

SCRIPTURE UNDER SCRUTINY

WAS THE NEW TESTAMENT
REALLY WRITTEN IN HEBREW?



SCRIPTURE UNDER SCRUTINY **Was the New Testament Really Written in Hebrew?**

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edited by Margaret McKee Huey

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Abbreviation Chart and Special Terms

The following is a chart of abbreviations for reference works and special terms that are used in publications by TNN Press. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as *TWOT* for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

Special terms that may be used have been provided in this chart:

ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*

AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*

Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament

ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)

b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)

B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.

BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)

BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*

BKCNT: *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*

C.E.: Common Era or A.D.

CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)

CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)

CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*

CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)

DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls

EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*

ESV: English Standard Version (2001)

EXP: *Expositor's Bible Commentary*

Ger: German

GNT: Greek New Testament

Grk: Greek

halachah: lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community

HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)

HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2001)

Heb: Hebrew

HGM: *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* by George Howard (1995)

HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible

IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*

IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*

ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*

IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*

Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)

JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)

KJV: King James Version

LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)

LS: *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Lidell & Scott)

LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)

LXX: Septuagint

m. Mishnah

MT: Masoretic Text

NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)

NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)

NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*

NEB: New English Bible (1970)

Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*

NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*

NIV: New International Version (1984)

NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)

NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)

NKJV: New King James Version (1982)

NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)

NLT: New Living Translation (1996)

NT: New Testament

OT: Old Testament

REB: Revised English Bible (1989)

RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)

Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament

Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*

TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*

TEV: Today's English Version (1976)

TNTC: *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*

TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition

v(s). verse(s)

Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*

Vul: Latin Vulgate

WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*

YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

Introduction

We have been very blessed by the reception of our Messianic Helper Series in the past few years, as we have covered subjects in a brief, but concise form, that deal with the Fall, Winter, and Spring Holidays, as well as the Sabbath. These are all subjects that people new to the Messianic movement always have many questions about as they start observing them for the first time. Our Helper Series has always been directed toward the majority of the questions that we receive here at Outreach Israel Ministries. So needless to say, we have felt the overwhelming need to address another subject that many people have asked us questions about: **Was the New Testament really written in Hebrew?**

After several years of studying and researching this subject, our ministry has prepared this addition to the Messianic Helper Series, entitled *Scripture Under Scrutiny: Was the New Testament Really Written in Hebrew?* It has been quite an adventure to prepare and compile this publication as concisely as we have. We probably have not covered every question that can come up, but we have certainly covered a great many of them!

We pray that you will be helped and edified as you delve into the study of this timely subject. You have undoubtedly asked, at one point or another, what the truth is concerning this topic that many Messianic teachers have been playing around with. We would ask you to prayerfully consider the following Scripture from Proverbs 18:17 before you begin reading:

“The one who first states a case seems right, until the other comes and cross-examines” (NRSV).

We believe that many of you have heard other teachings on this subject that have made some “sense” to you. But we believe that after you read what our research has uncovered, you will be able to more readily assess the truth of the Biblical texts that have been handed down to us from the Apostles. Consider the painstaking research made by Luke the doctor in composing his Gospel, and how many of us take it, as well as other texts, for granted:

“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:1-4).

We will all do well when we put Scripture under scrutiny and evaluate it not by our “self-opinionated guesswork (as is fashionable currently),” but instead “by adducing the acid test of independent, external evidence so far as it is available.”¹

May you be blessed as you examine the history of the Apostolic Scriptures and begin to rely upon them again as they were once delivered to the saints!

Margaret McKee Huey
Editor, Messianic Helper Series
TNN Press

¹ K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 241.

Beware of Higher Criticism in the Messianic Movement

Margaret McKee Huey

When I became a born-again Believer in 1983, I wanted to study the Bible to find out as much as I possibly could about Yeshua. I wanted to understand as fully as I could why He had died for my sins and why He was the Messiah of Israel. I had been raised in the church, but I had never really dealt with my sins until I was 30 years old. I knew all the stories about the Savior, but I needed to understand them now. In essence, I was searching for the Hebraic Roots understanding in the Christian faith, but did not realize that was what I was after.

