medievales*, edited Jacqueline Hamesse (Paris: Louvain-La-Neuve, 1992), 291-301, 297.

⁹² Gerd R. Puin, "Observations on Early Qur'ān Manuscripts in San'ā'," in *The Qur'ān as Text*, edited Stefan Wild (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 107-112. 107, 111.

⁹² Sadeghi and Goudarzi, "Şan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'Ān, 2.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

Additionally, early manuscripts of the Qur'ān can also be complex to date and create much controversy in their dating. Adolf Grohmann describes various collections of manuscripts that different historians have dated, and they have dated the same manuscripts in ranges of six hundred years in some cases.⁹⁴ This dating issue stems from a few chief reasons, first because the earliest manuscripts were rarely dated as it was not the custom to do so then.⁹⁵ Then, other manuscripts were often dated in a different script than the scribes indicating the dates may have been added at a later time than the rest of the writing in the manuscripts. One example of this is manuscript BL Or. 12884, in which the British Library's listing stated, "On the back of the fly-leaf to which this has been pasted is an inscription stating that the manuscript was written in 340 (951 AD). Although this inscription is presumably not that of the original scribe, it might well have been copied from his colophon."⁹⁶ Then, carbon 14 dating only reflects when the source (animal or plant) that provided the writing materials (vellum, parchment, papyrus...) had died. It does not reflect the time of the writing.⁹⁷ Furthermore, it was common practice during the fifth through ninth centuries for parchment to be reused, sometimes several times. It may be written on, then the writing scraped, sanded, or washed clean and reused.⁹⁸ Alba Fedeli notes several times in her dissertation about the phenomenon of the manuscripts' date and the texts' date being

⁹⁴ Adolf Grohmann, "The Problem of Dating Early Qur'āns," *Der Islam* 33, no. 3 (1958): 213-231, 214-216.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁹⁶ British Library, *List of Oriental Manuscripts 1984-1964, Or. 11820-12898* (London: British Library, 1964), 1963 section.

⁹⁷ R. E. Taylor, "Radiocarbon Dating: An Archaeological Perspective" in *Archaeological Chemistry II*, edited by Giles F. Carter (Washington D. C.: American Chemical Society, 1978), 33-69, 43.

⁹⁸ Sadeghi and Goudarzi, "Šan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān," 5-6.

different or different parts of the text being dated differently.⁹⁹ Adolf Grohmann proposed that the dating of Qur'ānic manuscripts should be done by comparing data from Islamic literature and script characteristics in dated papyri and comparing them to early manuscripts to identify the time period of their writing based on their scripts.¹⁰⁰ However, this practice is not consistently used, and frequently articles will be posted advertising an extremely early dating of a manuscript using carbon dating and dismissing that the script points to a much later date.

Despite the controversy, there does exist a consensus that some manuscripts do come from the first hundred years after Mohammad's death, and most notably, that of the lower writing on the San'ā'1 folios have a high probability of being within the first twenty years after Mohammad's death.¹⁰¹ This likelihood is because the carbon dating and paleography overlap in this period. Additionally, the unlikely case of a nonUthamān manuscript being written after this standardization supports the lower writing of the San'ā'1 folios early date since it does not align with Uthamān's standardization. Thus, it appears that with available data, the Qur'ān has the earliest date to the supposed origins of the Hebrew, Christian, or Muslim manuscripts. However, it is also with a manuscript that does not appear to align with the standardization, which could become problematic to the transmissional accuracy as more studies on San'ā'1's lower writings are completed.

Probably the most controversial manuscript currently is Birmingham manuscripts (MS BnF328c) which is part of the earlier mentioned Mingana collection. This manuscript was

⁹⁹ Fedeli, "Early Qur'ānic Manuscripts, Their Text, and the Alphonse Mingana Papers Held in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Birmingham," 195, 242, 343, 361.

¹⁰⁰ Grohmann, "The Problem of Dating Early Qur'āns," 213-231.

