

PROCEDURES CONSISTENT WITH A COMPLETELY RELIABLE TEXT

Virgil Warren, PhD

On the one hand, a totally reliable text in principle represents the guiding characteristic of “scripture.” On the other hand, a certain amount of variability may happen in the manner by which biblical writings originated and passed down. Two assumptions underlie the suggestions below. (a) We need not invoke the supernatural as long as natural means can accomplish the purposes. God does not generally do for people what they can do for themselves. (b) The concern is reliability of the information, not prescription of forms (words).

1. Use of source material. Writing a plenary inspired book has nothing to do with the manner in which the information came to God’s spokesman. If there were accounts he could access, God need not reveal such materials to him. References to resources no longer extant appear in Joshua through 2 Chronicles, showing that resource usage occurred. The following works make a relatively full list.

- a. The Book of the Wars of the Lord (Numbers **21:14**)
- b. The Book of Jashar (Joshua **10:13**; 2 Samuel **1:18**; and possibly in the Septuagint at 1 Kings **8:53**)
- c. The Book of the Acts (דברי) of Solomon (1 Kings **11:41**)
- d. The Book of the Chronicles (דברי) of the Kings of Israel (1 Kings **14:19**; **15:31**; **16:5**, 14, 20, 27; **22:39**, 45; 2 Kings **1:18**; **10:34**; **13:8**, 12; **14:15**, 28; **15:11**, 15, 21, 26, 31)
- e. The Book of the Chronicles (דברי) of the Kings of Judah (1 Kings **14:29**; **15:7**, 23, 31; **22:45** [46]; 2 Kings **8:23**; **12:19** [20]; **14:18**; **15:6**, 36; **16:19**; **20:20** [25]; **21:17**, 25; **23:28**; **24:5**)
- f. The Book of the Kings of Israel (1 Chronicles **9:1**; **33:18**; same as preceding?)
- g. The History (דברי) of Samuel the Seer (1 Chronicles **29:29**)
- h. The History (דברי) of Nathan the Prophet (1 Chronicles **29:29**)
- i. The History (דברי) of Gad the Seer (1 Chronicles **29:29**)
- j. The Visions (דברי) of Iddo the Seer (2 Chronicles **9:29**)
- k. The Prophecy (נבואה) of Ahijah the Shilonite (2 Chronicles **9:29**)
- l. The History (דברי) of Shemaiah the Prophet (2 Chronicles **12:15**)
- m. [The History (דברי) of Iddo the Seer (2 Chronicles **12:15**; a dual-authorship work with the preceding prophet?)

- n. The Commentary (מדרש) of the Prophet Iddo (2 Chronicles 13:22; same work as the preceding?)
- o. The Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel (2 Chronicles 16:11; 25:26)
- p. The History (דברי) of Jehu Son of Hanani (inserted in the Book of the Kings of Israel; 2 Chronicles 20:34)
- q. The Commentary (מדרש) of the Book of the Kings (2 Chronicles 24:27; 35:27; 36:8); note the writing of Elijah (2 Chronicles 21:12).
- r. The Vision (חזון) of Isaiah the Prophet Son of Amoz (2 Chronicles 32:32; = the canonical book?)
- s. The Acts of the Kings of Israel (2 Chronicles 33:18)
- t. The Lamentations (2 Chronicles 35:25; = the canonical book?)
- u. The Book of Chronicles (Nehemiah 12:23; Esther 2:23)

Besides these are references to canonical works: the Law (1 Kings 2:3; Daniel 9:11, 13; Ezra 3:2), the Book of Moses (2 Chronicles 25:4; Ezra 6:18; 2 Chronicles 25:12), the Book of the Law that Hilkiah found (2 Kings 23:24).

Some above references indicate sources written by inspired men: the Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, The Visions of Iddo the Seer, and so on. Others were typical chronicles of the nation's activities. They need not have had more than providential oversight because such information could be collected, organized, and written without supernatural aid. Many sources could have been incorporated into the canonical literature that cites them insofar as they made any lasting contribution.

