What is Redemptive History?

Redemptive history is the gradual unfolding of God's sovereign plan to redeem his people and advance his kingdom. The over-arching themes of the Bible follow several patterns of Creation/Covenant, Sin, Exile, and Resurrection/Restoration.[1]

Therefore, we should view Scripture in the context of these structures. Knowing how a specific passage fits within God's eternal plan aids our interpretation. By examining the Old Testament in relation to the new covenant, we can better grasp our role in God's plan as his kingdom expands to fill the earth.

What are the Primary Ways the Old Testament Points to Jesus?

The first of these is through God's prophetic promises of a coming redeemer, as in Gen 3:15, where God told Satan "From now on, you and the woman will be enemies, and your offspring and her offspring will be enemies. He will strike your head and you will strike his heel."

Another means is by types, which are historical figures, objects, or events which foreshadow the coming of Christ. Examples of these are Noah, who built an ark which saved his relatives and the animals from God's wrath (Gen 6:11–19 and 1 Pet 3:19–21); the bronze serpent on a pole that the Israelites had to look at to recover from the bites of poisonous snakes (Num 21:4–9 and John 3:14–15); and the Passover feast, in which a lamb's blood saved the firstborn sons among God's people from certain death (Exod 12:1–13 and John 1:29–30).

What Endorsement Do We have of the Redemptive Historical Approach?

When Christ was confronted by some religious authorities, he asserted, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me" (John 5:46).

After his resurrection from the dead, Jesus encountered two of his followers as they traveled to Emmaus. Since his identity was hidden from them, they expressed their grief over his crucifixion. "[Jesus] said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:13–27).

Luke implied that the Old Testament contains important clues about Christ and his work. I view the Old Testament much like a set of puzzle pieces of God's plan to renew all creation. Seeing how those pieces fit together through the lens of the New Testament makes reading the Old Testament very exciting.

[1] Roy E. Ciampa, "The History of Redemption," in Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity (ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 257.

Exegesis

Good exegesis involves observing what the authors wrote. The task of analyzing Scripture involves a great deal of complexity. First, one must determine where the passage begins and ends.[2] Scribes copied the original manuscripts with neither spaces between words nor punctuation marks, so this can be tricky:

THISISNOTASDIFFICULTTOINTERPRETASITMIGHTSEEMINFACTISUSPECTTHAT
MANYOFYOUAREHAVINGNOTROUBLEREADINGTHISPAPYRUSWASEXPENSIVE
SOTHISWASDONETOSAVESPACE

Our current chapter divisions were not established until approximately 1200, and numbered verses were set in place in 1551 by a man named Stephanus.[3] Since verse divisions occasionally occur in unlikely places, some scholars joke that Stephanus prepared his numbering system while riding his horse, deciding where each one ended by where his pen hit the page (e.g. Eph 1:3–6).

Next, scholars create a preliminary translation from the Hebrew or Greek text. After examining grammatical issues and performing word studies on important or perplexing terms, they incorporate previously unidentified nuances into the translation.

In Gen 6:1–4, we can translate the phrase *bene haelohim* as "sons of God" or "sons of the gods." While initially increasing our confusion, recognizing these options proves critical for understanding these verses. As in English, one word often carries a range of meanings. For example, the term "school" can refer to an institution of learning, a group of fish, or a form of reprimand. Similarly, the root word *isha* in Gen 6:2 can mean "women" or "wives."

Identifying the structure of the entire passage can provide additional enlightenment. This is especially true when studying poetry.[4]

While we should generally interpret the Bible literally, one must keep the type of literature in mind. For example, historical narratives, psalms, proverbs, and prophecy have varied means and purposes in conveying the heart and mind of God to us.

Biblical writers operated on a continuum between historical reporting (Ezra 1:7–11) and imaginative poetry (Song 4:11–15). Skilled interpreters determine where a passage falls on that scale to avoid misconstruing the author's intended meaning.[5] In other words, deriving a verbatim meaning from a passage which the author did not intend his readers to take literally is *not* a literal interpretation.

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[2] Douglas K. Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors, 4th Ed.* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), xv.
[3] Frederick J. Long, *Kairos: A Beginning Greek Grammar* (Mishikawa, IN: Bethel College, 2004), 19.
[4] Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors, 4th Ed*., xv-xvi.
[5] William N. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, 2nd Ed.* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 191.

What is Hermeneutics and Why is It Critical for the Study of Redemptive History?

Hermeneutics consists of the art of knowing how to properly interpret and apply Scripture by considering what our exegesis has uncovered. Due to an abundance of archaeological discoveries in the past century and the availability of scholarly resources at our fingertips, this task has become much simpler in recent years.

We seek to answer this question: "How would the original recipients of this passage have understood it?" Scholars do this by learning the historical context and the prevailing culture of that time and then translating the meaning of the author into our time and place.[6] This prevents us from coming to Scripture with the intent of forcing it to fit into our preconceived notions.

To illustrate this importance of understanding the cultural context when reading Scripture, I did a simple test using social media. I asked my friends, "If I told you that I saw a news report about a young man who swam in a pond at night, what would you guess from that?"

These are some of the answers: "It's of no significance." "I'd want to know why he did that." "Everything is calmer and more relaxing at night." "He is allergic to the sun." Several people attributed his behavior to skinny-dipping.

After twenty years of living in Florida, my immediate reaction to hearing of a night swim is "Oh no!" One of the responses from a state resident was on-target: "In Florida that means being attacked by an alligator."

Another local inhabitant noted that the man must have been drunk. Based upon what I have seen, those who swim at night are invariably reported as intoxicated, under the influence of illegal drugs, or fleeing from the police. People who live here know not to swim where the water isn't crystal clear, as alligators abound and are hard to see.

We can also make the opposite error of inserting our cultural expectations into Scripture. A few days after arriving at college, one of my daughters—who does not recall living anywhere but Florida—panicked when she observed her fellow students swimming in a campus pond. She was about to yell at them to get out of the water when she suddenly realized that alligators don't live in New England.[7]

Thankfully, we now have ancient resources available to us to help us avoid these twin errors.

The verses in Gen 6:1–2 provide an excellent example. They contain numerous parallels to other documents from the Ancient Near East. As a result, the original audience understood much of the ambiguity we encounter.[8]

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[6] Randall C. Zachman, "Gathering Meaning from the Context: Calvin's Exegetical Method," *JR* 82, no. 1: (January 1, 2002):2

[7] Thanks to my daughter for her permission to share this anecdote.