¹⁰¹ Sadeghi and Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur'ān of the Prophet," 354.

recently dated and highly promoted to the press as a date before Uthmān or even Mohammad (AD 568-645) based on the radiocarbon dating.¹⁰² Some people latched on to the carbon dating as possible proof that the Qur'ān was not written by Mohammad but stolen from someone else. In contrast, others use it to promote an authoritative text that Mohammad may have directed. However, it comes as no surprise that this early date has some valid questions. Since this early date is only reflecting the date of the vellum without taking into consideration other evidence for if it was actually written that early. Chances are there is a gap between when the animal that provided the materials for the vellum died and when it was used for the manuscript writing.¹⁰³ The fact that this manuscript is of high-quality material and writing allows for other factors to be considered in a more accurate date. In all likelihood, it was most assuredly still written in the first century after Mohammad though undoubtedly only after the standardization.¹⁰⁴ The later dating of the Birmingham manuscript came by comparing the paleographic and philological evidence of the document and found due to the high quality and care the scribe took in writing it, indicating it was copied from an authoritative text, based on hesitations and corrections.¹⁰⁵ Additionally, it includes spacing traditions and diacritical marks that were not used till the later part of the first century of Islam.¹⁰⁶ These practices were also most likely copied over from the

¹⁰² Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit, University of Oxford, March 2014.

¹⁰³ Taylor, "Radiocarbon Dating: An Archaeological Perspective," 43.

¹⁰⁴ Fedeli, "Early Qur'ānic Manuscripts, Their Text, and the Alphonse Mingana Papers Held in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Birmingham," 182-183.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

text the scribe used based on the analysis of the writing, indicating it was more likely into the eighth century AD before it was written.¹⁰⁷

Despite the date for Qur'ānic manuscripts being much closer to the date of inspiration for the beginning of Islam than that of the Old and New Testaments, it cannot be a direct comparison to weighing the accuracy of the manuscripts because there was never one autographed version of the Qur'ān thus the ability to recreate and compare textual variants cannot be done in the same way as variants were inevitable in the various original documents. At best, a recreation can only be done to compare that tenants of the teaching have not changed, as a word-for-word, symbol-for-symbol, mark-for-mark comparison to the autograph cannot be accomplished. Keith Small summed it up by asserting, "[s]ince it cannot be demonstrated that there was one version going back to Muhammad, it also cannot be demonstrated that seven or ten recitations went back to him. What can be maintained is that one form of consonantal text has been very well preserved from the seventh/first century."¹⁰⁸

The Accuracy to Which the Original Autographs can be Recreated from the Manuscripts

Old Testament

Using ancient manuscripts to discover the original text of any writing is a process that needs careful examination. Paul Wagner lays out the process with four starter criteria. First, collect evidence from various sources. These sources should include the various Hebrew texts, translations, and recensions. Second, both internal and external evidence should be evaluated.

¹⁰⁷ Fedeli, "Early Qur'ānic Manuscripts, Their Text, and the Alphonse Mingana Papers Held in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Birmingham," 183.

¹⁰⁸ Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, 179.

Then the most plausible reading should be determined by weighing the evidence collected through the manuscripts, textual traditions, and internal and external evidence. Finally, if and only if the readings do not make sense, should a conjecture emendation be made based on the context and internal and external evidences.¹⁰⁹

In the case of the reconstruction of the Old Testament, the Masoretic text, Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Dead Sea Scrolls, Wadi Murabba'at, Nahal Hever, Masada, Nash Papyrus and the Silver Amulets texts must all be considered as witnesses in the evidence collection. Since the text of the Old Testament manuscripts are rather homogenous, even among the various textual traditions and translations, identifying errors must be made by looking at problems in translations, evident textual corruptions, or variations. Once discovering where they differ, then searching for why they differ so the original wording can be extracted.

Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, there remained an enormous gap between the original autographs of the Hebrew Scriptures and the earliest known manuscripts, which laid the question of what could have changed during that time. However, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has brought about invaluable resources in the accuracy of the recreation of the autographs of the Hebrew scriptures. Beforehand there was some question of whether the Masoretes had corrupted the Old Testament and destroyed the old manuscripts to cover it up. Once the DSS were discovered, a comparison could be made to post Masoretic manuscripts and the much earlier ones. Millar Burrows claims it is a "matter of wonder" that in a thousand years, the comparison of the Great Isaiah scroll to the Masoretic Texts, so little is altered, "[h]erein lies

¹⁰⁹ Paul D. Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods, and Results* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 121-135.

its chief importance, supporting the fidelity of the Masoretic tradition."¹¹⁰ The two Isaiah scrolls from Qumran Cave 1 are both of the same textual family as the Masoretic Texts, yet date a thousand years before the earliest MT manuscript. When they were compared to the standard Hebrew Bible today, it was ninety-five percent identical in a word-for-word comparison.¹¹¹ The remaining five percent variations were predominantly pen slipups, followed by some spelling alternatives.¹¹² None of the deviations changed the teachings or prophecies meaning. Likewise, when manuscript fragments from other textual families were compared to the current Hebrew Bible, there were also no changes in doctrine or teachings.¹¹³ In fact, when discussing the fragments from the Qumran caves, Geisler states, "[t]hose fragments often agree almost exactly with the corresponding copies of the Old Testament text that are 1,000 years later in the history of the transmission of that text."¹¹⁴

After the unearthing of the original eleven Qumran caves prompted further exploration in the Judean desert. The Bedouins discovered more caves southwest of Bethlehem at *Wadi Murabba'at*. Additionally, these scrolls gave additional resources for textual comparison and accuracy. One scroll found at Murabba'at contained Joel through Haggai. It was preserved well enough to compare with the Masoretic Text. It closely supports the MT as well as the Isaiah scrolls of the DSS.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking Press, 1955), 304.

¹¹¹ Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 25.

¹¹² Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 25.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹⁴ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 465-466.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 364-365.

The *Biblia Habraica Stuttgartensia* places notes where these textual irregularities occur. According to Bruce Waltke, these occur about every ten words or about ten percent of the text.¹¹⁶ Of these variants, the vast majority are spelling differences for the same word. Similarly, to how all languages change over time or after splits in culture. English is a perfect example of that, American, Australian, and British English all have variations both in spelling and in synonyms for the same meaning of words. British spelling of “judgment” includes the “e” after the g where as American spelling drops the “e” before adding the suffix “ment.” Most of the spelling differences for the Old Testament Hebrew are single-letter changes that are either variant spellings or similar-looking letters that when the scribe copied it, they may have read it wrong, or their quill had too much ink on it, and it changed its look. For example, *dālat* looks like “ד” whereas *rēsh* looks like “ר” if the letters were mixed up, it would change the people group mentioned in Genesis 10:4 from Dodanim to Rodanim as mentioned in 1 Chronicles 1:7.¹¹⁷ Other errors done to a lesser extent are errors in skipping a line in the copying, homophones, and writing the same word twice. These are easy to spot and identify, so one can easily distinguish that it was not part of the autograph writings but an error of the scribes. Very few variants have significant weight in changing the text. The most significant of these variants and the only ones that could be considered a change of doctrine comes from the Samaritan Pentateuch manuscripts versus all other manuscripts which change God's chosen sacred sites from Mount Zion to Mount Gerizim and Jerusalem to Shechem.¹¹⁸ This change also makes sense since the Samaritans were not allowed to worship in the same locations as the Ancient Hebrews and thus would need

¹¹⁶ Bruce K. Watke, “Old Testament Textual Criticism,” in *Foundations of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. David S Dockery, Kenneth A. Matthews and Robert Sloan (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1994), 157.

¹¹⁷ McDowell and McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 116.

¹¹⁸ Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 44.

different sacred sites. Whether this change was a chosen change by man or an inspired change by God, specifically to the Samaritans so they could have a place to worship properly, is not to be examined in this paper, but an understanding of why the variant is present is essential to understand the accuracy of the Scriptures.

