Discerning Truth: Comparing Ancient Stories

A Devotional Workbook for Testing Texts and Building Faith In Trustworthy Foundations

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God..."

— 1 John 4:1

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."

— 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Please Note: This was orignally designed as an interactive app. Having printed it out, you should use a notebook alongside this workbook to answer your questions. This guide likley does not have the room neccesaru for your answers. If you would like you could also use the digital form of this workbook on your favorite device, alongside a notebook.

A Word of Advice - While there are stopping points built into this interactive workbook please consider really giving each prompt and section the time that is needed to fully digest the essence of the knowledge being presented to you. If the natural stopping points are the only markers used, your study sessions will likely last hours each day: who has that kind of time? And the whole workbook will be done in about 5 days. If God has granted you several hours a day, for a week, to go through this workbook - halleluYah! Otherwise, you should expect each section to take several days, if each section's prompts are to be digested fully, changing your life and doing miracles that will leave you stunned and grateful.

Check Off Sections as You Complete Them

- ☐ Introduction
- ☐ Section 1a
- ☐ Section 1b
- ☐ Section 2a
- ☐ Section 2b
- ☐ Section 3

☐ **Workbook Complete!**

Welcome

Shalom, my dear friend. I pray this activity is finding you curious and excited with anticipation. As humans, we have the proclivity to approach a workbook such as this one with the desire to "get through it". Instead, view this as an experience or a meal. Labor in the fields of this work differently. It will be worth it. This work, designed for your spiritual soundness and engineered to bolster you on the path towards salubrious spiritual study that will endow you with great riches of God's Kingdom will be a waste of time for some and life changing for others, dependant on how they approach it. Sit down, laboring to clear your mind of distractions and preconceived notions, planning to labor in this work until your spirit has been satisfied with a correction or some new piece of information.

If approached in this way, denying the fleshy traps and proclivities but instead listening to the wise counsel you are receiving from the throne room of Heaven, this workbook guides you through a structured, prayerful process to compare stories about Biblical figures from both extra-Biblical sources and Biblical sources - encouraging you to develop an eye that can recognize the distinctions between true character verse gossip - even that gossip has lasted millenia. The goal is to grow in more than discernment concerning Patriarchal characacter, but being able to discern fact from fiction, clean from unclean, holy from unholy: testing every narrative against truth (1 John 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Navigate through the sections using the buttons above to begin your journey of discernment.

Section 1a: The General Framework – Choose Your Own Stories

> ***Prepare Your Heart***
>
> ***Pray: Adonai Yeshua, open my eyes to see the essence of each story I read today—the agenda it carries, the truths it highlights, and the ways that agenda might shape my behaviors, decisions, and relationships if I take it to heart. Give me discernment, humility, and a teachable spirit. In Yeshua's name, Amen.***

Read and Study an Extra-Biblical Story

Choose any extra-Biblical account of a Biblical figure (e.g., from midrash, pseudepigrapha, apocrypha, or other ancient traditions). Read it carefully. Then, answer each question below by reading through the pertinent section again. Keep in mind you are not answering the quesiton based on your knowledge but based on what the text indicates. This is not about you, but about the essence of the text.

Reflection Questions – Extra-Biblical Account

1. What is the moral of this story?

Write your reflection here...

2. How is the protagonist portrayed? (rebellious, submissive, mature, weak, human, extraordinary?) Expound on your findings.

Write your reflection here...

3. How is the antagonist portrayed? Who is the antagonist, even if he is not mentioned or hard to find?

Write your reflection here...

4. If the protagonist is in his younger, spiritually speaking, years and shown as rebellious, using your knowledge of Scripture, does time and pressure appear to temper this person and develop them into a more well-rounded and mature individual later in life?

Write your reflection here...

Read and Study the Biblical Text

Now read the closest Biblical account of the same protagonist during the most applicable verses that portray the same time frame in his life.

Reflection Questions – Biblical Account

1. What information is left out compared to the extra-Biblical version?

Write your reflection here...

2. What information is given (even if very little)?

Write your reflection here...

3. What is the moral of the Biblical Story?

Write your reflection here...

4. How is the protagonist portrayed? (rebellious, submissive, mature, weak, human, extraordinary?)

Write your reflection here...