[8] John H. Walton, *Genesis* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 2001.

"Scripture interprets Scripture" describes another extremely important principle which we shall employ in these studies. The writings of Peter do not contradict those of Paul. So, we seek to discover how individual passages fit within the Bible as a complete entity.[9]

How should we read and interpret Hebrew poetry?

Virtually every book of the Old Testament contains poetry, often in the context of songs or prophecy.[10] The entire book of Psalms falls into this genre. Since the Old Testament was written for a predominantly oral culture, poetic elements aided those who heard these texts to remember what had been read or sung to them.[11]

Just as we interpret poetry differently from narrative in our culture, we must be aware when this shift in genre has occurred in the Old Testament and make allowances for that in our exegesis. Within Hebrew poetry, specific words were often selected not only for their meaning but also for their rhythm (e.g. "formless and empty" is *tohu wabohu* in Gen 1:2).

There are a few common Hebrew poetic literary devices. English readers can easily miss them:

Parallelism is a technique in which a second line repeats (Ps 77:1), clarifies (Prov 19:5), intensifies (Isa 40:9), or provides contrast to the first line (Prov 11:20).[12]

Chiasm is an A–B–C–B–A thought structure, where the focus often, but not always, lies upon C (for Gen 15:1–6, this is verses 3–4). Noah's flood appears in the form of a large chiasm (Gen 6:10–9:19), with the central focus falling upon Gen 8:1.

Merism is a literary device which employs a pair of opposites to denote both of them and everything in between, akin to saying, "from A to Z" (Ps 139:6–12).

Acrostics are poems in which each line begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet (Ps 34).

Alliteration is repetition of the same sound; for example, Ps 122:6–7 has five instances of "sh" and three words ending with "k."

Hebrew poetry was written mainly for corporate worship and occasionally for private devotion by a specific author in response to life circumstances.[13] Therefore, whenever possible, we should read these great works in their historical contexts to appreciate their fuller meaning. David likely wrote Ps 63 while he was fleeing from King Saul in the Judean wilderness. This piece of information helps us to understand what he was feeling.

[9] Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral, 2nd Ed.* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 347.
[10] Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation,* 273.
[11] Gene M. Schramm, "Languages: Hebrew," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 4:212.
[12] Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 286–92.
[13] Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms Vol. 1* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 23.

As with Hebrew proverbs, a statement in a poem or song may refer to a promise or observation which is generally true as an axiom but not applicable in every case.[14] Unlike David, I have seen the children of the righteous "begging bread" (Ps 37:25).

An over-riding principle for interpreting sacred poetry is to read the piece in its entirety before attempting to make theological application. In fact, only by viewing the entire body of psalms can we assess our own lives in relation to the Lord.

For example, where some of these songs affirm the security of the person who walks with God (Ps 1), others emphasize the transitory nature of life (Ps 39).[15] Both are equally true.

Ancient Literature: What do Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) works, the Mishnah, Babylonian Talmud, Apocrypha, and Greco-Roman texts add to our insight of Scripture?

Imagine that you step into a time machine and go to visit Moses. You greet him by quoting Star Wars, saying, "May the Force be with you." How do you think he would react? Why would that be?

Biblical authors did not write in a cultural vacuum. Just as we are shaped by what we see and read, so their intended recipients had been affected by what they had previously heard or read.[16]

Consider an example from American history. When President Abraham Lincoln met Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, he greeted her by saying, "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war."[17] Her publication had radically shifted American cultural views of her era.

Likewise, the original recipients of both Old Testament and New Testament writings were quite familiar with, and had been influenced by, other literature of their time. Consequently, biblical authors wrote in ways which made sense to people steeped in their civilizations. However, they inserted God's perspective as a form of commentary on Ancient Near Eastern and Greco–Roman cultural assumptions. As a result, much of what Moses wrote parallels what we see in Ancient Near Eastern texts but with important deviations.

For example, in The Code of Hammurabi, the penalty for the person who destroyed the eye of an aristocrat was the loss of his eye, but if the injured person was a commoner, he paid a comparatively small fine (Law 196–199).[18] In contrast, God's command did not discriminate against the lowly. A slave who lost a tooth or eye due to his Hebrew master was freed as compensation (Exod 21:23–27).

Jewish religious leaders recognized that their failure to obey the law of Moses resulted in their exile from the promised land (Dan 9:3–7; Ezra 9:5–7). Therefore, they developed the

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[14] John E. Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41* (BCOTWP; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 24.
[15] Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral,* 238.
[16] Gary A. Parrett and S. Steve Kang, *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful: A Biblical Vision for Education in the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 253.
[17] World History Group, "Causes of the Civil War," http://www.historynet.com/causes-of-the-civil-war.
[18] Hammurabi, "Code of Hammurabi" (1915), Leonard W. King, trans., 196–199, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/ancient/hamframe.asp.

Mishnah (*m*.) as an oral commentary on the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) from the late first century BC to the first century AD. It was published around AD 200.[19]

The *Mishnah* was intended to place a protective fence around the Mosaic law to prevent people from sinning (*m*. Avot 1.1). Then Rome would be overthrown and their exile could finally come to an end. As a result, the book Shabbat contains twenty-four chapters of rules to obey on the Sabbath.[20] Even today, Orthodox Jews do not mix meat and dairy in one meal due to Exod 23:19, which states, "You shall not boil a young goat in the milk of its mother" (Cholin 8.1–4).

Much of Jesus's conflict with the religious leaders of his day centers upon these man-made rules, which Christ called "the tradition of the elders" (Matt 15:1–9).

The *Babylonian Talmud* (*b*.), written from 400–600 AD, discusses the *Mishnah*, making it a commentary on a commentary.[21] According to the Talmud:
All the predestined dates [for redemption] have passed, and the matter [now] depends only on repentance and good deeds…The son of David will come only in a generation that is either altogether righteous or altogether wicked. In a generation that is altogether righteous—as it is written, "Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land forever" [Isa 60:21]. Or altogether wicked—as it is written, "And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor" [Isa 59:16] (b. Sanhedrin 97b).

Rabbis devised these regulations to hasten their deliverance from foreign domination by creating the conditions for the arrival of the messiah.[22]

The books of the Apocrypha vary widely in character and quality and must be judged against Scriptural teaching. First and 2nd Maccabees are valuable for detailing the history which occurred between the two testaments, particularly regarding Hanukkah (The Feast of Dedication). This was a festival which Jesus celebrated (John 10:22–23).