Though the Hebrew Scriptures are not mark-to-mark or spelling-to-spelling perfectly replicated to the original autographs, they are proven to be reliably transmitted to near-perfect conditions. Even with a thousand-year gap between manuscript groups, the integrity and transmissibility of the Old Testament is impactable. Additionally, when people groups split, i.e., the Samaritans, the Christians, and the Hebrews, taking the Scriptures with them, translating them, and copying them, their veracity still maintained its purity.

New Testament

The New Testament studies on the restoration of the original autographs have the most extensive work of any ancient manuscript. These studies have been ongoing for hundreds of years. Lorenzo Valla used the known ancient manuscripts of his time to restore the original Greek text. Then Erasmus used Valla's studies to annotate the New Testament published in AD 1505 and to write the Erasmus edition of the Greek New Testament in 1516.¹¹⁹ Additionally, the materials available for both internal and external evaluation are much more extensive than that of other ancient manuscripts. Thus, the accuracy of the New Testament autographs can be narrowed down to infinitesimal details.

The criteria for evaluating the New Testament's most plausible recreation of the autographs writing is the same as it would be for any ancient manuscript, including what was

¹¹⁹ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 319.

described above for the Old Testament. The advantage the New Testament has over the Old Testament is the plethora of source material to compare witnesses. The New Testament has well over fifteen thousand published and studied early manuscripts of various translations, nearly six thousand of which are in the original language.¹²⁰ This fifteen thousand number is low compared to the complete list of manuscripts above because it is a conservative estimate of the total number studied for textual variations in recreating the original autographs, not the total number still being studied. Every New Testament book has various copies to compare the internal evidence exacting the accuracy of the writings. Additionally, the writings by early Christians, historians, and persecutors of the Christians give a plethora of external evidence to support the internal evidence. Much of the early writings are of direct quotes from the Bible, while others support events told within the New Testament or summarize the teachings. In fact, the McDowells mention that if no New Testament manuscripts existed today from the quotations of these external documents, a substantial amount of the original text could be recreated, "at the very least an outline of the New Testament and many crucial details could be reconstructed from their writings."¹²¹

There is little doubt as to the quality of reconstructing the original wording of the New Testament autographs. F. F. Bruce explains,

¹²⁰ McDowell and McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 51-52.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 64.

It is doubtful whether there is any reading in the New Testament that requires to be conjecturally emended. The wealth of attestation is such that the true reading is almost invariably bound to be preserved by at least one of the thousands of witnesses. Sometimes what was at first put forward as a conjectural emendation has, in the course of time, turned up in one of our witnesses.¹²²

Due to the weight of evidence, the New Testament has been nearly perfectly preserved. Scholars overwhelmingly agreed that it can be recreated to its autograph to between 99.5%¹²³ to 99.9%¹²⁴ accuracy.

Qur'ān

The Qur'ān has been edited and canonized multiple times in what Keith Small categorizes as six periods: Muhammad's Prophetic Career, The Companions' Collection, 'Uthmān and Al-Hajjāj, Editing and Development of Orthography, Consolidation of the Ten Readings, and Primacy of the Hafs Text.¹²⁵ Muhammad's Prophetic Career, AD 610-632, was primarily by oral tradition to be flexible for poetic and relatable performative stories.¹²⁶ What little was written down in this period was done so with imprecise grammatical, phonic, and syntactical meanings.¹²⁷ It functioned as a memory aid for reciting known texts instead of a means for recording and preserving the tenants of the religion.¹²⁸ Essentially, at this time, oral preservation was the primary focus of early Muslims, and written preservation was secondary. It

¹²² F. F. Bruce, *The Books and Parchments*, 169-170.

¹²³ Lee, Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 65.

¹²⁴ Geisler, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 474.

¹²⁵ Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, 162-170.

¹²⁶ Alan Jones, "Orality and Writing in Arabia," 593.

