

The Old Testament

- * As we know, there are many who doubt the historical reliability of the Old Testament
- * Though as we've studied, the New Testament writers support it
- * There is a substantial body of external **Ancient Near Eastern (ANE)** historical and archaeological backing for it.
 - * Much of which is direct evidence for specific historical details.
 - * We also have the historical account that the OT gives of its own composition:
 - * Who wrote it
 - * When they wrote it
 - * What processes were involved in writing it
- * New Testament passages affirm the divine inspiration and ongoing importance of the Old Testament for followers of Jesus Christ.
 - * Example: the Apostle Paul wrote, *2 Tim. 3:15b-17 ... from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*
 - * Since Paul wrote this near the end of his life & ministry, even though much of the NT existed by that time, the OT never lost importance to him and the church.
- * Similarly, referring to the OT Peter wrote, *2 Pet 1:21 " . . . no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit"*
 - * Clearly, according to these (and related) passages, the OT scriptures are reliable for guiding the believer in his or her walk with the Lord.
- * We can also compare passages from the Old Testament itself to see similar affirmations
 - * *Josh 1:8*⁸ *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*
 - * *Pss 1:1-2*¹ *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.*

Composition of the Old Testament

- * The Old Testament, like the Bible as a whole, has three main dimensions:
 - * Literary
 - * Historical
 - * Theological.
- * It refers to events and claims they happened in historical time and space.
- * It recounts this history theologically and claims to do so in a historically and theologically reliable way (as we just noted).
- * Another whole set of controversies over the reliability of the Old Testament surrounds the question of its literary composition.
 - * Who were the human writers
 - * How did they write it?
 - * When did they write it?
 - * How reliable is the information it gives us about its own composition?
- * Yes, there was a divine author too, but he revealed himself and inspired the writing of scripture through human (*2 Pet 1:21*)

Points of Confirmation

- * The ancient scribes employed a **detailed and trustworthy system of checks and balances** as they copied the original texts

- * The accuracy of transmission process was successfully tested with the discovery of the Isaiah text in the Dead Sea Scroll collection.
- * The ancient Jewish believers and Church Fathers also embraced the Old Testament as the Word of God.
- * Archeological discoveries have since confirmed many of the Old Testament accounts, and these archaeological evidences are rich compared to other written claims about the ancient past.
- * Finally, the Old Testament Scriptures contain fulfilled prophecies (including amazing prophecies about the coming Messiah), establishing the Divine nature of the texts.

Historical Reliability in the Old Testament

- * Did the historical events to which the Hebrew Bible refers happen in real space-time history?
- * If so, did they happen in the way the Old Testament describes them?
- * As previously noted, Jesus and the apostolic writers of the NT consistently taught or assumed the historical reliability of the Old Testament.
 - * Including everything from ...
 - * God's Creation of the World
 - * To the conquest and occupation of the land
 - * To the Babylonian Exile and Restoration, and points along the way
 - * *(Matt 1:1-17; 19:3-9; John 8:39-47; Acts 7; Rom 5:12-21; Heb 11; 2 Pet 2:4-10)*
 - * To the Patriarchs
 - * To Moses
 - * To the period of the Kings and Prophets
- * Jesus and the writers of the NT used all of it to teach the church about history as "His-story" and the theological significance of that story for the life of the believer.

Different Views of Old Testament Historical Reliability

- * For some readers of the OT, the NT references cited above (and many others of a similar kind) settle the matter of OT historical reliability (If this is you, you can micro-nap ☺).
- * Not so for others.
 - * Some argue that historical confirmation is not really the issue, because the OT historical claims are irrelevant to the issues of faith and practice.
 - * Others contend that in such passages, Jesus and the other writers of the New Testament simply accommodated the understanding of the people of that day in order to make certain theological claims.
 - * Still others require external historical confirmation to accept anything as historical in the Old Testament (more on this below).

External Support for Old Testament Historical Reliability

- * Much of what the OT presents as historical has no direct confirmation in external sources
- * One should not expect that we would find specific mention of the person of Abraham in the textual or archaeological record of the Ancient Near East (ANE).
 - * Other solid evidence shows that the biblical description of Abraham and his way of life is plausible for the time and place in which the story is set.
- * Much of what we find in the OT does enjoy a reasonable level of external archaeological and written confirmation.
 - * Another example; ANE documents confirm the sequence and dating of many of the kings of Israel and Judah as the Old Testament presents them.
 - * The Old Testament tells us that God really did deliver ancient Israel out from slavery in Egypt, led them to Sinai, made a covenant with them there, and then led them on to conquer and occupy the land he had promised them.