On the other extreme, there are fanciful works such as The Life of Adam and Eve, a book which details what happened to the couple after their expulsion from Eden (e.g. 9.1–11.3). Many of these works were embraced by the Jews of that era and are critical for deciphering Jewish thought. Biblical authors did not necessarily agree with everything which appears in those books.[23] In effect, they did the same thing preachers do today when they reference popular culture to make a specific point in their sermons.[24]

The great theologian Jerome (347–420 AD) wrote, "Many things in sacred Scripture…are said in accordance with the opinion of the time in which the events took place, rather than in accordance with the actual truth of the matter."[25]

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[19] Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation,* 29.
[20] *m*. Shabbat, http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/etm/index.htm.
[21] Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation,* 29.
[22] N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 188.
[23] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 450.
[24] Webb, "Jude," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 614.
[25] Jerome, *Commentary on Jeremiah* (Michael Graves; Ancient Christian Texts; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 28:10–1, 173.

An important document called the Muratorian Fragment (ca. 190 AD) aids us in distinguishing between apocryphal books and those which were later incorporated into the New Testament. It lists all the New Testament books, except for James and Hebrews. The author notes that The Shepherd of Hermas was useful for private reading. However, he claimed that it should not be publicly read in churches, as it was written in his own era and not by one of the apostles or prophets from the days of Christ.[26] Note that Roman Catholic Bibles include apocryphal works not accepted by most Protestants.

Just as the *Mishnah* and *Talmud* aid us in grasping the worldview of Jewish people from the time of Jesus, Greco-Roman works enable us to comprehend how Gentiles from that era thought and behaved. Often their understanding of the world and society was distinct from ours. Therefore, the way they heard and understood what the biblical authors were writing occasionally differs from how we understand the New Testament at first glance.

Learning about these cultural influences clears up many of the perplexing questions which arise while reading Scripture.

Author and Date of Genesis

All biblical traditions assert that Moses authored the Pentateuch, which includes Genesis.[27] In keeping with Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) practices, Moses rarely named himself as the author, and he described himself in both the first and third persons.[28]

In Rom 10:5, the Apostle Paul noted, "Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness," a quotation of Lev 18:5. Since Moses was raised in the courts of the pharaoh (Exod 2:10; Acts 7:20–22), he had unique access to the ANE myths which he referenced and rebuffed in Gen 1–11.[29]

In addition, some elements of Biblical Hebrew are borrowed from second millennium BC Egyptian.[30] Only in the Pentateuch is the early Hebrew lack of distinction between "he" and "she" found, supporting the ancient date of writing and Mosaic authorship.[31] Scholars have found other early Hebrew inscriptions at Sinai,[32] where Israel camped for at least a year (Exod 19:1–2; Num 9:1–2).

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[26] Alister E. McGrath, ed., "The Muratorian Fragment on the New Testament Canon," in *The Christian Theology Reader, 4th Ed.* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 68–9
[27] Walton, *Genesis*, 41.
[28] A good example of this is *The Code of Hammurabi*, circa 1780 BC, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/ancient/hamframe.asp.
[29] Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 23.
[30] Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), 84.
[31] Gary A. Rendsburg, "Late Biblical Hebrew and the Date of 'P'," *JANESCU* 12 (1980): 65–80, 78, http://bildnercenter.rutgers.edu/docman/rendsburg/45-late-biblical-hebrew-and-the-date-of-p/file.
[32] Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch*, 84.

Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Formats[33]

Mari and Leilan	*Hebrew Patriarchal*	Intermediate Hittite	**Middle Hittite**	**Pentateuch*[34]**	Sefire and Mesopotamia
Divine Witnesses	*Divine witnesses*	Title	**Title**	**Title**	Title
Oath	*Oath*	Divine Witnesses	**Historical Prologue**	**Historical Prologue**	Divine Witnesses
Stipulations	*Stipulations*	Stipulations	**Stipulations**	**Stipulations**	Curses
			Divine Witnesses		
Ceremony	*Ceremony*	Oath	**Curses**	**Curses**	Stipulations
Curses	*Curses*	Curses	**Blessings**	**Blessings**	
Early	*Early*	Mid	**Late**	**Late**	1st
2nd Mill BC	*2nd Mill BC*	2nd Mill BC	**2nd Mill BC**	**2nd Mill BC**	Mill BC
1800-1700		1600-1400	**1400-1200**		900-650

Note that the accounts of treaties made between the patriarchs and government authorities in Gen 21:22–23, 27–33; Gen 26:28–31; and Gen 31:44–54 all follow the format used from 1800–1700 BC (Columns 1 and 2 below).[35] Much of the Pentateuch itself adheres to the pattern of treaties written from 1400–1200 BC (Columns 4 and 5), with Exodus and Leviticus forming one pact and Deuteronomy another.[36] Thus, the Documentary Hypothesis, a method devised in the modern era which attributes each book of the Pentateuch to four groups of authors living in the 11th–7th centuries BC (Column 6),[37] does not correspond to the biblical material.

[33] Adapted from Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 285, 288, and 324 and with permission from Gordon P. Hugenberger ["Introduction to the Pentateuch (Continued): Authorship of the Pentateuch" (lecture, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, 2006).
[34] This includes Genesis/Exodus/Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua 24. Since there is no God but Yahweh, divine witnesses are omitted.
[35] Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 323.
[36] Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 284.
[37] Thomas L. Thompson, "Historiography: Israelite Historiography," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (*ABD*) 3:206–11, 208.

After the two parties ratified a treaty, each of them received a copy to place in the temple of their god (Cf. Exod 25:16, 21–22).[38] This raises an interesting issue with how we typically think of the two tablets of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1–17). Based upon ANE practices, each tablet contained the full covenant. Moses placed both of them in the ark of the covenant (Deut 10:1–5).

Internal evidence suggests that Exod 20:2–17 was the first written biblical passage, which God himself wrote (Exod 31:18). Moses incorporated this treaty into the book of the covenant (Exod 20:22–23:33), which was written just prior to its ratification (Exod 24:4–11). The next section of Exodus to be recorded describes the requirements for the building of the tabernacle and its furnishings and the fabrication of priestly vestments (Exod 25:1–31:18).