¹²⁷ Fred M. Donner, "Orality and Writing in Arabia," 31.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

is not that oral preservation is an unreliable way of passing information on, as the accountability has been shown through various studies to be quite reliable in the preservation of the messages. However, it is not accurate in word-for-word, mark-for-mark preservation as the Muslim's often claim for the Qur'ān. Further standardization of written Arabic grammar was not established until the eighth century. Though an authoritative body of material was used during Mohammad's life, they varied greatly in order of telling what was included in each copy, grammar, phonics, and syntax. Nor was there a single autograph attributed to any one writer like that of the Biblical manuscripts since the autographs were essentially oral storytelling to teach the tenants.¹²⁹

The Companions' Collections period, AD 632-A.D. 653, is the period between Mohammad's death and the initial standardization of the Qur'ān. The collections belonging to Muhammad's companions were the versions recognized as the authoritative text-form manuscripts of the era. Western and Muslim scholars alike recognize that in these early authoritative text-form manuscripts, there was not a fixed order of surahs, and the content varied greatly at this time.¹³⁰ In fact, based on the manuscripts found at San'a', Gerd R. Puin believes there most likely was a much greater assortment of surah order than Islamic sources are willing to recognize.¹³¹ One specific manuscript, the San'a'1, found here may give the best insight into what occurred during this period. This manuscript is of the Qur'ān post-Uthmān that reused the parchment by scraping away a previous manuscript of the Qur'ān. Over time the metallic ink of the previously scraped or washing away writing has experienced a chemical reaction as metals

¹²⁹ Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, 163.

¹³⁰ Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, 164.

¹³¹ Gerd R. Puin, "Observations on Early Qur'ān Manuscripts in Sana'a," 107, 111.

do and changed color, reshowing itself as a ghostish pale brown-grayish underwriting.¹³² The lower ink has a higher copper and zinc than the upper ink; thus, they can be distinguished from each other.¹³³ However, the significance of this lower text is that it is a pre-Uthmānic textual tradition and not from a standard textual tradition,¹³⁴ that was most likely destroyed and rewritten because it did not agree with the post-Uthmān standardization. An example Sadeghi and Goudarzi give is in Qur'ān 2:196, the San'ā'1 text leaves out the word *ru'ūsakum*, this changes the text from the standard tradition “do not shave your heads until the offering reaches its destination,” to “do not shave until the offering reaches its destination.”¹³⁵ Further, it changes *fa-man kānain* meaning “any,” in the standard tradition, to *fa-in kāna ahadun*, “one,” in the San'ā'1 text.

Though the exact date of both levels of the San'ā'1 writing is difficult to exact, the lower writing most likely dates to the middle of the seventh century, with about a seventy-five percent chance of it predating AD 646, assuming it was written at or shortly after the parchment was prepared.¹³⁶ Thus, the lower writing provides invaluable insight into the pre-Uthmān manuscripts that were destroyed, similar to the Dead Sea Scrolls providing authenticity to the Masoretic texts. Additionally, it can be compared to the modern Qur'ān to see how the various standardizations may have changed from the early writings. It appears that there are many variants within the text based on Sadeghi and Bergmann's assessment. However, there is also common ancestry to the C-

¹³² Sadeghi and Goudarzi, “Ṣan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān,” 5-6.

¹³³ Ibid., 7.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 7-8.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 21.

¹³⁶ Sadeghi and Goudarzi, “Ṣan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān,” 8.

l style seen in San'ā' l's lower script and that of the Uthman's standardization manuscripts.¹³⁷ It looks like the San'ā' l manuscript may do the opposite for proving the Qur'ān's accuracy than what the Dead Sea Scrolls do to prove the accuracy of the Old Testament. Especially since the Muslim claim is that the Qur'ān has been perfectly preserved down to the exact wording, not simply preserving the doctrine, because the San'ā' l palimpsest shows that there are many variants. Whereas the Christians and Hebrew claim is that the doctrine has been transmitted accurately, but they recognize spelling changes and scribal copying errors exist. At the very least, Muslims may have to amend their assertion that their manuscripts have been perfectly preserved. However, since the studies on the subject are still in their infancy, more must be done before solid conclusions can be made. One such example is from Nosedá, who claims to compare *hijazi* manuscripts from the first century of Islam to the dominant text of today,¹³⁸ the King Fu'ad edition, and concluded that only eighty-three percent of the king Fu'ad edition was represented in these manuscripts.¹³⁹ However, Nosedá provided minimal detail as to which manuscripts were used, so it is difficult to verify his findings, which is a common problem in the current research of Qur'ānic manuscripts.