* These and other such historical facts add value to the validity of our faith.

* As previously noted, some have argued that what is important, is the theological interpretation, not the historical reality, of God's actions themselves.

* Others possess a view of God as one who talks but likely doesn't always take action, or at least the actions that He relayed specifically as outlined in scripture. We disagree

* We do know, the Old Testament primarily interprets history theologically; but the fact that it is theologically oriented history does not make that history any less historically accurate.

* We may not have concrete historical or archaeological data to prove each point, but, as the saying goes, Absence of Evidence is not Evidence of Absence.

Skepticism about Old Testament Historical Reliability

* Sometimes the skepticism of scholars goes beyond reason.

* Pharaoh Merneptah's Victory Stele (ca. 1209 BC, around the time of the judge Deborah?), it offers, external to the bible, verifiable evidence of the existence of a people called "Israel" in the hill country of Palestine in his day.



* This is the first appearance of "Israel" in surviving ANE literature.

* In spite of the specific and significant implications of this small piece of historically verifiable evidence, there have been those scholars who deny it, ignore it, or somehow re-interpret it because it does not fit with their skepticism about the early existence of Israel.

* One group of scholars of this sort rose to prominence in the 1990s.

* These historical "minimalists" as they came to be known, consider the Old Testament to be purely fictional literature written in the late Persian & early Hellenistic period to support the agenda of Israel's leaders at that time with no real basis in historical fact (c.a. 400 - 250 BC).

* The scholarly rhetoric led to "exasperation" between such scholars and those committed to historical veracity of the Old Testament

* Others simply stayed the course with the actual historical data.

* Gabriel Barkai a well-known (Israeli archaeologist) remarked, “minimalism is less than that”, meaning the minimalist brand of scholarship or allowance resists accepting any event which extrabiblical data confirms as historical in the Old Testament.

* Many believe the minimalist agenda is an extreme position that will play its way out and eventually defeat itself.

* As it cannot stand up to the accumulating data against it.

* In the meantime, we need to concern ourselves with the ongoing search for relevant data, and the careful examination and evaluation of it.

* In these matters, it is important to distinguish what we believe to be true from what we can show to be true.

* Good, honest historical work is ongoing.

* Some of it will show the historical reliability of the Old Testament, and some of it will not provide the detailed perspective we might hope for.

* We need not press the evidence.

* We understand that the Bible is inspired, and our understanding of it can only be gleaned by the aid of the Holy Spirit.

Extra-Biblical confirmation of Biblical events

* The campaign into Israel by Pharaoh Shishak 926 B.C. (*1 Kings 14:25 & 2 Chron 12:1-12*)

* The revolt of Moab against Israel, 853 B.C. (*2 Kings 3:1-12*)

* The fall of Samaria, 726-722 B.C. (*2 Kings 18:9-11*)

* The defeat of Ashdod by Sargon II, 711 B.C. (*Is 20*)

* The campaign of Sennacherib against Judah, 701 B.C. (*Is 36 & 37*)

* The siege of Lachish by Sennacherib, 701 B.C. (*II Kings 18; II Chron 32; Micah 1:13*)

* The assassination of Sennacherib by his own sons, 681 B.C. (*II Kings 19:37*)

* The fall of Nineveh as predicted by the prophets, 612 B.C. (*Nahum*)

* The captivity of Jehoiachin, king of Judah, in Babylon, 597 B.C. (*2 Kings 24:13-16*)

* The fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar, 589 B.C. (*2 Kings 25:2; Jer 39:2*)

The Old Testament Has Been Confirmed by Prophecy

* Accurate Predictions of Ancient Historical Events

* Babylon Will Rule Over Judah for 70 Years (*Jer 29:10*)

* Babylon's Gates Will Open for Cyrus (*Is 45:1*)

* Babylon's Kingdom Will Be Permanently Overthrown (*Is 13:19-20*)

* Babylon Will Be Reduced to Swampland (*Is 14:23*)

* The Jews Will Survive Babylonian Rule and Return (*Jer 32:36-37*)

* The Ninevites Will Be Drunk in Their Final Hours (*Nahum 1:10*)

* Nineveh Will Be Destroyed By Fire (*Nahum 3:15*)

* Tyre Will Be Attacked By Many Nations (*Ezek 26:3*)

* Tyre's Stones, Timber and Soil Will Be Cast Into Sea (*Ezek 26:12*)

* The Jews Will Avenge the Edomites (*Jer 49:16*)

* The Old Testament Accurately Predicts the Coming Messiah

* *Is 53:7* ⁷ *He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.*

* *Dan 9:25* ²⁵ *Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times.*

* www.neverthirsty.org/bible-studies/book-of-daniel/prophecy-of-daniels-70-weeks/

* In this prophecy, Daniel is claiming that there will be 69 weeks of years between the issuing of a decree to rebuild Jerusalem and the appearance of the Messiah. Now keep in mind that this bold prediction came 538 years before Christ was born.