I remember, as though it were only yesterday, turning the TV channel to listen to a Jewish man named Zola Levitt² as he shared about this Jewish Messiah, Jesus, whose Hebrew name was Yeshua—*which means “salvation”!* I was so overcome with excitement just hearing Zola explain so easily about Yeshua and the feasts of Israel. I heard the Messianic music from the group *Lamb* for the first time as well as Zola’s beautiful songs. My heart was so stirred! I had to tell my late husband Kim about this teaching! I was connecting to my roots through the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua. And what a blessing it was that Kim, who also had just come to saving faith in the Lord, was stirred and moved by Zola’s teachings, too. We had instilled in us the love for the Scriptures that we did not know was possible. In our desire to study God’s Word, we realized that a good foundation in the Old Testament would be very beneficial. I bought a beautiful set of commentaries of the entire Bible and excitedly started reading. Needless to say, I was not prepared for the shock of what was inside the cover of that first book!

Higher Criticism of the Old Testament and Darwinism

I eagerly dove into the first volume of this very good-looking and impressive commentary series. As I read about the Book of Genesis, I was shocked to find out on the very first page that the authors did not give any kind of credit to Moses for its composition. They instead gave it to these guys named J, E, D, and P! “Who in the world are they?” I had to ask myself. As I read further into the chapter, I really started to get suspicious of the constant references by the commentator that the Bible was a product of error and myth from the very beginning. Being a discerning person, and in my uneasiness, I nevertheless felt that I had come across this way of thinking before. I realized that in a very odd way I was once again coming upon the intellectual mindset that I had had to study in college in my geology courses. I had come across the same spirit that gave us the theory of evolution!

² As you are probably already aware, Zola Levitt passed away of cancer in April 2006. The legacy that he leaves was of a man who helped evangelical Christians see the Jewish heritage of their faith. Without his work, the Messianic movement would not be where it is today.

I then started to put this book aside, with its theories that tore down all of the theology that I had grown up with, and I started to research what actually happened in the intellectual community to want to tear Scripture apart in such a way. What I found did indeed tie together the evolution theories from the mid-1880s to this new way of looking at Scripture, called **Higher Criticism**. “The term ‘higher criticism’ has come to designate an approach to the OT which discards its absolute trustworthiness and...feels free to set itself in conflict with express statements of the Bible.”³ Higher Criticism was popularized by Julius Wellhausen (1844-1914) and other liberal theologians in Germany in the 1880s. It advocated that “the religion of Israel was not a special revelation but arose from natural impulses in man. The patriarchs were not historical figures,”⁴ and instead a series of sources labeled J, E, D, and P were compiled together to form the Torah, often called the **Documentary Hypothesis**. This school of thought first came to the forefront with the teachings of the Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), who many consider to be the father of higher criticism and who “denied the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.”⁵

I discovered that my original feelings of unease concerning the same spirit that I had encountered in geology with Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution were well founded. This “Documentary Hypothesis” had at its very core the explicit challenge to the Divinely assured truth of the Torah, especially the early parts of Genesis. Darwinian evolution and the associated geological timetable of Charles Lyell (1797-1875), that I had been taught in college, further represented a fatal frontal attack in the West on Divinely revealed religion.⁶ Needless to say, because of what I had confronted as a science student with evolution, I was prepared to discount and distrust the theories brought forth from Higher Criticism as I had already done with Darwinism.

Unfortunately, with further study, I found that unbelieving theorists and liberal theologians from the past centuries **had also challenged the Apostolic Scriptures** (New Testament)!

Higher Criticism of the Apostolic Scriptures

In his book *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* F.F. Bruce summarizes the issues pertaining to New Testament Higher Criticism. He comments, “About the middle of the last century it was confidently asserted by a very influential school of thought that some of the most important books of the New Testament, including the Gospels and the Acts, did not exist before the thirties of the second century AD. This conclusion was the result not so much of historical evidence as of **philosophical presuppositions.**”⁷

The primary focus of such modernism was to view Scripture by judging it by human reason, guided by new theories of evolution, and revised by what can only happen in nature. In essence, one was to take out the ever-present supernatural content that permeates the Word of God! Does this natural mindset not remind us of the original lie spoken to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? Satan challenged the first two humans with the very beguiling words, “Indeed, has God said?” (Genesis 3:1b), or “Did God really say?” (NJPS).

³ Edward J. Young, “Criticism, Old Testament,” in Everett F. Harrison, ed., *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), 150.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁶ Higher critics generally believe that the religion of Ancient Israel evolved from animism to polytheism to monotheism, thus early references in the Hebrew Scriptures to God as *Elohim* (E) and *YHWH* (J) are actually interpreted as being references to *two separate deities*.