¹³⁷ Sadeghi and Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur'ān of the Prophet," 343-436.

¹³⁸ Hijazi manuscripts are manuscripts that employ Hijazi style writing which was already in use before the rise of Islam and was used on many of the earliest Qur'anic manuscripts. It is recognized by its more angular right slope and does not use dots or diacritical marks for vowel sounds. Instead, it uses dashes above letters to differentiate consonants. It originated in the Hejaz region of the Arabian Peninsula, which includes the cities of Mecca and Medina. It was often used for informal writing and similar both in appearance and use to handwriting as opposed to the more formal calligraphy writing. Alain George, "The Qur'an Calligraphy, and Early Civilization of Islam, in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture from the Prophet to the Mongols*, edited Finbarr Berry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2017) 109-129, 112-116.

¹³⁹ Sergio Noji Nosedá and Francois Deroche, *Sources de la transmission manuscrite du texte coranique, Les Manuscrites de style Higazi. Manor, 2165, Vol 2* (London: British Library, 2001), xxvii.

The Uthmān and Al-Hajjāj period, AD 653- AD 705, is when Uthmān's version became the first Canonical text -form. It is claimed that this autographical text was given to Hafsa from Mohammed.¹⁴⁰ However, this claim has never been verified. Even if the claim were true, it would still not have been the sole authoritative text before this time. The various companion texts would have equal authority. Additionally, suppose this was the sole authoritative text handed down from Mohammed. Why did Uthmān need to edit it further, then prohibit text-forms use and destroy them if they never had the authority to begin with? The evidence shows there was resistance to Uthmān's authority through Ibn Mas'ūd.¹⁴¹ Finally, Al-Hajjāj further felt the need to edit Uthmān's consonantal base, yet this too was inconsistent in its use of diacritical marks, which resulted in more destruction of manuscripts that showed variants.¹⁴² Small states, “[t]he lack of manuscripts demonstrating a variant text in line with what was reported to exist seems to be confirmation of the efficiency of the suppression and destruction of these texts.”¹⁴³

The Editing and Development period, AD 705- AD 936, was essentially an attempt to create stabilization from the previous flexibility that was needed for the oral tradition of the Qur'ān to that of the demands of a fixed written literature. It also attempted to stabilize the method of reciting the Qur'ān as sources show there were still multiple reading systems used, including the Ibn Mas'ūd's manuscripts, who questioned Uthmān's authority over his own in

¹⁴⁰ Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, 165.

¹⁴¹ Aliza Shnizer, “Sacral and Collection,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, edited Jane Dammen McAuliffe (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 159-71, 169.

¹⁴² Rizwi Faizer, “The Dome of the Rock and the Qur'ān,” in *Coming to Terms with the Qur'ān*, edited Khaleel Mohammed and Andrew Rippin, (North Haledon: Islamic Publications International), 77-106, 89. Omar Hamdan, “The Second Masāhif Project: A Step Towards the Canonization of the Qur'ānic Text,” in *The Qur'ān in Context*, edited Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 795-836, 807-809.