5. How is the antagonist portrayed (if any)? Who is the antagonist?

Write your reflection here...

Comparative Reflection

Between the two accounts, which one helps reveal a more accurate version of the person's true character as seen later in life—after time, pressure, and relationship with God shaped them?

Write your reflection here...

Application Section

1. Journal one insight from this first section's comparison that challenged or encouraged you.

Write your insight here...

2. Share a brief summary with a trusted friend or mentor for accountability.

Note your plan to share...

Note: this trusted mentor can be Elohim, or a friend on the internet you trust, if your pursuit of truth has left

you in a lonely place, like Noah, when it comes to fellowship.

Prayer of Recognition

Father, thank You for Your Word and for the gift of discernment. Teach me to test every story and tradition against Your truth. Shape my heart to honor You above all. In Yeshua's name, Amen.

Attitude of Gratitude

Look over this section. What did you learn that you didn't recognize before? Take a moment and reflect on the fact that just a few days or hours ago you lacked life giving knowledge, that you have labored in the fields of "Studying thyself approved", and a result has been produced.

Take a moment and be grateful or that result. It feels good, right? Carry that with you today and protect that grattitude.

This is a good stopping point. Take a break and in the next section we will ask further questions concerning these same stories.

Section 1b: Conclusions of Moral & Virtue

Extra-Biblical Story

1. Remind yourself: What is the moral of the extra-Biblical story?

Write your reflection here...

2. What does this moral get you excited to apply to your life?

Write your reflection here...

3. How does this story affect your view of authority?

Write your reflection here...

4. How might this story affect childrens' views of the authority of their parents if it were treated as canonical Scripture?

Write your reflection here...

Biblical Story

Now answer the same four questions for the Biblical account:

1. What is the moral of this Biblical story?

Write your reflection here...

2. What does this moral get you excited about, in how you might apply it to your life?

Write your reflection here...

3. How might this story affect your view of authority?

Write your reflection here...

4. How might this story affect the easily influenced view of a child? How might this story affect a child's relationship and view of their parents' authority?

Write your reflection here...

Final Comparison

Of the two stories, which one appears whole, sound, and capable of presenting to people of all ages, genders, walks of life, and levels of faith in order to bring about both salvation and strength in salvation?

Write your reflection here...

Application Section

1. Journal one insight from this section's comparison that challenged or encouraged you.

Write your insight here...

2. Share a brief summary with a trusted friend or mentor for accountability.

Note your plan to share...

Note: this trusted mentor can be Elohim, or a friend on the internet you trust, if your pursuit of truth has left you in a lonely place, like Noah, when it comes to fellowship.

Prayer of Recognition

Father, thank You for Your Word and for the gift of discernment. Teach me to test every story and tradition against Your truth. Shape my heart to honor You above all. In Yeshua's name, Amen.

Attitude of Gratitude

Look over this section. What did you learn that you didn't recognize before? Take a moment and reflect on the fact that just a few days or hours ago you lacked life giving knowledge, that you have labored in the fields of "Studying thyself approved", and a result has been produced.

Take a moment and be grateful or that result. It feels good, right? Carry that with you today and protect that grattitude.

"I will test every spirit and every story, holding fast to what is good and true."

Section 2a: Abraham – Idols, Authority, and the

Divine Call

> ***Prepare Your Heart***
>
> ***Lord, open my eyes to see the essence of each story I read now. Change the way I see. Save me from false agenda's that are not designed by You. Help me be brave and accept your agenda, highlighting the text, with Your Spirit, the ways that false agenda might shape my behaviors, decisions, and relationships if I take it to heart. Give me discernment, humility, and a teachable spirit. Give me, Father, your agenda and the resources I need to walk in that agenda. In Yeshua's name, Amen.***

Read and Study the Extra-Biblical Story

Read the account of young Abraham confronting his father Terah's . Pick one:

- **Genesis Rabbah (Bereshit Rabbah) 38**
- **Book of Jasher (Sefer HaYashar) chapters 11–12** (especially 11:21–49 and chapter 12)
- **Book of Jubilees chapter 12** (Abraham burns the house of idols)

Key events: Abraham destroys idols, places an axe in the hand of the largest remaining idol (in some versions), and sarcastically claims the big idol did it.