* There were four commands in scripture related to the return to Jerusalem.

* 3 in the book of Ezra:

* Cyrus (Ezra 1) * Darius (Ezra 6) * Artaxerxes (Ezra 7)

* The 4th by Artaxerxes (a second one) (Neh 1-2)

* Now which one is the one we start with, because they were all given at different dates? And if they all start at a different time, they're all going to end at a different time. And there's much debate as to which of these is right.

* In 464 BC, Artaxerxes, a Persian king, ascended to the throne. His twentieth year as king would be 444 BC. Nehemiah, the Jewish cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, was deeply concerned with the reports about the ruined condition of Jerusalem which came about as the result of their being defeated (Neh 1:1-4) and as a result, he petitioned the king:

"Send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it. So it pleased the king to send me" (Neh 2:5-6).

* According to the Scriptures the decree is issued "in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king" (Neh 2:1).

* The Jewish calendar month was Nisan, and since no day is given, it is reasonable to assume that the date would be understood as the first, the Jewish New Year's Day. In the Julian calendar we presently use, the corresponding date would be March 5, 444 B.C. This was the day on which the decree was issued to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.

* Remembering this date, March 5, 444 B.C. when does Messiah appear?

* You may recall that the Gospels tell us that Jesus, on numerous occasions, had forbidden his followers to make him known as "the Messiah". He would frequently do miracles and tell the disciples not to tell anyone who had done the miracles because his "*hour has not yet come*" (John 2:4, 7:6).

* However, on March 30, 33 A.D., when he entered Jerusalem on a donkey, he rebuked the Pharisees' protest and encouraged the whole multitude of his disciples as they shouted, "*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord*".

* Many scholars believe that Jesus was crucified in AD 30. We are persuaded that the evidence strongly points to a date of AD 33. For an introductory discussion of the issues, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, "The Date of Jesus' Resurrection," The ESV Study Bible, ed. Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 1809–10. See also Colin J. Humphreys and W. G. Waddington, "The Jewish Calendar, A Lunar Eclipse and the Date of Christ's Crucifixion," Tyndale Bulletin 43.2 (1992): 331–51.

* And Jesus said, "*If these become silent, the stones will cry out*" (Luke 19:38-40). This was the day on which Jesus was publicly declared the Messiah.

* Converting the biblical years into Gregorian years – we multiply the 483 biblical years by 360 days per year and we obtain 173,880 days. This is the number of days from the start of the prophecy to the end of the prophecy. Next we want to determine how many Gregorian years are represented by these 173,880 days. Since there are 365.24219879 days in a Gregorian year we divide the 173,880 days by 365.24219879 and we discover that the **483 biblical years equals 476 years and 24.7 days or approximately 25 days in the Gregorian calendar**. Therefore, the predicted time from the start to the end of the prophecy is 476 Gregorian years, and 25 days.

* Now let's compare the date of the decree (March 5, 444 BC) with the date of Jesus' declaration (March 30, 33 AD).

* We need to clarify the fact that the Jewish prophetic year was composed of twelve 30 day months. In other words, the ancient evidence indicates that the Jewish prophetic year had 360 days, not 365 days.

* Since Daniel states 69 weeks of seven years each, and each year has 360 days, the equation is as follows: $69 \times 7 \times 360 = 173,880$ days.

* In nothing more than a simple mathematical demonstration, the number of days in the period from March 5, 444 B.C. (the twentieth year of Artaxerxes) to March 30, 33 A.D. (the day Jesus entered Jerusalem on the donkey) can be determined at this point.

* The time span from 444 B.C. to 33 A.D. is 476 years (remember that 1 B.C. to 1 A.D. is only one year). And if we multiply 476 years x 365.2421879 days per year (corrected for leap years), we get the result of **173,855 days**.

* Looking back at the difference between **March 5** and **March 30 (25 days)**. What is our total? You guessed it, **173,880 days**, exactly as Daniel predicted it.

What Does Fulfilled Prophecy Prove?

* The ancient Jews were careful to use Prophecy as a measuring stick.