A second use of resources is the adoption and adaptation of non-Israelite materials in hymnody and legal codification. Snatches of Ugaritic poetry are reminiscent of certain Old Testament psalms. David, Moses, Solomon, and others could have adapted whole pieces to the worship of Yahveh by deleting the pagan god and omitting inappropriate portions. The psalms become appropriate in the new setting. In modern times Christians have done that with "*You'll Never Walk Alone*"; "*What the World Needs Now Is Love, Sweet Love*"; "*Bridge Over Troubled Waters*"; "*No Man Is an Island*"; "*Cleanse Me*"; "*You Light Up My Life*"; "*I Believe in Music*" (insert "Jesus"); "*I Believe in Love*" (Mac Davis). We would expect a limited amount of such borrowing even as there is a limited amount of it today.

Legal codes offer another possibility of adaptation. Sacrificial categories similar to those in Leviticus have shown up among other Near Eastern cultic documents. Some civil regulations are likewise common to other peoples. Such matters do not detract from their rightness, appropriateness, or divine authority any more than elders in the church would be non-essential simply because they were part of the Jewish synagogue form.

2. Use of amanuensis. Baruch as Jeremiah's scribe brings up another consideration for the variability and looseness of God's oversight in producing the Old Testament scripture. Depending on the degree of freedom given to assistants, an author's work might vary in style in different parts. Such matters pertain to longer books and to authors that may have produced

several literary pieces. The use of amanuenses applies especially to New Testament criticism since they varied from epistle to epistle, the author himself penning one or another as well.

3. Various editions of a work. The Book of Jeremiah went through at least three editions. The information behind Joshua through 2 Chronicles existed in at least two levels, the present Old Testament books being more abbreviated editions of those histories.

4. Editorial activity. Up to this point the procedures have dealt with the originating, or essential, author. Editorial activity comes after the fact; yet the product is viewed as the original author's work. The alterations are minor deletions due to space limitations, clarification through rewording and punctuation changes, and the like.

In Old Testament studies, editorial activity may explain a number of supplementary glosses for (a) updating obsolete place names (Genesis 10:12; 14:2, 3, 7, 8, 15, 17; 16:14; 23:2; 35:19; 36:1; Joshua 15:9, 10, 13, 25, 49, 54, 60; 20:7; 21:22; Judges 1:10, 11, 23; 2 Chronicles 1:27) and archaic vocabulary. Extensive vocabulary modernization may be questionable, however, since many such terms were not altered as, for example, in the headings of the psalms. The Septuagint does not render correctly "*To the Choir Master*" in Psalm 44, "*To the Lilies*" in Psalm 80, "*According to the Maidens*" in Psalm 46.

Included under editorial activity are (b) explanatory notations. References that presuppose a much later viewpoint likely indicate editorial activity on the original record. One case may be Judges 18:20, "*He and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land.*" We think of the fall of the Northern Kingdom several centuries later, in 722 B.C. Several places speak of something that continues "*to this day.*" Those of special importance are Genesis 35:20; Deuteronomy 3:14; Joshua 15:63; Judges 1:21; 1 Samuel 27:6; 1 Kings 8:8; 9:21; 12:19; 2 Kings 8:22; 16:6; 17:23, 41. Explanatory notes are Deuteronomy 2:10-12, 20-23. The different times of "*to this day*" may reflect different editorial viewpoints (1 Kings 12:19 before fall of Israel; 2 Kings 17:23, 41 several generations after the fall of Israel). The problem remains, however, of why such ambiguous notations would have been added since they would become confusing later to people that did not know the scribe that inserted them. They might have marginal notes on a personal copy preserved during the time of the Babylonian captivity. Later copyists might think the insertions came when the original scribe checked back through the work and found them missing.

A more satisfactory explanation is that "*to this day*" is comparable to "*beyond the Jordan,*" which does not represent the same viewpoint in all cases and so means simply "*with reference to the Jordan.*" "*To this day*" could indicate "*for a long time.*"

Finally, (c) organization of material may be left up to editorial activity. Not only were the Psalms collected and ordered that way, but we can imagine that a lifetime of prophetic oracles might be organized into final form by a disciple (Elisha) or scribe (Baruch). Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos are anthologies of their writers' "articles." Collecting and editing them would not need to be by their respective authors. (Isaiah 1, however, seems to introduce the whole book). We would expect that those in responsible leadership would undertake that editorial activity.

(5) Not everything preserved. Not everything written by inspired men has been preserved, as is evident from the different “Histories” of prophets. Just because the writing is inspired does not mean it is preserved.

christir.org