During the year that the Israelites remained in Sinai, Moses likely wrote the book of Genesis and the account of their emancipation from Egypt. In fact, Exod 1:1–8 presupposes familiarity with Jacob and Joseph. After generations of slavery, knowledge of their history as a nation was critical to Israel's identity as God's people.[39]

Thus, Genesis functions as a historical prologue to the covenant God made with the nation of Israel.[40] In essence, it says, "This is what I have done for you as a people, so you must obey the terms of my covenant with you." Its incorporation into the Pentateuch fits beautifully within the parameters of Hittite treaties dating from 1400–1200 BC between a suzerain king (an emperor) and the vassal kings under him.[41]

The records of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—whose treaties with surrounding rulers follow the conventions of 1800–1700 BC, rather than those from Moses's era—would have been passed down to the firstborn son. Shortly before Jacob died, he displaced Reuben from his exalted position and transferred the rights of the firstborn son to Joseph (Gen 49:1–4, 22–26). Joseph's duties in Egypt indicate that he was well-educated enough to read and write (Gen 39:4; Gen 41:46–49).

It appears that Joseph added his personal history to these family records. This would explain the lengthy treatment of Joseph's life, which accounts for one-third of Genesis (Gen 37, 39–50). Moses seems to have had access to not only Joseph's bones but also to these ancestral records (Exod 13:19).

Ancient Near Eastern Genealogies

In contrast to most lay readers of Scripture, biblical scholars experience great fascination with the historical aspects of genealogies.[42] Names in the Ancient Near East (ANE) often made statements about a god. These include Ashurbanipal, Ramesses, and Nebuchadnezzar.

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[38] René Lopez, "Israelite Covenants in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Covenants (Part 2 of 2)," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 10 (4 January 2004): 72–106, 80, http://chafer.nextmeta.com/files/v10n1_5lopez_covenants2israelite_covenants.pdf.
[39] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1998), xxii.
[40] Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 356.
[41] Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 288.
[42] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 248.

Hebrew divine designations include "iah, "el," and "Jeho." Consequently, something as mundane as people's names informs us of their language and religious beliefs.[43]

Biblical Hebrew emerged during 1400–1200 BC.[44] Therefore, names which indicate a belief in Israel's God were likely translated from earlier sources.[45]

Genesis 5 begins by saying, "This is the book of the generations of Adam." This introductory formula denotes our entry into a new major segment of this book of the Pentateuch.[46] By citing a document (*sepher*), Moses implied that he incorporated preexisting material into this chapter.[47]

The phrase, "The book of the generations of…" occurs thirteen times in Genesis alone (eg. Gen 6:9; Gen 10:1; Gen 11:10, 27).[48] Since the word "generations of" (*toledot*) derives from the verb which connotes "fathering offspring," the word conveys a family or clan history.[49] Long sections of narrative intersperse with these genealogies.[50]

In this chapter, Moses reached back in time to the age of Adam, once again surveying the era of Gen 4 but from the vantage point of the line of Seth.[51] Both this genealogy and that of Cain trace one line of descent until the last named generation, which lists three sons (Gen 4:17–22; Gen 5:32). This repeated format draws our attention to the contrasts between the two records. Cain's cursed line prominently features two murderers (Gen 4:8, 23–24). The line of Seth links the two founders of humanity: Adam and Noah (Gen 4:1–2; Gen 10:1).

Some scholars cite the similarities between names in the genealogies of Gen 4 and Gen 5 to assert that these passages denote the same people. However, enough differences exist between them to reject that theory.[52] For example, Moses listed Enoch as the seventh in the line of Adam through Seth and as second through Cain (Gen 5:19; Gen 4:17). Others cite Mahalalel via Seth vs. Mehujael from Cain (Gen 5:13; Gen 4:18). This type of repetition and of similar sounding names commonly occurred throughout the Ancient Near East.[53]

Genesis contains two distinct genealogy formats. A segmented genealogy traces an individual's descendants through several of his children (Gen 10:1),[54] while a linear genealogy follows one straight line of descent. The latter type often bridged the gaps between major events, such as the creation of humanity and the flood.[55] As commonly occurs with

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[43] Walton, *Genesis*, 280.
[44] Gene M. Schramm, "Languages: Hebrew," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 4:205–14, 205.
[45] Walton, *Genesis*, 280.
[46] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 121.
[47] Josef Schreiner, "תּוֹלְדוֹת" *(toledot)*, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (*TDOT*), 15:582–8, 584.
[48] Logos 9 word study of תּוֹלְדוֹת (*toledot*). In Hebrew, the English phrase consists of a single word in construct form.
[49] Schreiner, "תּוֹלְדוֹת" *(toledot)*, *TDOT*, 15:582–8, 582–3.
[50] Alexander, Desmond T. *From Paradise to the Promised Land, 2nd Ed.* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 101.
[51] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, 189.
[52] Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 442.
[53] Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 442.
[54] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 248–9.
[55] Matthews, Victor H., Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament (IVPBBCOT)* (Downers Grove, IL; Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Gen 5:1–32.

linear genealogies, those falling outside the main line of descent receive little mention, if any at all.[56]

Genealogies in the Ancient Near East suggested continuity and relationship to increase a person's power and prestige.[57] By recounting the generations from Adam to Noah, Moses identified Noah as the legitimate seed who built a godly culture (Gen 3:15).[58] Indeed, the concept of a seed resembling the parent closely aligns with a royal line of descent throughout Genesis.[59] Eventually, Seth's line would produce Abraham (Gen 11:1, 27).[60]

Unlike the number seven, which signifies divine completeness, the number ten symbolizes fullness on a lesser level.[61] Throughout the Ancient Near East, genealogies tend to limit the number of generations to ten, just as we see in Gen 5 and in Gen 11. This also occurs in other biblical texts (Cf. 1 Chron 6:3–14 to Ezra 7:1–5).[62] Ezra 7:3 skips six of the generations listed in 1 Chron 6:7–10.[63]

While "son" (*ben*) typically refers to a direct descendant, the Hebrew language also allows for it to mean a grandson (Gen 31:17–18, 26–28) or the distant offspring of a founding father.[64] For example, the "sons of Levi" answered Moses's summons. However, many generations had been born and died since Levi's lifetime (Exod 32:26). After all, his descendants had been in Egypt for 430 years (Exod 12:40–41).