* If someone claimed to be a prophet, yet his predictions did not come true, he was abandoned and his writings did not make it into the canon of scripture. Moses, inspired by God, was careful to set this high standard for prophets:

* *Deut 18:22²² when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.*

* Moses knew that fulfilled prophecy was evidence that God was truly at work in the heart of the prophet, giving him insight to something that only God knew about.

* The **exact** fulfillment of all the prophecies that we've talked about from the Old Testament is more than enough to demonstrate the accuracy and divine inspiration of the Bible and the truth of Christianity.

* Only God can *Is 46:10 "declare the end from the beginning"* and forecast to the very day *"things that are not yet done ... I will do all my will"*.

Internal Data for Old Testament Composition

* The Pentateuch itself tells us that Moses himself wrote down at least some parts of it (*Ex 24:4; 34:27; Num 33:2; Deut 31:9*)

* Other Old Testament passages also assign the origin of the Law to Moses

* *Ezra 7:6⁶ this Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given ...*

* The New Testament supports this as well

* *Luke 24:44-45⁴⁴ Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me."⁴⁵ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.*

* The Pentateuch does however include post-Mosaic information.

* Example, *Deut 34:1-8 recounts the death of Moses and vs 10 tells us "there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face,"*

* Obviously written from a later historical point of view

* *Gen 14:14 refers to the city of "Dan" before it was named Dan in the period of the Judges*

* Gen 14:14¹⁴ *Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan*

* Judges 18:29²⁹ *And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel. However, the name of the city formerly was Laish.*

* This is not surprising, if one remembers that each time the scribes made a new copy of one of the many scrolls that made up what we know as the Old Testament, they had to recopy the whole scroll by hand.

* They were careful copyists, but since the Old Testament grew over a 1000-yr period (1400–400 BC) they naturally updated it to make it understandable to the people in their day

Conclusion

* There is much more to say about the reliability of the Old Testament historically and compositionally.

* God did not just drop the Old Testament down out of heaven at one time in one piece.

* He revealed it to human authors in history who wrote it down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, while also using their own mind, language, and experience.

* It is evident from the Old Testament text itself that God revealed some of it directly to the writers, for other parts he guided them in using sources, whether oral or written.

* Yes, the Old Testament is reliable, but it only tells us so much about the history it recounts, the means by which the various authors composed it, and how it was passed down to us so that we have it today.

* The rest we leave in God's hands, as we seek to live faithfully for Him in our world

* Deut 29:29²⁹ *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

One-Sentence Summary of the OT Books

Pentateuch

1) Genesis: Answers two big questions: "How did God's relationship with the world begin?" and "Where did the nation of Israel come from?"

* Author: Traditionally Considered Moses, but the stories are much older.

* Interesting Fact: Most of the famous Bible stories we've heard about are probably found in the book of Genesis. This is where the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Ark, the Tower of Babel, Abraham and Isaac, Jacob's ladder, and Joseph's coat of many colors are recorded.

2) Exodus: God saves Israel from slavery in Egypt, and then enters into a special relationship with them giving intimate details of how He is to be worshipped.

* Author: Traditionally Considered Moses

3) Leviticus: God gives Israel instructions in the law and how to worship Him.

* Author: Traditionally Considered Moses

4) Numbers: Israel fails to trust and obey God, and wanders in the wilderness for 40 years.

* Author: Traditionally Considered Moses

5) Deuteronomy: Moses gives Israel instructions (in some ways, a recap of the laws in Exodus–Numbers) for how to love, obey, worship and serve God in the Promised Land.

* Author: Traditionally Considered Moses

6) Joshua: Joshua (Israel's new leader) leads Israel to conquer the Promised land, then parcels out territories to the twelve tribes of Israel.

* Author: Unknown, but Most Probably Joshua, the key eye-witness to recorded events

* Interesting fact: The first half of the book lists a few fantastic stories (the Battle of Jericho and the day the sun stood still), but most of the action happens in the first half of the book. The last half is pretty much all about divvying up the land.

7) Judges: Israel enters a cycle of turning from God, falling captive to oppressive nations, calling out to God, and being rescued by leaders God sends their way (called “Judges”).

* Author: Unknown, but likely Samuel who was a key prophet who lived at the time of events

8) Ruth: Two widows lose everything, and find hope in Israel—which leads to the birth of the future King David.

* Author: Jewish tradition credits Samuel

9) 1 Samuel: Israel demands a king, who turns out to be quite a disappointment (Saul).

* Author: Unknown

10) 2 Samuel: David, a man after God’s own heart, becomes king of Israel.