Reflection Questions – Extra-Biblical Account

1. What is the moral of this story?

Write your reflection here...

2. How is the protagonist (young Abraham) portrayed? (rebellious, submissive, mature, weak, human, extraordinary?)

Write your reflection here...

3. How is the antagonist portrayed? Who is the antagonist?

Write your reflection here...

4. If the protagonist is portrayed as a younger man, often rebellious or confrontational. Using your knowledge of Scripture, does time, pressure, and relationship with God later develop

him into a more well-rounded and mature man?

Write your reflection here...

Read and Study the Biblical Text

- **Genesis 11:27–32** (family background, departure from Ur, settlement in Haran, Terah's death)
- **Genesis 12:1–5** (God's call to leave country, people, and father's household; Abraham obeys)

Reflection Questions – Biblical Account

1. What information is left out compared to the extra-Biblical versions?

Write your reflection here...

2. What information is given (even if very little)?

Write your reflection here...

3. How is the protagonist (Abraham) portrayed? (rebellious, submissive, mature, weak, human, extraordinary?)

Write your reflection here...

4. How is the antagonist portrayed (if any)? Who is the antagonist?

Write your reflection here...

5. What moral conclusions are naturally drawn from the story?

Write your reflection here...

Comparative Reflection

Between the two accounts, which one helps reveal a more accurate version of Abraham's true character, the chosen "Father of many nations", as seen later in life—after time, pressure, and relationship with God have shaped him?

Write your reflection here...

Here is a good stopping point.

Application Section

1. Journal one insight from this section's comparison that challenged or encouraged you.

Write your insight here...

2. Share a brief summary with a trusted friend or mentor for accountability.

Note your plan to share...

Note: this trusted mentor can be Elohim, or a friend on the internet you trust, if your pursuit of truth has left you in a lonely place, like Noah, when it comes to fellowship.

Prayer of Recognition

Father, thank You for Your Word and for the gift of discernment. Teach me to test every story and tradition against Your truth. Shape my heart to honor You above all. In Yeshua's name, Amen.

Attitude of Gratitude

Look over this section. What did you learn that you didn't recognize before? Take a moment and reflect on the fact that just a few days or hours ago you lacked life giving knowledge, that you have labored in the fields of "Studying thyself approved", and a result has been produced.

Take a moment and be grateful or that result. It feels good, right? Carry that with you today and protect that grattitude.

Section 2b: Moral and Authority Questions

Read and Study the Extra-Biblical Story

Read the account of young Abraham confronting his father Terah's . Pick one:

- **Genesis Rabbah (Bereshit Rabbah) 38**
- **Book of Jasher (Sefer HaYashar) chapters 11–12** (especially 11:21–49 and chapter 12)
- **Book of Jubilees chapter 12** (Abraham burns the house of idols)

Key events: Abraham destroys idols, places an axe in the hand of the largest remaining idol (in some versions), and sarcastically claims the big idol did it.

1. What is the moral of the extra-Biblical story?

Write your reflection here...

2. What does this moral get you excited to apply to your life?

Write your reflection here...

3. How does this story affect your view of authority?

Write your reflection here...

4. How might this story affect children's views of the authority of their parents if it were treated as canonical Scripture?

Write your reflection here...

Biblical Story

Now answer the same four questions for the Biblical account:

- **Genesis 11:27–32** (family background, departure from Ur, settlement in Haran, Terah's death)
- **Genesis 12:1–5** (God's call to leave country, people, and father's household; Abraham obeys)

1. What is the moral of this story?

Write your reflection here...

2. What does this moral get you excited about, in how you might apply it to your life?

Write your reflection here...

3. How does this story affect your view of authority?

Write your reflection here...

4. How does this story affect children's views of their parents' authority?

Write your reflection here...

Final Comparison

Of the two stories, which one appears more whole, sound, safe, and capable of presenting to people of all ages, genders, walks of life, and levels of faith in order to bring about both salvation and strength in salvation?

Write your reflection here...

Application Section

1. Journal one way you will prioritize God's authority while honoring human authorities this week.

Write your application here...