By limiting the Gen 5 and Gen 11 accounts to ten generations of important people or to those who lived at critical times, Moses presented the flood as the important dividing line in what scholars call primeval history (Gen 1–11).[65] Knowing that these genealogies contain broken lines of descent which include only the most significant ancestors enables us to recognize that the periods of time from Adam to Noah and from Noah to Abraham almost certainly differ in length.[66]

Even the Epic of Gilgamesh—which existed hundreds of years before Abraham's lifetime—recognized the flood as having occurred in the distant past.[67] Gilgamesh hinted at this by nicknaming the man who had survived the flood "the Faraway" and expressing shock that he looked like a normal man.[68] By ca. 2000 BC, people understood that the world was already

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[56] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, 190.
[57] Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBCOT*, Gen 5:1–32.
[58] Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 109.
[59] Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land, 2nd Ed*, 105.
[60] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 248.
[61] Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 111.
[62] Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land, 2nd Ed*, 105 note 3.
[63] We see the same skipping of generations in Matthew's gospel. To achieve 14 generations from Abraham to David, from David to the exile, and from the exile to Christ, Matthew omitted three of Judah's kings (Matt 1:8, 17).
[64] H. Haag, "בֵּן" (*ben*) *TDOT,* 2:145–59, 150, 152.
[65] Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 111.
[66] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, 10–1.
[67] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, 11.
[68] E. A. Speiser, trans., "The Epic of Gilgamesh," in *ANET*, tablet 11:1–4, 93, https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET_20160815/Pritchard_1950_ANET#page/n117/mode/2up.

ancient. Therefore, they used existing records to develop early histories of their people.[69] Gen 5:1 confirms this by using the term "the document of the genealogy."[70]

In keeping with the ten generations mentioned in this chapter, Gen 5 contains ten paragraphs. Although some variation may occur for important historical figures,[71] the typical format appears as follows: Person A lived x years and fathered Person B; Person A lived y years after that and had other sons and daughters; Person A lived x plus y years and then he died.[72] The text does not indicate whether these people experienced the life spans typical for all people in that era or whether the descendants of Seth lived for unnaturally long periods of time.[73]

An intriguing parallel to Gen 5 exists in the form of the Sumerian King List.[74] The prism begins by stating, "When kingship was lowered from heaven, kingship was [first] in Eridu."[75] Most likely, a scribe composed this record after the Sumerian Empire put an end to Akkadian rule over Sumer (ca. 2100–2000 BC). King Utuhegal wished to prove that Sumer had always been united into one empire, even though the rulers lived in different cities.[76] Thus, the Sumerian King List consisted of propaganda.

This list of rulers notes that nine kings ruled before the great flood.[77] Their reigns ranged from 18,600 to 43,200 years. Eight of these kings ruled from five cities over a period of 241,000 years. "[Then] the flood swept over [the earth]."[78] Some versions of this document cite ten generations before the flood.[79] The list continued after the deluge, citing thirty-nine kings with considerably shorter reigns. In fact, the longest post-flood rule endured for a relatively short 1560 years.[80] This same pattern of progressively shorter lives occurs after the flood in Genesis,[81] ranging from 600 to 110 years (Gen 11:10–11; Gen 50:26).[82]

Some significant differences exist between these two genealogies. While the Sumerian King List cites the first royalty, Genesis names the first man (Gen 2:7).[83] In addition, the former calls several of the kings who lived after the flood priests and/or gods. It says:

Mes-kiag-gasher, the son of the (sun) god Utu, became high priest as well as king, and ruled 324 years…; the god Lugal-banda, a shepherd, ruled 1,200 years; the god Dumu-zi

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[69] Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 444.
[70] Schreiner, "תּוֹלְדוֹת" *(toledot)*, *TDOT*, 15:582–8, 584.
[71] Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 110.
[72] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 121.
[73] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 256.
[74] "The Sumerian King List (SKL)," http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/doku.php?id=the_sumerian_king_list_skl. This site has an excellent photo of the best example and descriptions of several versions of this list.
[75] Thorkild Jacobsen, trans., "The Sumerian King List," in *ANET*, 265, https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET_20160815/Pritchard_1950_ANET#page/n289/mode/2up.
[76] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 251.
[77] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 124.
[78] Jacobsen, "The Sumerian King List," in *ANET*, 265, https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET_20160815/Pritchard_1950_ANET#page/n289/mode/2up.
[79] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 124.
[80] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 252–3.
[81] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 124.
[82] This does not include Noah, who died at 950 years of age (Gen 9:29).
[83] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 125.

a…fisherman…ruled 100 years; the divine Gilgamesh, his father was a…high priest of Kullab, ruled 126 years."[84]

While some of the men named in Genesis, such as Adam, could be considered priests (Gen 2:15), none of them were gods. Furthermore, the king list notes the length of rule; the book of the generations of Adam cites the length of life.[85] In addition, some kings reigned approximately fifty times longer than the early descendants of Adam lived.[86]

The genealogy in Genesis 5 presents us with several difficult issues. First, we must address these patriarchs not becoming fathers until at least sixty-five years of age, as well as with their extremely long lives.[87] While Adam's lifespan of 930 years has more credibility than one of nearly 43,000 years, we cannot logically explain it with ease.[88]

Complicating the matter, the most reliable Hebrew text (Masoretic), the Samaritan version, and the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX) frequently disagree concerning the ages of these patriarchs. In the case of the LXX, it appears that translators modified it to counter Egyptian dates for the origin of humanity.[89]

Not only does the amount of time which passed seem less important than the notion of completing the charge to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28),[90] these dates of descent do not correspond to the archaeological record.[91] As a result, the intended meaning may be that "Person A fathered the line culminating in Person B," rather than "A fathered B."[92]

The key may lie in understanding the purpose of a linear genealogy: to establish generational legitimacy. Since some names may have been omitted,[93] totaling the ages of these men to establish a date for the creation of Adam at 4004 BC produces enormous problems.[94]

Sumerians utilized a number system which combines base ten and base six.[95] The Sumerian King List contains indications that the first king of Uruk reigned for "7 x 60 plus 7 days."[96] Consequently, Kenneth A. Kitchen surmises that the length of the reigns before the flood in that document had been multiplied by 60 to represent heroically long rule.[97]

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[84] Jacobsen, "The Sumerian King List," in *ANET*, 265, https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET_20160815/Pritchard_1950_ANET#page/n289/mode/2up.
[85] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 253–4.
[86] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 125.
[87] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 130.
[88] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 256.
[89] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 130.
[90] Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBCOT*, Gen 5:1–32.
[91] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 133.
[92] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 254.
[93] Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 106.
[94] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 133.
[95] Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBCOT*, Gen 5:1–32.
[96] Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 121, Https://oi.uchicago.edu/sites/oi.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/shared/docs/as11.pdf.
[97] Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 445.

