

Talk 3: The Manuscripts- Can we trust our Bible?

Intro & Review: Session 1 (Writing with a Goal) & 2 (Authorship)

A) What is a Manuscript? A hand-written copy of another document

How were New Testament copies made, by what kind of copyist?

Who asked for them to be made? Individuals, but mostly churches (lectionaries)

Goes up to the period of invention of the printing press (15th-16th century)

Made of what? Papyrus (plant based, not long lasting) & Parchment (animal skin)

What form? Mostly Codex (book) and earlier, scrolls

Size of existing manuscripts? From one verse to the whole text, average is 450 pages

Where did we find them? In printed form, the bible is everywhere- In manuscript form, they stopped being used centuries ago, so they are found in ditches, garbage heaps, Monasteries, private collections, caves, etc.

How many do we have? 5800 in Greek, 20,000 in other languages.

What about non-biblical manuscripts? Very, very few, mostly of famous works (Iliad, etc)

B) Dates – When were they written?

Vast majority very late, 10th C and later (about 90%)

Why not from 1st C? Mostly papyrus, so they dissolve... except in Egypt

Others, a handful from the 2nd C. almost entire books, more from the 3rd C, full copies from 4th

What about other ancient manuscripts? Even popular ones come several hundreds of years after, often 1000 years.

How many originals or near-originals do we have? Zero. Just letters and bills in garbage heaps.

C) How accurate are they? Can we say they are the same as the originals?

No two manuscripts are exactly the same.

Around 400,000 variants in the manuscripts, only 139,000 word in the whole text of NT.

Variants: what are they?

Whenever there is a difference found between texts, it is called a variant.

There are Four Categories of Variants:

1) **Spelling differences**, lines copied twice, etc (about 75%) Ex. Moveable Nu 'a' or 'an'

2) **Inconsequential order**, not meaningful or viable [possible original] variant (word order);
ex. 'Jesus Christ' or Christ Jesus'

3) **Meaningful but not viable**; ex. Luke 6:22 misses line in 10th C (on 'account of the son of man')

4) **Meaningful and viable** (less than 1%) harmonized wording with other texts, and additions

Ex. Romans 5:1 'we have peace with God' or 'let us have peace with God'.

How large are the additions? Less than two sentences for all but two:

John 7:53-8:11 Not in earliest manuscripts, but in many later. Early fathers may refer to it, at least by 250. Could have been strong oral tradition (better to give than receive), could have been marginal addition transferred to text.

Mark 16:9-20 Not in earliest and best manuscripts but mentioned in 2nd C. by Early Fathers, and in almost all later.

D) Changes made on purpose- For Better Theology??!

1 John 5:7-8

VERSION 1: "For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement."

VERSION 2: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."

E) How do we know what should go in our bibles?

Methodology- Oldest, best manuscripts, supported by other writings (1,000,000 quotes by Church Fathers). Over 99% of text is identical to original.

Would the originals have helped? Not really- how could you know they are the originals?

F) What is the final verdict?

Could God have made this such that there would be no way to have errors creep in?

Of 20,000 lines in the NT, only 40 are in doubt, and hold no doctrinal significance.

The point is no doctrine rests on any of these variants, not a single one.

"Besides textual evidence derived from New Testament Greek manuscripts and from early versions, the textual critic compares numerous scriptural quotations used in commentaries, sermons, and other treatises written by early church fathers. Indeed, so extensive are these citations that if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament".

Metzger/Ehrman collaboration, ***Text of the New Testament***

"Bruce Metzger is one of the great scholars of modern times, and I dedicated the book to him because he was both my inspiration for going into textual criticism and the person who trained me in the field. I have nothing but respect and admiration for him. And even though we may disagree on important religious questions – he is a firmly committed Christian and I am not – we are in complete agreement on a number of very important historical and textual questions. If he and I were put in a room and asked to hammer out a consensus statement on what we think the original text of the New Testament probably looked like, there would be very few points of disagreement – maybe one or two dozen places out of many thousands. The position I argue for in 'Misquoting Jesus' does not actually stand at odds with Prof. Metzger's position that the essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament."

Ehrman, ***Misquoting Jesus***

Glossary:

Church Fathers

Christian writers, philosophers, apologists and Leaders writing about the text, or in sermons, letters to friends and churches or about church history. Apostolic Fathers knew some of Jesus disciples personally or second-hand.

Textual Variant

A difference between manuscripts, either significant or insignificant

Textual Criticism

The study of original wording of a text