

Lesson #1A

3 TESTS FOR ANCIENT HISTORY (by professor of military history: Sanders; *Introduction to Research in English Literary History*)

Copies: How many **copies** do we have, what is their date and how close in time are the copies to the original?
 (7 factors to date a manuscript: material written on; size/form of letters; punctuation; how text is divided;
 kind of ornamentation; color of ink; texture/color of parchment)

Author: When the **author** is writing about historical events, is he an eyewitness or giving an eyewitness account?

Other sources: Are there other **sources** that confirm what the author says?

TESTS APPLIED TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

- Copies:** secular history and the New Testament compared
- **8 copies** of *History* by the Greek historian Herodotus
 The original was written between 480-425 BC. The oldest (first) copy is 900 AD, a **gap of 1300 years**.
 - **10 copies** of *Gallic Wars* by Julius Caesar
 The original was written between 58-50 BC. The oldest copy is 900 AD, a **gap of 1000 years**.
 - **24,000 handwritten copies** of the New Testament (manuscripts)
 The original was written from 40-95 AD. Oldest copies are from 130-400 AD, a **gap of 40-300 years**.
 - **Number** of copies compared
 The New Testament has the most: 24,000; the next highest is Homer's *Iliad*: 643 copies.
 - **Accuracy** of copies compared
 5% of the *Iliad* text is in doubt because of differences between the 643 copies.
 ½ of 1% of the New Testament text is in doubt because of differences between the 24,000 copies.

Author: secular history and the New Testament compared

- **Herodotus** is valued for his account of the Persian Wars because he interviewed survivors of those wars.
- "*Gallic Wars* by Julius Caesar is factual reporting, because he is writing about personal experiences".
 Quoted from a secular history book
- The New Testament **authors** said they were eyewitnesses or writing from eyewitness reports.
 Luke 1:1-3; 1 John 1:3; 2 Peter 1:16; they even appealed to the knowledge of their enemies Acts 2:22

Other sources: secular history and the New Testament compared

- **Later writers** confirmed what earlier historians said.
- **Early church leaders** quote those who studied under the apostles. They confirm New Testament writers.
 If all 24,000 copies of the New Testament were destroyed, it could still be found, in its entirety, in the writings
 of the early church leaders, (except for 11 verses).

TESTS APPLIED TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

Copies: the Old Testament originals were written from 1400 to 400 BC.

- For centuries, the oldest copy was 900 AD, a **gap of 1300 years**.
 According to the critics, that left much room for doubt and error.
- In 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered.
 Among them were copies of the Old Testament from 200 BC, a **gap of only a few hundred years**.
 Accuracy could now be compared between the Isaiah scroll of 125 BC and the Isaiah text of 916 AD.
 Many errors were expected from 1000 years of hand copying, but after a comparison, 1 scholar said,
*The Isaiah scroll (of 125 BC) proved to be word for word identical with our standard
 Hebrew Bible in more than 95% of the text. The 5% of variation consisted chiefly of
 obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling.* Gleason Archer; Ph.D., BD, LL.B.
- This accuracy is because the Jews developed a professional group of copiers
 From 1300 BC - 100 AD they were called scribes.
 From 100 - 500 AD they were called Talmudists; they developed 17 rules for copying the Old Testament books.
 From 500 - 900 AD they were called Massorites; they developed even more safeguards.
- Old Testament copies were buried or burned when they became old and unreadable.
 This is why there are only one to two thousand instead of 24,000 copies.

TESTS APPLIED TO THE OLD TESTAMENT continued**Author**

The majority of Old Testament authors said they were writing about events in their generation.

Other sources: Old Testament events can be confirmed thru archeology

- Critics said **Moses** could **not** have written the first 5 books ...
 - ... **because** laws of Moses were too complex and organized for that time period, 1400 -1200 BC; **but:**
 - **Hammurabi Code** was found in 1901 in Susa with 282 complex and organized laws from 1700 BC
 - **Laws of Eshnunna** were found in 1945 in Iraq: on 2 tablets were an organized set of laws from old Babylon, written c. 1900 BC, more than 500 years before Moses.
 - ... **because** there was no developed writing at the time of Moses; **but:**
 - 500 years before Moses, 5 written languages were in use: Egyptian, Akkadian, Phoenician, Sinian, Ugaritic.
(W. F. Albright, Ph.D., Litt.D.; Professor of Semitic Languages at John Hopkins University)
 - Ras Shamra Tablets from the time of Moses were a library with hundreds of tablets
they included stories, poetry and dictionaries in 4 languages.
- Critics said stories in **Genesis** were myth and legend without historical basis.
 - ... **Nuzi Tablets** found in 1925 in northern Iraq: over 4000 tablets describe life during 1600-1500 BC
They talk about: selling a birthright, marriage to a servant woman if the wife cannot bear a son
 - ... **Marl Tablets** found in 1933 in Iraq: 20,000 tablets describe life c. 1700 BC
They mention towns of Nahor and Haran, towns connected with Abraham's family.
They give rules about buying land if you want to purchase a small area, such as a cave. See Gen. 23
 - ... **Ebla Tablets** found in 1964-74 in Syria: a library of 16,000 tablets describes life c. 2300 BC
They mention the 5 cities of the Plain including Sodom and Gomorrah in the exact order as in Genesis.
They list cities that previously had only been mentioned in Genesis.
- Critics say the book of **Daniel** has errors, because according to history, Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon. The Bible says Belshazzar was the last king. History had no record of that name until recently.

Archeology has found building **inscriptions** and **clay cylinders** in Babylon; they include a prayer of Nabonidus
*Life for long days give as a gift to me; and as for Bel-shar-usur, my first born, the offspring of my body,
may the reverence for thy great godhead be placed in his heart. May he not contract sin. May he be sated
with the fullness of life.*
(Langdon S.H., *Historical Inscriptions*)

Persian Verse Account - *He (Nabonidus) put the eldest, his firstborn in charge of a camp.
The troops of the land he sent with him.
He freed his hand; he entrusted the kingship to him.
While he himself set out on a distant campaign...* (Smith, S. *Babylonian Historical Texts*)

Nabonidus, "the last king" entrusted the kingship to his oldest son, Belshazzar.

APPLICATION The Bible is historically reliable

- ◆ One archaeologist has said: ... *Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of details and has brought increased recognition ... of the Bible as a **source of history*** W. F. Albright
- ◆ Archeology is based on science and facts. It can never prove the Bible is truth from God or the Word of God. But, it **can** prove that what the author said is historically reliable. It can prove the critics of the Bible are wrong.
- ◆ It takes faith to believe the Bible; but it is faith based on facts and evidence. **The Bible is worthy of our faith.**

Source books for this lesson

- McDowell, Josh, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Vol. 1 and 2*, 1972, '75; *Daniel in the Critics' Den*, 1979; *A Ready Defense*, 1990.
- Montgomery, John W., *History and Christianity*, 1976.
- Pfeiffer, Charles, *The Biblical World, A Dictionary of Biblical Archeology*, 1966.
- *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 5 Volumes, 1975.