⁷ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 9.

Early “during the early Christian centuries, particularly among groups which were outside the pale of the orthodox church, hostile criticism of the OT made its appearance. This was the case among certain Gnostic groups, Marcion, Celsus, Porphyry and others. These latter were hostile opponents of Christianity and opposed the OT from a heathen philosophical standpoint.”⁸ It was not, however, until the late Nineteenth Century that it “developed so as to exert an influence upon the interpretation of the NT as a whole”⁹ when the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament was also applied to the New Testament. This new approach to examining Scripture was applied with “an attitude of mind relying strongly on **subjective judgment** and **unfavorably** disposed to belief in supernatural activity in the world. The way was prepared for regarding the books of the NT as purely human works. The miraculous was suspect...It was hoped that with the discovery of the ‘real Jesus,’ who was believed to have been a merely human prophet, leading a blameless life and teaching the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man and the nearness of the kingdom of heaven”¹⁰ (emphasis mine) would be embraced. Liberal theologians in the Twentieth Century such as Rudolf Bultmann, and later Paul Tillich, would try to “demythologize” the Apostolic Scriptures, by essentially removing all of their supernatural elements, as well as deny the bodily resurrection of Yeshua.

At the time these beliefs were being formalized, a “reaction was beginning to make itself felt against a wave of rationalism which had promoted skepticism on matters of religious faith.”¹¹ While liberal theologies surrounding the Bible flourished in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries, “there has also existed a reverent scholarship which has regarded the Scriptures as authoritative and infallible.”¹² This group engaged in “scholarly, critical study of the OT, but endeavors to be guided in its research by the authority of the Scriptures.”¹³ The archaeological, historical, and the theological research done by such noted men as F.F. Bruce, R.K. Harrison, K.A. Kitchen, Walter C. Kaiser, Donald Guthrie, and many others have done much to restore confidence in the authenticity, unity, and historicity of the Bible. Without a doubt, the discoveries in archaeology alone that have come to light since the 1880s have brought about a “more conservative frame of mind” in examining the history that is recorded in Scripture.¹⁴

Facts & Fallacies: “Messianic” Higher Criticism

Why am I writing an article entitled “Beware of Higher Criticism in the Messianic Movement?” Am I seeing some of the same **subjective judgment** by Messianic teachers that are found throughout the teachings of liberal theologians who make up the “elite” of Higher Criticism? Am I seeing **prejudice** within the Messianic movement and a lack of objective research when some are trying to examine the Hebrew Roots of our faith for the first time? My answer, unfortunately, is a resounding: **“Yes!”**

Too many teachers and students are falling for evaluations and conclusions made by what K.A. Kitchen describes as “self-opinionated guesswork (as is fashionable currently),” instead of “by adducing

⁸ Young, “Criticism, Old Testament,” in *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, 150.

⁹ William J. Cameron, “Criticism, New Testament,” in *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, 148.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp 148-149.

¹² Young, “Criticism, Old Testament,” in *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, 151.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp 151-152.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

the acid test of independent, external evidence so far as it is available.”¹⁵ In others words, you need to know that **a little reliable research goes a long way!** We need to look at the research done by those who are not ruled by their presuppositions of subjective prejudice, but by those who are faithful as they apply it to the Holy Scriptures. We need to look at the research which has been done by those who are regenerate, yet who possess the necessary scholastic skills. I ask you to consider this quote by a new “up-and-coming” Messianic teacher, and listen for the presuppositions and prejudice in his statement:

“Oh, yes you want me to believe that the NT was written in Greek well that theory can only be sold to the ignorant masses that the NT was given in Greek yet we do not have a Greek Messiah or a pagan bridegroom but a Jewish Messiah who came speaking His native tongue of Hebrew/Aramaic.”