However, this does not apply to Genesis, for the Hebrew civilization seems to have always used base ten. Furthermore, people would have fathered children when they were six or seven years old.[98]

The scholar M. Barnouin views the ages of these patriarchs in terms of the length of time it takes for a planet to reappear in the same place in the sky, called synodic periods. Babylonians discovered this concept. Based upon Barnouin's theory, Enoch's lifespan of 365 years would represent perfection, since there are 365 days in a year (Gen 5:23).[99] Lamech lived for 777 years, equivalent to the synodic periods of Jupiter plus Saturn (Gen 5:31). The 962 years of Jared's lifetime equal the synodic periods of Venus plus Saturn (Gen 5:20).[100]

By adding the number of years when each of these descendants of Seth fathered their first child and dividing by the number sixty, the sum of the remainders is a perfect 365. The same result occurs for their lengths of life. Since the cycles of these men's years match the cycles of the heavenly orbs, Moses may have intended to symbolize that their lives were meaningful and complete.[101]

In sum, it remains unclear whether the ages of these historical figures in Adam's genealogy are symbolic or literal. Moses's purpose may have been to suggest that human history extends to an extremely distant past.[102]

When discussing the Sumerian King List in relation to Gen 5, Kitchen wrote, "BE WARNED! We are entering a zone of speculation…."[103] As a result, most Old Testament scholars present only some general observations on the transmission of the image of God from generation to generation and on the fulfillment of the mandate to fill the earth (Gen 1:26–28).[104]

The long lives of the descendants of Seth may depict that they were unusually godly people (Deut 5:16, 33–6:2). On the other hand, this genealogy many indicate that the penalty of death gradually took its hold upon humanity (Gen 2:16–17; Gen 3:19).[105]

By recording precise numbers, this genealogical record conveys that Moses discussed real people. At the same time, the vast spans of their longevity indicate that they lived in an environment very different and remote from ours.[106] While God's blessing remained upon them in terms of their fruitfulness, Moses reminds us that the scourge remained by repeating the refrain, "and then he died."[107]

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[98] Walton, *Genesis*, 281–2.
[99] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 133–4.
[100] Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 111–2.
[101] Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 111–2.
[102] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 134.
[103] Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament,* 445.
[104] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 134.
[105] Walton, *Genesis*, 282.
[106] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 134.
[107] Walton, *Genesis*, 284.

Read **Gen 5:1.** What characteristics of Ancient Near Eastern genealogies make it unlikely that God created Adam in 4004 BC? Why were these types of ancestral records important? What do you think Moses was implying by referring to the creation and blessing of humanity at the beginning of Seth's genealogy rather than before recounting the descendants of Cain?

Greek Translation of the Old Testament (LXX)

Why do New Testament quotations of the Old Testament occasionally vary from the Old Testament verses in our English Bibles?

Compare Hos 6:6 with Matt 9:13. Why do these translations differ? Just as words in English typically have more than one meaning, such is the case in Hebrew. The Hebrew text of Hos 6:6 contains the word *khesedh*. It connotes loyalty, intervention on someone's behalf, unmerited favor, goodness, and kindness.[108]

During their seventy-year exile in Babylon, the language spoken by Jewish people shifted from Hebrew to that of their captors, Aramaic (2 Kgs 18:17–18, 26–29). In fact, one of the exiled prophets who served in the court of the Babylonian king penned a significant portion of his writing in Aramaic (Dan 2:4–7:28).[109] By the time of their return to Israel, they needed Hebrew translated for them by the priests' assistants (Neh 8:1–3, 8).

In the 4th century BC, Alexander the Great's army introduced Koine Greek into Palestine, officially displacing Aramaic. However, Jewish people continued to speak Aramaic within their own communities (Mark 5:41).[110]

During the third century BC, a group of scholars created a Greek translation of the Hebrew Pentateuch (the five books of Moses). This work was attributed to seventy men in Alexandria, Egypt. Hence the title given to this work was the Septuagint, which means "seventy" (LXX for the Roman numeral seventy). Other portions of the Old Testament were completed by the first century BC.[111]

As New Testament authors and their readers were well-versed in Greek, they frequently quoted this translation. The Greek version of Hos 6:6 translates *khesed* as "mercy," a term which fits into the range of meaning for the Hebrew word. Most modern English Bibles translate the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew text, which accounts for these minor variations.

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[108] H. -J. Zobel, "*khesedh*," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 5:44–64, 51.
[109] John E. Goldingay, *Daniel* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1998), xxv.
[110] Gerald Mussies, "Languages: Greek," *Anchor Bible Dictionary,* 4:195–203, 197.
[111] Melvin K. H. Peters, "Septuagint," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 5:1093–1104, 1093.

Old Testament Textual Criticism

Why can we have confidence that the Hebrew manuscripts reflect the original writings?

Due to the layout of the three tables in this section, you will have to download them.

The process of textual criticism for the Old Testament involves comparing various ancient translations of the Hebrew text to the standard known as the Masoretic Text. This differs drastically from the procedure for New Testament manuscripts.

In 1008 AD, a Jewish scribe copied the Masoretic Text from another manuscript into a book called the Leningrad Codex. Now kept in Russia, the Leningrad Codex remains the oldest complete Hebrew Bible.[112] Nevertheless, scholars regard the Hebrew Bible based upon the Leningrad Codex—known as the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (*BHS*)—as an exemplary reflection of manuscripts dating back to 100 AD, especially for the Pentateuch.[113]

In 1947, a shepherd searching for a lost member of his flock discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls in a cave. These texts largely confirm the Masoretic Text's reliability. They contain all the Old Testament, except for the book of Esther, and they date to the third century BC.[114] Where significant differences do exist, most Bibles provide an explanatory footnote (see the paragraph in brackets in 1 Sam 10:27–11:2 in some English translations, which comes from 4QSam of the Dead Sea Scrolls).

Old Testament scholars consider the text of Gen 15:2 problematic. The issue regards the identity of the man whom Abram names in his complaint to God. Does "the son of acquisition of my house, Eliezer of Damascus" reflect the original writing?

Since the process which Bible scholars call Old Testament textual criticism is quite complicated, we'll walk together through an examination of the identity of Abram's heir in three tables. The first of them cites various ancient Hebrew translations, while the second table consists of Greek translations, and the third lists Aramaic, Syriac, and Latin texts.