¹⁴³ Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, 165.

reference to the Qur'ānic texts.¹⁴⁴ However, Ahmad Von Denffer quotes Nadim from the tenth century saying, "I have seen a number of Qur'ānic manuscripts, which transcribers recorded as manuscripts of Ibn Mas'ūd. No two of the Qur'ānic copies were in agreement and most of them were on badly effaced parchment."¹⁴⁵ This issue seems to be the reason they needed stabilization and uniformity, but how far did this editing change the teachings of Mohmmad? The next edit, the version Ibn Mujāhid, in AD 936, has external sources, even Christian ones, referencing its many copies and future Qur'ānic reference, too. However, there are no known Ibn Mujāhid manuscripts remaining to compare.¹⁴⁶ Small mentions that during this period, "the manuscript evidence demonstrates a great deal of experimentation in developing a more complete orthography for the Qur'ān text."¹⁴⁷ He elaborates that much of this experimentation was based on geography, pronunciation differences, and even personal understanding of grammar. Small claims that "[i]nstead of seeking to recover or restore its original Autographic text-forms or even earlier Authoritative text-form, what had been sought instead has been to create from the flexible consonantal orthography a form that satisfied as many dogmatic and practical liturgical conditions as possible."¹⁴⁸ All the experimenting and editing created more confusion and deviation rather than stabilizing the text.

The Consolidation of the Ten Readings period, AD 936- AD 1924, developed eighty recognized versions of the ten main recitations authorized in the AD 900s. None of these

¹⁴⁴ Ahmad Von Denffer, *'Ulū al-Qur'ān, An Introduction to the Science of the Qur'ān* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1983), 47-48.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 48.

¹⁴⁶ Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, 167.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 167-168.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 168.

represent the Authoritative or Autographic text-forms but are instead Interpretive text-forms.¹⁴⁹

There is not just one Qur'ān but many.

Finally, the Primacy of the Hafs Text period, AD 1924 to present, in 1924, the printing of the King Fu'ād version of the Qur'ān virtually ended the ever-expanding versions of recitation and editing. This printing became the standard throughout the Muslim nations and the Arabic versions found in the West. It is promoted as the fifth of the seven authorized readings of Āsim. However, it was not taken from any Qur'ānic manuscripts but reconstructed from written records of oral tradition.¹⁵⁰ Small explains the process as "[t]hey took the basic Qur'ān text that had been used by the Ottomans and rewrote it in what their tradition told them the ancient 'Uthmānic orthography was like, and then to this, they added the full set of diacritical marks and reader's aids."¹⁵¹ It has now been nearly universally accepted as the only canonical text; though the eighty recitations are technically still authoritative, they are arrogated by the printed texts.

Unlike the Bible, where each book could be traced to one author and one autograph, the Qur'ān had many authoritative texts that were written from oral recitation. None of them were exactly the same. Each had the author's individuality imprinted on it, just as there are four Gospels of the New Testament that told the same story with emphasis on a different event or from a different view of the same events from the perspective of four authors that had either first or secondhand accounts of the events. However, unlike the Bible, which preserves each as it was originally written, the editors of the Qur'ān attempted to meld, modify, and appease each differing set of writings. The result is that there is no longer any way to compare or reconstruct

¹⁴⁹ Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts.*, 169.

¹⁵⁰ G. Bergsträsser, "Koranlesung in Kario" in *Der Islam: Zeitschrift Für Gerschichte und Kultur des Islamischen Orient* 20, no 1 (1932):1-42, 5.

¹⁵¹ Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, 167-170.

the original teaching of Mohmmad. Too much has been lost to develop a percentage of accuracy to the original text or oral recitations. Small articulates, "the efforts to establish and justify one text from among a group of collections of material, both oral and written, has resulted in the irreparable loss of the earliest authoritative forms of the text."¹⁵²

Conclusion

The New and Old Testaments have by far the most authenticated and studied early manuscripts of any ancient manuscript, with Josh and Sean McDowell claiming more than 66,000 combined manuscripts and scrolls currently accounted for.¹⁵³ Though Muslims will make claims of high numbers, they fail to provide authenticating studies and documentation to these numbers, or they count multiple fragments from the same manuscripts as separate counts, falsely inflating the number of manuscripts. It is possible, even likely, that there are more manuscripts of the Qur'ān than that of the Bible, particularly considering that it is hundreds to thousands of years newer than the books of the Bible. However, since there exists so much deception and lack of accountability within the Qur'ān's manuscript studies, the indications are that there is also great corruption in the manuscripts, too. If, through newer studies, verification of an accurate count of authenticated manuscripts can be accomplished possibly, these facts could change. However, the destroyed manuscripts will continue to leave gaps in the evidence chain of transmission.