I hope you were alarmed by his strident manner (aside from the poor English grammar). Are you also aware that his presuppositions are actually showing us that he has really never truly researched this subject? At best, he has examined the opinions of others who have also made the same presuppositional mistakes. At worse, he is using his “pulpit” to pass on his prejudice! My friends, **a little reliable research truly goes a long way!**

Unfortunately, many in the Messianic movement have supposed or assumed different things about the Holy Land of the First Century that just are not true. First of all, many believe that all the Jews lived in Israel during that time and only spoke Hebrew or Aramaic. However, the objective history of those times tells us differently. F.F. Bruce explains it well in his book *New Testament History*:

“At the beginning of the Christian era all Jews throughout the world looked at Palestine and Jerusalem as their home, **but the majority of them lived farther afield.** The list of nations in Acts 2:9-11 from which worshippers came to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost [*Shavuot*] seven weeks after the death of Jesus has interesting literary affinities, but it does indicate clearly the wide area of Jewish dispersion.”¹⁶

If all the Jews lived in Israel in the First Century, then the majority would not have been coming from other lands for the celebration of *Shavuot*. If they had all understood Hebrew, then Peter would not have had his preaching supernaturally translated by the Holy Spirit, **so that each one could hear his words in his own language to which he was born** (Acts 2:9-11). Disregarding the true history of the times and who spoke what languages have caused many to fall for teaching that simply does not stand up to research. These teachers totally fail to recognize who spoke what and where they spoke it. They fail to understand that in the First Century the majority of the Jews lived in the Diaspora, and the majority of those Jews used Greek in both commerce and in everyday life. The Jews of the Diaspora used the Greek translation of the Tanach, which we today call the Septuagint, because Hebrew was not their native language. They lived in times when Greek was the *lingua franca* of the day. It was the language most widely used beyond the population of its native speakers. In essence, Greek was like English is in today’s modern times.

We then find that these same teachers fall for what we might call “**Messianic**” **Higher Criticism**, which advocates that the Apostolic Scriptures would never—or even could ever—have been originally written down in Greek. It is widely taught that the Biblical texts that are in existence from the past in the Greek language are not original and are not inspired by God. Here is a quote from another young teacher who also has fallen for his own prejudicial theories:

¹⁵ Kitchen, 241.

¹⁶ F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 135.

“I also could not understand how Elohim could reveal half of His Word in the holy tongue of Hebrew and the other half in the language of Greek paganism and the Romans, who burned Jerusalem to the ground.”¹⁷

This quote might sound good to some, and it even might seem to make sense, if you have not objectively studied the subject for yourself. Unfortunately for this teacher, the historical record **does not support his wishes**.

Current Hebrew Roots Teachers Employing “Messianic” Higher Criticism

Unfortunately, many teachers are quoting from sources that are very problematic. The current rage that the New Testament was believed to have originally been written in Hebrew or Aramaic has been taught by people who themselves have used Higher Criticism in their view of the Scriptures. In fact, some new Bible “translations” actually claim to have been translated from the so-called “original Hebrew and Aramaic,” not the Greek. Yet, when you look into these claims, you see that they are using Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac texts that were translations from an original Greek source dating from the Fourth Century (discussed further in Chapter 3). What is most disturbing about these teachers is who they quote from as their “experts”! Names like Wierwille, Lamsa, and Schonfield are generously sprinkled throughout the credits by these teachers as “revered” scholars and men of God. But who were these people, actually? What did they really believe?

Victor Paul Wierwille (1916-1985), founder of the cultic group The Way International, taught that the New Testament was originally written in Aramaic, but he also denied the Divinity of Yeshua and authored the book *Jesus is Not God*.¹⁸ Wierwille’s preconceived theology is an “accumulation of ancient heresies in modern dress combined with some biblical truth. The Way, in reality, is an organization that is built around one man’s interpretation of the Bible.”¹⁹ The Way produced their own Bible version based on the Fifth Century Aramaic Peshitta.

George M. Lamsa (1892-1975) believed that the Bible was originally written in Aramaic. However, his translation often called “The Lamsa Bible” has all the markings of the Aramaic actually being a translation from the Greek when put under the scrutiny of textual research. On the surface, Lamsa “appeared to be a revealer of biblical truth and culture and a friend of...Christianity.”²⁰ Closer study, however, has revealed that Lamsa promoted *metaphysical*, not *evangelical* teachings, which led him to “inaccurate interpretations and translations of portions of the Bible. As an ambassador of *Nestorian*, not *biblical* culture, Lamsa became a cultic figure in his own right.”²¹ Lamsa likewise did not believe in the Divinity of Yeshua. He believed in a “spiritual” resurrection, ascension, and second coming of Yeshua the Messiah, and said that they are only for those who have the “spiritual” eyes to see Him—much like today’s New Agers who are great users and admirers of Lamsa’s translation!