Column A of the first table contains the information for the Masoretic Text, which is the standard for our Old Testament. At the bottom of each table, we have the date of the translations as well as whether they arose independently from the Masoretic Text. The center row identifies how each manuscript deviates from the Masoretic Text. Those entries which affirm the reliability of the Masoretic Text appear in bold.

Looking at Column A of table 1, we can see that the Masoretic Text we have today was copied in 1008 AD, but that scholars believe the original document was penned close to 100 AD.[115]

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[112] Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament, 2nd Ed.* (Erroll F. Rhodes; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 36–7.
[113] Davis Craig, "Excerpt 1 – Genesis. Dating the Old Testament," http://www.datingtheoldtestament.com/excerpt1.htm.
[114] John J. Collins, "Dead Sea Scrolls," *Anchor Bible Dictionary,* 2: 89–101, 89.
[115] Craig Davis, "Dating the Old Testament," http://www.datingtheoldtestament.com/Texts.htm.

[Note that since I completed this post, the Sassoon Codex (ca. 900 AD) has become available. It is an almost complete MT, with some sections seriously damaged or missing. Otherwise, it does not differ from the Leningrad Codex.]

Column B does not help us, as this verse does not appear in Qumran's Dead Sea Scrolls. If it did— and were identical to the Masoretic Text—our decision would be simpler due to the early date of the Dead Sea Scrolls (250 BC–68 AD).

However, we do have a strong witness from the Qumran era in the Samaritan Pentateuch (Column C). Although the earliest manuscripts date to the 12th century AD, the tradition formed independently of the Masoretic Text in the second century BC. [116] The Samaritan Torah (Column D) is like the Samaritan Pentateuch, except for the word "and."[117]

Overall, this page supports the Masoretic Text.

Moving on to Table 2, we see various Greek translations of the Old Testament (the Septuagint). They change the picture considerably, for they originated in the second century BC. The 4th century AD Codex Vaticanus, a manuscript used in several Greek Bible versions (Column G), includes the phrase "of Masek, my home-born slave."[118] Even Göttingen's edition (Column F), which had the best textual evidence at the time of its publication in 1974, includes this variant.[119] Significantly, a more recent translation by the German Bible Society based upon a compilation of the most reliable Greek manuscripts parallels the Masoretic Text (Column E).[120]

When considering the Greek translations, Origen's Hexapla (ca. 230–240 AD) provides extremely valuable information. Origen compiled five common Greek translations, including the Septuagint (Column H). His version matches the Codex Vaticanus. However, next to these Greek translations, Origen listed the Hebrew text of Gen 15:2 which was available to him. That Hebrew exactly matches the Masoretic Text from 1008 AD.[121]

Our third table contains three languages: Aramaic, Syriac, and Latin. The Aramaic Pseudo-Jonathan adds quite a bit of material. However, that paraphrase notoriously adds commentary into the text.[122] A Syriac translation which scholars have composed from the most reliable manuscripts agrees with the MT. It dates to a first century AD tradition.[123]

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[116] Alan D. Crown, Samaritan Scribes and Manuscripts (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 5.
[117] Mark Shoulson, *The Torah: Jewish and Samaritan Versions Compared* (Mhaig, Ireland: Evertype, 2008), 34–5.
[118] Alan England Brooke and Norman McClean, eds, *The Old Testament in Greek According to the Text of Codex Vaticanus, Supplemented from Other Uncial Manuscripts, with a Critical Apparatus Containing the Variants of the Chief Ancient Authorities for the Text of the Septuagint* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1906), 35.
[119] John William Wevers, ed., *Septuginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, I Genesis* (Göttingen: Vandenhöck & Ruprecht, 1974), 167.
[120] Wolfgang Krause et al., eds, "Septuaginta Deutsch: Das Griechische Alte Testament in Deutscher Ubersetzung," (German Bible Society, 2009), electronic ed.
[121] Origen, *Hexapla, 2 Vols.* (ed. Frederick Field; Oxford: Clarendon, 1875), 1:32, https://archive.org/stream/origenhexapla01unknuoft#page/32/mode/2up.
[122] Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament, 2nd Ed.,* 83.
[123] Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project, "62001 P Gen, Chapter 15," http://cal1.cn.huc.edu/.

During 390–405 AD, Jerome translated the Latin Vulgate directly from the Hebrew text available to him along with several versions of the Greek Old Testament.[124] This resulted in a description of Eliezer as "the son of the steward of" Abram's house.[125] Other Latin translations adhere to Jerome's work.

After examining all this evidence, how would you identify the man whom Abram cited as his heir in Gen 15:2? How can you support your position?

New Testament Textual Criticism

Due to the layout of the two tables in this section, you will have to download them.

Those who perform New Testament textual criticism face a very different situation from those who seek to ascertain the veracity of Old Testament texts.

In 1896, a pair of archaeologists conducted a dig in the garbage dump of the ancient city of Oxyrhynchus, Egypt. Looking for evidence of the Roman occupation, instead they found the largest cache of papyri ever discovered.[126] These included fragments of personal letters, business documents, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, apocryphal works, and the New Testament.[127]

Since then, over five thousand Greek manuscripts, including these papyri, have been unearthed, dating back to AD 200.[128] The fourth century AD *Codex Sinaiticus* contains the oldest complete New Testament. Scribes copied it onto animal skins.[129] New Testament textual criticism involves dating and determining the text style, the geographical distribution, and the relative quality of each manuscript. This enables us to reconstruct what most likely reflects the original writing.[130]

As we did in the Old Testament Textual Criticism post, we will walk through the process. We will examine a single word from Rom 8:21. Our question is whether Paul wrote "that" (*hoti*)

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[124] Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament, 2nd Ed.,* 96–7.
[125] James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible, 2 Vols.* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 2:74.
[126] Aaron C. Fenlason, "Oxyrhynchus," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary.* John D. Barry et al.Eds. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), no pages.
[127] Arthur G. Patzia and Anthony G. Petrotta, "Oxyrhynchus Papyrii" in *Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 87–88.
[128] Peter van Minnen, "Dating the Oldest New Testament Manuscripts," http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/papyrus/texts/manuscripts.html.
[129] Eldon J. Epp, "Textual Criticism: New Testament," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6:412–35, 421.
[130] Michael W. Holmes, "New Testament Textual Criticism," in *Introducing New Testament Interpretation* (ed. Scott McKnight; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 57–58.

or "because" (*dioti*), a difference of only two letters. As with many disputed NT texts, the meanings are quite similar. *download them here*

Each of these two words requires its own worksheet. With one exception discussed below, only one manuscript is represented by each symbol, such as P^{46}.