2. Memorize Genesis 12:1 as a reminder of obedient faith.

Note your memorization plan...

Prayer of Recognition

Father, thank You for calling Abraham out of idolatry into covenant. Call me deeper into obedience and trust. Give me wisdom to discern truth from tradition. In Yeshua's name, Amen.

Attitude of Gratitude

Look over this section. What did you learn that you didn't recognize before? Take a moment and reflect on the fact that just a few days or hours ago you lacked life giving knowledge, that you have labored in the fields of "Studying thyself approved", and a result has been produced.

Take a moment and be grateful or that result. It feels good, right? Carry that with you today and protect that grattitude.

"I choose God's call above every competing voice, stepping forward in faith and obedience."

Section 3: Evaluating Authenticity with Scholarly Tools

Prepare Your Heart

Adonai Yeshua, open my eyes today to see the way scholars do, even if I am not a scholar. Protect me from pride and allowing powerful knowledge to puff me up. Instead keep me humble, using this knowledge not the way the world and scholarly bodies use this knowledge, but guide me in making use of this knowledge of Yours for Your Kingdom. Help me set myself aside and see through heavenly, logical, sound, whole, Kingdom centered

lenses that admonish my shortcomings and lift You up within me. Guide my mind and spirit to test all things against trusted, truth seeking tests applied to all manuscripts. Give me discernment, humility, and a teachable spirit. In Yeshua's name, Amen.

Read and Study the Extra-Biblical Story (Review)

Revisit the account of young Abraham confronting his father Terah's idols (pick one):

- **Genesis Rabbah (Bereshit Rabbah) 38:13**
- **Book of Jasher (Sefer HaYashar) chapters 11–12** (especially 11:21–49 and chapter 12)
- **Book of Jubilees chapter 12** (Abraham burns the house of idols)

Read and Study the Biblical Text (Review)

- **Genesis 11:27–32**
- **Genesis 12:1–5**

Important Instruction for This Section

In Sections 1 and 2 we examined the moral lessons, character portrayals, and potential impact of these stories on moral conclusions, wielding and submitting to authority, and faith.

In this section, we set all moral or inspirational value completely aside.

A story can teach a powerful moral lesson and still be historically unreliable or even completely fraudulent in its origin. Conversely, a text can be morally appalling, yet historically authentic in that it its origins and claims are factual and authentic, as distasteful as it is when such a thing is revealed.

Moral authority or spiritual usefulness has **no bearing** on evaluating authenticity in terms of the text's being what it claims. Here we use **only objective scholarly tools** employed by textual critics (believers and non-believers alike) to assess evidence of a manuscript's or tradition's historical authenticity, age, and reliability—regardless of whether the content is edifying or problematic.

When the workbook is complete, the conclusions drawn from this "objective tools" section of the workbook can be laid beside the "moral conclusions" section of the workbook to form a multi-witness framework to stand on.

Evaluating Authenticity: Tools for Discernment

Professional scholars (e.g., Wes Huff, Daniel Wallace, Bart Ehrman, James Charlesworth, and others) use the following objective criteria to determine whether an ancient text or tradition is likely authentic to its claimed time period or is a later composition/expansion attempting to falsely use its supposed age as proof of its authenticity.

Your task is to research and apply the following tools yourself using reputable academic sources. Journal your findings without letting moral or spiritual appeal influence your evaluation.

Use the texts we have been studying to do the following.

1. **Date and Provenance of Manuscripts**
   When was the text first composed or compiled according to scholarly consensus? What is the date of the earliest known physical manuscripts?

2. **Anachronisms and Cultural/Name Usage**
   Do names, customs, places, technologies, political references, or theological ideas fit the historical period the text claims (or appears) to represent, or do they reflect a later era?

3. **External Attestation**
   Is the story or text referenced, quoted, or alluded to by independent ancient sources outside its own tradition? Are there early witnesses that confirm its existence or content?

4. **Internal Consistency and Stylistic Markers**
   Does the language, vocabulary, grammar, and literary style match other documents known to originate from the same time and region?

5. **Chain of Transmission**
   Is there evidence of a continuous, careful scribal tradition from the claimed time of composition to the surviving copies? Or are there signs of later interpolation, expansion, or fabrication?