¹⁷ Andrew Gabriel Roth, *Ruach Qadim: Aramaic Origins of the New Testament* (Malta: Tushiyah Press, 2005), 20

¹⁸ Consult the entry under “The Way International” in *Handbook of Today’s Religions* by Josh McDowell and Don Stewart (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1983), pp 103-113.

¹⁹ R.M. Enroth (n.d.). *The Way International*. BELIEVE Religious Information Source. Retrieved 27 April, 2006, from <<http://mb-soft.com/believe/indexaz.html>>.

²⁰ John P. Juedes (n.d.). *George M. Lamsa: Christian Scholar or Cultic Torcbearer*. Christian Research Institute. Retrieved 27 April, 2006, from <<http://equip.org>>.

²¹ Ibid.

Another favorite Higher Critic who is quoted from liberally among Messianics today is Hugh J. Schonfield (1901-1988). He was a British Bible scholar specializing in the New Testament and the early development of the Christian Church and theology. He was Jewish, called himself a Nazarene, and believed for a time the Messiah had come in the person of Yeshua. He wanted people to look for and embrace an historical Yeshua. Schonfield is best known, however, for writing the book *The Passover Plot*. This book presents a very calculated argument as to why the crucifixion and resurrection of Yeshua were “staged events,” and did not really occur. Schonfield, more than anything else, wanted Christians to believe that the story of Yeshua’s atoning work was nothing more than a myth.

Schonfield also took a very critical view of the Apostle Paul, and believed that he distorted Yeshua’s message and was mentally ill. He believed that Yeshua’s followers distorted all of His teachings. He compiled his own translation of the Apostolic Scriptures called *The Original New Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), which he believed was originally in Hebrew. Yet, he used Greek texts in its compilation.

Schonfield’s legacy has been primarily left by *The Passover Plot*. Its thesis is that the crucifixion was part of a larger, conscious attempt by Yeshua to fulfill the Messianic expectations rampant in His time, and that the plan went unexpectedly wrong. Schonfield’s writings sought to destroy the validity of the Scriptures, the Divinity of Yeshua the Messiah, His crucifixion, His burial, His resurrection, and His ascension. He attempted to destroy who Messiah Yeshua was as an historical figure and the witness of His ministry found in the Apostolic Scriptures. It is very important to note that a special 40th anniversary edition of *The Passover Plot* has recently been released (New York: The Disinformation Company, Ltd., 2005), and is being advertised in many places with the very controversial novel *The DaVinci Code* by Dan Brown, who basically wrote nothing new that Schonfield had not already written or proposed in some way!

The Reliability of the Greek New Testament

Biblical presuppositions are important, if they are grounded in the facts from historical evidence and research. First, we need to realize that the **Apostolic Scriptures were originally written in Greek to best evangelize the world.** We have to understand that Greek was commonly used by all types of people in Israel and the Mediterranean world in Yeshua’s day. “The apostles knew Greek and wanted all nations to believe. They had no reason to write in a politically and racially-colored dialect (Aramaic) when the universally known Greek existed. They wrote as bilingual men, intimately acquainted with the Greek version of the Scriptures; they thought in Aramaic (and/or Hebrew) and wrote in the Greek style of the [Septuagint].”²²

In the days of the Apostles there was a largely stereotyped oral preaching of the deeds and words of Yeshua, originally in Aramaic, but soon spoken in Greek as well. As Bruce observes, this kind of “preaching or oral tradition lies behind our Synoptic Gospels and their documentary sources....The Greek style of the Gospels as a whole were written by those who had a good command of Greek but whose native language was Aramaic”²³ The oldest Greek text of the Apostolic Scriptures that has been found is “a tiny scrap of papyrus found in Cave VII at Qumran that preserves seventeen Greek letters; this was identified... as having been written about AD 45-50 and containing a portion of Mark vi. 52-

²² Ibid.

²³ Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, pp 29, 52.

53.”²⁴ We have to remember that first and foremost, the Apostles were evangelists whose greatest desire was to spread the good news of salvation in Messiah Yeshua, and, when the oral preaching was finally put to the written record, they had it preserved in the language that would have reached the largest number of people!