At first glance, many people would automatically choose the first table since it contains many more manuscripts. However, in textual criticism, quantity can never replace quality. Every column signifies a different century, while the rows refer to the style of manuscript.

Alexandrian readings tend to be shorter and less clear in terms of their meaning.[131] Scholars consider the Primary Alexandrian text style most faithful to the original writings. Secondary Alexandrian texts are more recent.[132] Western texts tend to paraphrase, and the Byzantine manuscripts merge multiple variants into one document.[133]

Checking whether early church fathers cited one form or another can also assist us. They appear below the worksheet, along with the date of the citation. While noting which modern translations have chosen each option can help us decide what Bible to study, that has no impact upon the outcome of the exercise.

The symbol *M* requires special attention. It signifies a compilation of nearly identical medieval manuscripts called the Majority Text. As of 1983, these documents represented 80–90% of all known New Testament manuscripts.[134] However, as one text critical scholar has noted, "Ten thousand copies of a mistake do not make it any less a mistake."[135] A stellar achievement in 1611, unfortunately, the KJV and the NKJV continue to depend upon these less-reliable manuscripts.

Now let's take a closer look at the tables *here*. The most reliable text types are listed in descending order from top to bottom. In general, an earlier manuscript is more likely to reflect the original writing. So, where there are manuscripts concentrated in the upper left corner of one of the two tables, we have our most likely candidate for the original reading.

Based upon this exercise, do you think that Paul wrote "that" (*hoti*) or "because" (*dioti*)?

While our example is clear, there are times when this technique fails to yield a conclusive answer. When that occurs, we seek to determine which reading best explains the origin of the other.

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[131] David Alan Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism: A Concise Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 32–3.
[132] Holmes, "New Testament Textual Criticism," 59.
[133] Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 2nd. Ed*. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), *5–*7.
[134] Michael W. Holmes, "The 'Majority Text Debate': New Form of an Old Issue," *Them* 8, no. 2: 15, http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/themelios/majority-text_holmes.pdf.
[135] Holmes, "New Testament Textual Criticism," 55.

Scribes tended to add to, rather than subtract from, the Scriptures, making the best candidate the shorter version. Additionally, the original reading should fit with the author's normal style and vocabulary, make sense in context, and—in the case of the gospels—not match parallel passages.[136] Counter-intuitively, the most difficult reading—the one that seems less probable—is likely the original.

First Thessalonians 2:7 provides a good example of this: "gentle" (*ēpios*) and "infants" (*nēpios*) differ by only the first letter in Greek. Most likely, a scribe would see that Paul had written "we were infants among you" and think that a previous copyist had made an error when writing "we were gentle among you." After all, the apostle would never call himself an infant! Therefore, the variant which best explains the emergence of the other is "we were infants among you."

Some scholars have complied those they deem as the most reliable readings into the 28th edition of the Greek New Testament called *Novum Testamentum Graecae* (NA[28]).[137] As a result, entire verses are "missing" from some modern translations (e.g. Matt 18:10–12 skips verse 11). Text critical scholars have confidence that 97–99% of the NA[28] reflects the original document.[138]

Most English Bibles contain two larger passages which do not appear in the earliest New Testament manuscripts. Consequently, editors mark them with a footnote, in brackets, or in a smaller font.[139] The earliest manuscripts of John's gospel do not include the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53–8:11). It first appears in the fifth century *Codex Bezae* (D) and in the Latin translation by Jerome (ca. 405 AD.[140]

Nevertheless, the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (ca. 200–250 AD) alludes to this incident:

But if thou receive not him who repents, because thou art without mercy, thou shalt sin against the Lord God; for thou obeyest not our Savior and our God, to do as He also did with her that had sinned, whom the elders set before Him, and leaving the judgment in His hands, departed.

But He, the Searcher of hearts, asked her and said to her, "Have the elders condemned thee, my daughter?"

She saith to him, "Nay, Lord."

And he said unto her, "Go thy way. Neither do I condemn thee."

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[136] Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism: A Concise Guide*, 25–6.
[137] Eberhard Nestle and Erwin Nestle, *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus, 28. Revidierte Auflage.* Edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlos M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 322.
[138] Craig Blomberg, *Making Sense of the New Testament: Three Crucial Questions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 22–3.
[139] Gary M. Burge, *John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 237.
[140] Nestle and Nestle. *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus, 28. Revidierte Auflage*, 322.

In Him therefore, our Savior and King and God, be your pattern, O bishops.[141]

The scholarly consensus is that the account in John 7:53–8:11 represents an actual saying of Jesus, even though it was not included in the earliest manuscripts of that gospel.[142] Most likely, a scribe inserted this independent account there to illustrate what Christ said in John 8:14–16.[143]

Likewise, manuscript evidence for Mark 16:9–20 does not exist prior to the fifth century.[144] Experts remain divided over whether Mark 16:1–8 formed the original conclusion of that gospel or if,[145] coming at the end of a scroll, it was lost.

The additional verses read like a composite of materials from the gospels and Acts (e.g. Acts 27:42–28:8). Given the abruptness of finishing at Mark 16:8, it appears that scribes formulated the two alternatives to provide a more satisfying ending.[146] Unless you practice handling snakes (Mark 16:18), no major point of doctrine is in jeopardy.

Where manuscripts do differ, virtually all variants are insignificant. Nevertheless, our methodology can differentiate between versions which are original and those derived from them. Thus, we have assurance that the NA[28] reflects the original writings.[147]

Here is a link to my **Main Menu**, where you will find exegesis of Genesis 1–11 and related New Testament passages, an overview of the entire Bible, a study on Women and Marriage, and several other resources. Happy reading!

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[141] Margaret Dunlop Gibson, trans., *The Didascalia Apostolorum in English* (HSem; London; Cambridge: Clay; Cambridge University Press, 1903), 39–40, https://archive.org/stream/didascaliaaposto00gibsuoft#page/38/mode/2up.
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[143] Burge, *John*, 239.
[144] Nestle and Nestle, *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus, 28. Revidierte Auflage*, 175–6.
[145] Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 2001), 545
[146] David E. Garland, *Mark* (NAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 616–7.
[147] Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael F. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 231.