6. **Historical Canonicity Criteria**
   Was the text widely accepted as authoritative by the early Jewish or Christian communities? Was it associated with a known prophet, apostle, or eyewitness generation?

Application Prompt

Select at least three of these tools. Using reliable scholarly resources (academic books, peer-reviewed articles, lectures by textual critics, or university-level introductions to textual criticism: Youtube influencers do not count if that is their only accolade), apply them to both the extra-Biblical idol accounts and the Biblical Genesis account of Abraham's early life and calling.

Record only what the evidence indicates—set aside any personal feelings about the stories' moral value.

Note: This exercise is very time-consuming, but then again, so is researching the mountain of Apocryphal books. A list of resources is provided below to help you get started on this journey. AI can be helpful—when it is accurate—for comparing and contrasting literary styles if you prompt it properly and know how to use the tool perspicaciously. However, if you simply lack the time or resources to complete this section of the study, below the resources section is a small compilation of free YouTube videos created by men who have dedicated their lives to using these tools to discern what is and isn't authentic in the vast sea of manuscripts that speak of God. If the video path is the way for you, instead of doing your own research you will have to trust both the men in the videos and me for providing these videos as what I consider to be more or less trustworthy on this particular topic - for the most part.

Journal Space for Your Research Findings

Tool 1:

Record your research findings here...

Tool 2:

Record your research findings here...

Tool 3:

Record your research findings here...

Additional observations:

Record any additional observations...

Reflection Questions

1. Based solely on the scholarly tools you applied, what does the objective evidence suggest about the relative historical authenticity and dating of each account?

Write your reflection here...

2. How does separating moral/spiritual value from historical authenticity change the way you approach ancient texts if any change has occurred?

Write your reflection here...

Application Section

1. Choose one scholarly resource you used today and bookmark or note it for future reference when evaluating other ancient claims.

Note your resource here...

2. Pray for believers who study textual criticism, that God would use their work to strengthen the brotherhood's confidence in His Word.

Write your prayer notes...

Resources: Books and Documents

All About The Journey, Josh McDowell
Apologetics Form, Jerusalem Watch
Apologetics Press: Bible and Archaelogy
Answers Research Journal - Textual Superiority of Masoretic Genesis
Are the New Testament Documents Reliable? F.F. Bruce
Evidence That Demands a Verdict, Josh & Sean McDowell
Genesis 5 & 11 Chronology Research, ABR Project
Journey From Texts to Translations, Paul D. Wegner
Kenneth A. Kitchen On the Reliability of the Old Testament
MAPS (Manuscript Reliability Chart), Equip.org
Scripture Alone: Exploring the Bible's Accuracy, Authority, and Authenticity, James R. White

Youtube Resources: navigate to Youtube and search for the title(s) of your choice.

All About The Journey, Josh McDowell
Apologetics Form, Jerusalem Watch
Apologetics Press: Bible and Archaelogy
Can You Trust The Bible Manuscripts? J. Warner Wallace
Eyewitness Testimony & Biblical Manuscripts, J. Warner Wallace
How Reliable is Our New Testament Manuscripts? Dr. Daniel Wallace
How We Got The Bible, Michael Kruger
Navigate to Youtube and search for the title(s) of your choice.
The Truth About Dinosaurs, Thomas G. Sharp
The Truth About The Bible and Early Chrsitainity, Wes Huff, Michael Kruger, Daniel Wallace

Prayer of Recognition

Father, thank You for the minds and methods You have given scholars to examine ancient texts. Help me pursue truth with integrity, separating what fails to be edifying from what is verifiable, and grant me wisdom to honor what You have truly revealed. In Yeshua's name, Amen.

Attitude of Gratitude

Look over this section. What did you learn that you didn't recognize before? Take a moment and reflect on

the fact that just a few days or hours ago you lacked life giving knowledge, that you have labored in the fields of "Studying thyself approved", and a result has been produced.

Take a moment and be grateful or that result. It feels good, right? Carry that with you today and protect that grattitude.

"I will evaluate ancient texts with objective scholarly tools, seeking historical truth apart from moral appeal, and trust God with the results."