The second presupposition that we have to understand is how important the **authority of the Apostolic Scriptures** has always been. Bruce summarizes this very well. He states, “For various reasons it was necessary for the Church to know exactly what books were divinely authoritative. The Gospels, recording ‘all that Jesus began both to do and to teach’, could not be regarded as one whit lower in authority than the Old Testament books. And the teaching of the apostles in the Acts and Epistles was regarded as vested with His authority. It was natural, then, to accord to the apostolic writings of the new covenant the same degree of homage as was already paid to the prophetic writings of the old.”²⁵

Third, we have to recognize **how the books of Scripture became recognized as canonical**. Bruce continues, “One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and generally apostolic authority, direct or indirect.”²⁶

We can very confidently understand the reliability of the written testimony of the Apostolic writers. Bruce makes the very poignant remark that “We are, in fact, practically all the way through in touch with the evidence of eyewitnesses. The earliest preachers of the gospel knew the value of this first-hand testimony, and appealed to it time and again. ‘We are witnesses of these things’, was their constant and confident assertion.”²⁷

Here is a quote from the Gospel of Luke that testifies exactly how important this eyewitness of history was to the Apostles:

“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:1-4).

Finally, we need to understand the history behind the care and protection of the original texts of the Apostolic Scriptures, and how these **texts were copied, circulated, and preserved** for us today. Bruce M. Metzger, arguably the most influential scholar in New Testament textual criticism in the past fifty years, tells us that “Until the invention of printing with movable type in the fifteenth century the text of the New Testament—and, indeed, the text of every ancient record—could be transmitted only by laboriously copying it letter by letter and word by word....for almost all New Testament manuscripts are made of either papyrus or parchment.”²⁸

Papyrus was the earliest fabric that the Scriptures were written on. It comes from the papyrus plant “that grew plentifully in the shallow waters of the Nile—a fabric was made out of it that had the strength

²⁴ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, third edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 264.

²⁵ Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, 21.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 42-43.

²⁸ Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, 3.

of good paper,” but is now “so brittle that it can crumble into powder.”²⁹ Parchment or vellum was used later, and was “tougher, longer lasting and could be written on both sides.” It “was made from skins of cattle, sheep, goats, and antelopes and especially from the young of these animals. After the hair had been removed by scraping, the skins were washed, smoothed with pumice, and dressed with chalk.... It was a much tougher and more lasting material than the more fragile papyrus.”³⁰

The oldest New Testament texts were written in a formal style of Greek handwriting called uncials that was like our writing in capital letters—formal, classic and block like. Later, in the beginning of the Ninth Century, a reform in handwriting was initiated, and “a script of smaller letters in a running hand, called minuscules, was created for the production of books. Thus manuscripts fall into two rather well-defined groups, the earlier being written in uncial letters and the later in minuscules.”³¹

Dating of the existing texts of the Apostolic Scriptures can be done by examining both the material that the text was written on, as well as the style of letters in which it was written. Papyrus with uncials is older than parchment with minuscules. There are over 5,400 Greek texts that have been identified and collected over the centuries, with some of the oldest Greek manuscripts found in the last two hundred years. There are no Hebrew or Aramaic (Syrian) texts that have been found that are older than these Greek texts. No originals have ever been found, and the belief that an original “Hebrew New Testament” once existed, as is taught by many Messianics, is really no different than the “missing link” theory as espoused by evolutionists. *The physical evidence just is not there.* If the originals had been in Hebrew, we would have evidence of them all over the Middle East and beyond, because they would have been the first to be copied and passed out. The Syrian text, that some Messianics believe is original, is later than the Greek and *has been translated* from the Greek. Metzger explains why this is the case:

“Three main types of evidence support this judgement: (1) the Syrian text contains combined or conflate readings which are clearly composed of elements current in earlier forms of text; (2) no ante-Nicene Father quotes a distinctively Syrian reading; and (3) when the Syrian readings are compared with the rival readings their claim to be regarded as original is found gradually to diminish, and at last to disappear.”³²

My original warning is very real! Beware of the Higher Criticism that is infiltrating the Messianic movement. Beware of the sources that your “teachers” may be using. Truly understand that you can have great faith in the reliability of the preserved Greek Apostolic Scriptures. Please remember most of all the reason that we have the Holy Scriptures preserved for us is the following message of good news given to us by John the Apostle:

“[T]hese have been written so that you may believe that Yeshua is the Messiah, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31).

²⁹ Ibid., 4.

³⁰ Ibid., pp 4, 6.

³¹ Ibid., pp 9-10.

³² Ibid., 135.