

Is the New Testament Accurate?

(by Bob Pulliam)

The accuracy of our present day New Testament is actually quite easily proven. Those who say it isn't accurate either speak out of ignorance, or dishonesty. The accuracy of the New Testament can be tried and tested by any who are willing to do so. This is especially true for the Muslim. If one believes the Quran, he cannot help but believe that the Bible is accurate.

Yet, we still hear people ignorantly charge that: "The Roman Catholic Church changed the Bible for it's own purposes, so it can't be trusted"; or, "The men who translated the Bible made mistakes, that's why all the versions are different and can't be trusted". We shall see that these are merely excuses.

Let's Begin With the Quran...

Why would a believer in the Quran believe the New Testament to be accurate? Well, there is an interesting aspect of the Quran that is not regarded with the respect that is deserving. The Quran instructs Muhammad (and followers) to ask the truth of matters of Jews and Christians in their respective scriptures. For example:

Sura 10:94 "If thou wert in doubt as to what We have revealed unto thee, then ask those who have been reading the Book from before thee: the Truth hath indeed come to thee from thy Lord: So be in no wise of those in doubt."

The Muslim today would tell us that the Old and New Testament scriptures have been corrupted. And such occurred very shortly after their revelation. If such is the case, then Muhammad must not rely upon any of the scriptures that were "before"...

Sura 3:84 "Say: 'We believe in Allah, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ismail; Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in (the Books) given to Moses, Jesus, and the Prophets, from their Lord: We make no distinction between one and another among them, and to Allah do we Bow our will (in Islam).'"

Sura 3:93f "All food was lawful to the Children of Israel, except what Israel made unlawful for himself before the Torah was revealed. Say, "Bring ye the Torah and study it, if ye be men of truth. If any, after this, invent a lie and attribute it to Allah, they are indeed unjust wrong-doers."

Obviously, the Quran is acknowledging the existence of authentic copies of the Torah. So, when were the Scriptures corrupted by the enemies of Islam? Before we answer that, here are a few more texts to consider:

Sura 32:23 "We did indeed aforetime give the Book to Moses: Be not then in doubt of its reaching (thee): And We made it a guide to the Children of Israel."

Sura 5:43f "But why do they come to thee for decision, when they have (their own) Torah before them?- Therein is the (plain) command of Allah; yet even after that, they would turn away. For they are not (really) people of Faith. It was We who revealed the Torah (to Moses): therein was guidance and light. By its standard have been judged the Jews, by the Prophets who bowed (as in Islam) to Allah's Will, by the Rabbis and the Doctors of Law: For

to them was entrusted the protection of Allah's Book, and they were witnesses thereto: Therefore fear not men, but fear Me, and sell not My Signs for a miserable price. If any do fail to judge by what Allah hath revealed, they are unbelievers."

Sura 5:47 "Let the people of the Gospel judge by what Allah hath revealed therein. If any do fail to judge by what Allah hath revealed, they are those who rebel."

Sura 5:68 "Say: "O People of the Book! Ye have no ground to stand upon unless ye stand fast by the Torah. The Gospel, and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord." It is the revelation that cometh to thee from thy Lord, that increaseth in most of them their obstinate Rebellion and blasphemy. But sorrow thou not over (these) people without Faith."

Sura 62:5 "The similitude of those who were entrusted with the (obligations of) Taurat, but who subsequently failed in those (obligations), is that of a donkey which carried huge tomes (but understands them not). Evil is the similitude of people who falsify the Signs of Allah: And Allah guides not people who do wrong."

These passages make it clear that the Old and New Testament of Muhammad's day was considered authentic and inspired in character. So was it corrupted after Muhammad's day?

The Integrity of the New Testament...

Of all the books from antiquity, the New Testament is actually one of the best preserved. Nearly 3,000 copies of varying amounts of the New Testament in Greek survive to this day. In addition, there are other Greek manuscripts (about 2,000), that are arranged in a daily reading format. In addition to that there are 8,000 manuscripts in Latin and over 2,000 ancient manuscripts of different versions than the Greek and Latin.

All of these manuscripts can be compared and cross-referenced. The New Testament is just like any case where truth is sought... The more evidence you have, the more likely you are to arrive at the truth. The evidence offered by all of these ancient manuscripts is overwhelming. As they are compared, an astonishing continuity pervades the whole. From this we are convinced that God's word is not only accurate, but also that His will can be determined by that message!

There are a small number of the New Testament documents which contain minor discrepancies. These are called "textual variants." These amount to copyist errors, not the errors of the inspired writers. It is important to remember two things when considering this topic. 1) We do not have any of the originals that the inspired writers produced; and 2) copies in ancient times had to be done by hand. There were no photo copy machines available. Copyists often made minor errors, such as leaving out a "the", or a dot here or there. None of these errors affect the accuracy of important doctrinal matters. If they did, we could have no confidence in any part of the Bible!

What do Secular Historians Rely on?...

Secular historians might ridicule the Bible as silly and unreliable; but have you ever thought about what some of our historical knowledge is based upon? If you wrote a book in the year 100, and that book was lost, but later copies were found, their accuracy might depend on how much later they were produced. A copy from the year 900 may have gone through several copyings until the one in 900 was produced. If you don't have any of the

intermediate copies, you might wonder how accurate a copy from 800 years after the original might be (i.e. 100 to 900).

Here are some of the ancient documents that some of our ancient history is based upon:

Caesar's Gallic War (written around 50 BC). Oldest copy is 900 years after the original.
Roman History by Livy (59 BC - AD 17). Oldest copy is 450 years after the original.
Histories by Tacitus (AD 100) Oldest copy is 800 years after the original.
The History of Thucydides (460 - 400 BC). Oldest copy is 1,300 years after the original.
History of Herodotus (488 - 428 BC). Oldest copy is 1,300 years after the original.

The Bible, on the other hand, leaves much more room for trust. The oldest fragment of the Bible is the John Rylands fragment which dates to AD 125. That's just thirty to forty years after the original was written. Three other manuscripts found in Egypt date to between AD 100 - 400.

There are several early translations of the Bible which help to verify textual integrity. The Peshitto Syriac is an Aramean translation from the second century (within 100 years of the original NT documents). The Old Latin translation dates to this same time period. The well known Latin Vulgate was completed in AD 385.

Conclusion...

It is obvious from this information that there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the Bible. If you are a Muslim, the Quran has told you that the Bible is accurate, and we have seen that the Bible has not changed since before Muhammad's day. That we have what was written in the first century should be unquestioned. The only reason it is questioned in our day is it's message. People who do not want to accept it's message find it necessary to attack it's accuracy!