* Author: Unknown

11) 1 Kings: The kingdom of Israel has a time of peace and prosperity under King Solomon, but afterward splits, and the two lines of kings turn away from God.

* Author: Unknown

12) 2 Kings: Both kingdoms ignore God and his prophets, until they both fall captive to other world empires.

* Author: Unknown

13) 1 Chronicles: This is a brief history of Israel from Adam to David, culminating with David commissioning the temple of God in Jerusalem.

* Author: Arguments Favor Ezra

14) 2 Chronicles: David’s son Solomon builds the temple, but after centuries of rejecting God, the Babylonians take the southern Israelites captive and destroy the temple.

* Author: Arguments Favor Ezra

15) Ezra: The Israelites rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, and a scribe named Ezra teaches the people to obey God’s laws once again.

* Author: Arguments Favor Ezra

16) Nehemiah: Jerusalem is in bad shape, so Nehemiah rebuilds the wall around the city.

* Author: Arguments Favor Ezra

17) Esther: Someone hatches a genocidal plot to bring about Israel’s extinction, and Esther must face the emperor to ask for help.

* Author: Unknown, Mordecai, Ezra and Nehemiah have been suggested

18) Job: Satan attacks a righteous man named Job, and Job and his friends argue about why terrible things are happening to him.

* Author: Unknown, Job Unlikely

19) Psalms: A collection of 150 songs that Israel sang to God (and to each other)—kind of like a hymnal for the ancient Israelites.

* Author: Several

20) Proverbs: A collection of sayings written to help people make wise decisions that bring about justice.

* Author: Solomon and Potentially Other Wisdom Writers

21) Ecclesiastes: A philosophical exploration of the meaning of life—concluding that all should “*Fear God and keep His commandments*”.

* Author: Traditionally Considered Solomon

22) *Song of Solomon* (*Song of Songs*): A love song (or collection of love songs) celebrating love, desire, and marriage and is considered a part of the bible's poetic wisdom literature.

* Author: Traditionally Considered Solomon (but it could have been written about Solomon, or in the style of Solomon)

23) *Isaiah*: God sends the prophet Isaiah to warn Israel of future judgment—but also to tell them about a coming king and servant who will “bear the sins of many.”

* Author: Isaiah (and maybe some of his followers)

24) *Jeremiah*: God sends a prophet to warn Israel about the coming Babylonian captivity, but the people don't take the news very well.

* Author: Jeremiah

25) *Lamentations*: A collection of dirges lamenting the fall of Jerusalem after the Babylonian attacks.

* Author: Traditionally Considered Jeremiah

26) *Ezekiel*: God chooses a man to speak for Him to Israel, to tell them the error of their ways and teach them justice: Ezekiel.

* Author: Ezekiel

27) *Daniel*: Daniel becomes a high-ranking wise man in the Babylonian and Persian empires, and has prophetic visions concerning Israel's future.

* Author: Daniel (with other contributors)

28) *Hosea*: Hosea is told to marry a prostitute who leaves him, and he must bring her back: a picture of God's relationship with Israel.

* Author: Hosea

29) *Joel*: God sends a plague of locusts to Judge Israel, but his judgment on the surrounding nations is coming, too.

* Author: Joel

30) *Amos*: A shepherd named Amos preaches against the injustice of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

* Author: Amos

31) *Obadiah*: Obadiah warns the neighboring nation of Edom that they will be judged for plundering Jerusalem.

* Author: Obadiah

32) *Jonah*: A disobedient prophet runs from God, is swallowed by a great fish, and then preaches God's message to the city of Nineveh.

Author: Traditionally Considered Jonah

33) *Micah*: Micah confronts the leaders of Israel and Judah regarding their injustice, and prophecies that one day the Lord himself will rule in perfect justice.

* Author: Micah

34) *Nahum*: Nahum foretells of God's judgment on Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.

* Author: Nahum

35) *Habakkuk*: Habakkuk pleads with God to stop the injustice and violence in Judah, but is surprised to find that God will use the even more violent Babylonians to do so.

* Author: Habakkuk

36) *Zephaniah*: God warns that he will judge Israel and the surrounding nations, but also that he will restore them in peace and justice.

* Author: Zephaniah

37) Haggai: The people have abandoned the work of restoring God's temple in Jerusalem, and so Haggai takes them to task.

* Author: Haggai

38) Zechariah: The prophet Zechariah calls Israel to return to God, and records prophetic visions that show what's happening behind the scenes and will occur in the future

* Author: Zechariah

39) Malachi: God has been faithful to Israel, but they continue to live disconnected from him—so God sends Malachi to call them out.

* Author: Malachi