¹⁵² Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, 168.

¹⁵³ McDowell and McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 53.

Though later Qur'ān manuscripts are of high quality with few textual variants is misleading due to the known fact that most of the early ones were ordered destroyed due to the high number of textual variations in them. The Old Testament has a similar history of destroying worn and imperfect manuscripts, but unlike the Qur'ān, it has much earlier manuscripts of quality that predate the practice of destroying the imperfect ones. Additionally, the Old Testament has a wide range of textual traditions to compare the transmissional accuracy of its text leading to a higher validity to the quality of the Old Testament than the Qur'ān. Conversely, the New Testament, on the whole, has manuscripts in poorer condition than the whole of the other sets of manuscripts. However, the ability to compare and contrast the textual transmission of the New Testament leads to an overall better quality of text from those manuscripts, even if the individual manuscripts are in worse condition. Therefore, unless more Qur'ānic manuscripts are unearthed that help understand the earliest transmission history of the Qur'ān, questions of accuracy from the quality of the manuscripts will remain.

Even with discarding the early date of the Birmingham manuscript, the Qur'ān does have the shortest span from first writings to the earliest probable date of a manuscript with the lower writing on the San'ā' 1 palimpsest. This fact is expected since the Qur'ān is also nearly six hundred years newer than the New Testament and thousands of years newer than the Hebrew Scriptures. However, the fact that the Qur'ān has no single autographs to trace back to but instead has many different early original Companion writings makes the short timespan inconsequential, weighing its historical accuracy compared to manuscripts with solid original autographs. In fact, there are eighty known canonical recitations of the Qur'ān and further known uncanonical

recitations.¹⁵⁴ Additionally, there is a considerable lack of manuscript evidence to support the transmissional accuracy of these textual variants. Thus, it is nearly impossible to make a direct comparison to other ancient manuscripts that all have one original autograph from the author and manuscript evidence to follow the textual history's accuracy. The New Testament, conversely, has the shortest known span from the earliest manuscript to the known date of the original autograph of an ancient manuscript, even ones dated much newer than itself. Likewise, the Old Testament book of Malachi has a mere one to two hundred-year spread which still far exceeds the time spread of other manuscripts of antiquity. Further, even the Pentateuch has a shorter spread than Plato's earliest manuscript for the Tetralogies, with a time gap of thirteen hundred years. Additionally, the Tetralogies autograph is thousands of years newer than the Pentateuch.

Finally, both the New and Old Testaments can recreate the doctrine of the faith to near perfection back to the autographs of each. Additionally, a word-for-word recreation of the New Testament autograph can be recreated to an accuracy of less than one variant per thousand words.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, the Old Testament's word-for-word accuracy rate is likewise impressive despite its age. However, The Qur'ān cannot be recreated to an autograph at all since, as Small states, "it cannot be demonstrated that there was one version going back to Muhammad."¹⁵⁶ Nor can it be demonstrated that even seven or ten of the current recitations be traced to Muhammad.¹⁵⁷ It is only possible to trace one consonantal text and a fixed number of connected

¹⁵⁴Labib as-Said, *The Recited Koran: A History of the First Recorded Version*, Translated by Bernard Weiss, M.A. Rauf and Morroe Berger (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1975).

¹⁵⁵ John A.T. Robertson, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1925), 22.

¹⁵⁶ Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, 179.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

recitations to Uthmān though there are known transmissions of this text and at least one other that predates him.

Therefore, the manuscripts of the Bible continue to prove their historical accuracy, far surpassing all other ancient manuscripts through the bibliographical test. Even when compared with the Qur'ān, which is hundreds to thousands of years newer than the books of the Bible. Whereas Muslims belief is that it has been “flawlessly preserved since its inception,”¹⁵⁸ yet, the Qur'ān does not fare well against the bibliographical test, especially once one delf into the finer details of understanding its transmission.

¹⁵⁸ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 603.

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