

God Wrote a Book: Has the Bible Been Changed?

Opening Discussion

1. Do you remember playing the telephone game?
2. Have you ever heard the process of transmitting the Bible compared to the telephone game?
3. Have you ever heard people say the Bible has been translated so many times that we can't trust what it says?
4. How do you respond to those who say things like that?

From the back cover of *Misquoting Jesus* by Dr. Bart Erhman:

"Since the advent of the printing press and the accurate reproduction of texts, most people have assumed that when they read the New Testament they are reading an exact copy of Jesus's words or Saint Paul's writings. And yet, for almost fifteen hundred years these manuscripts were hand copied by scribes who were deeply influenced by the cultural, theological, and political disputes of their day. Both mistakes and intentional changes abound in the surviving manuscripts, making the original words difficult to reconstruct. Many of our cherished biblical stories and widely held beliefs concerning the divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, and the divine origins of the Bible itself stem from both intentional and accidental alterations by scribes -- alterations that dramatically affected all subsequent versions of the Bible."

Criticisms of the New Testament from Dr. Bart Erhman:

- We don't even have copies of the copies of the originals, or copies of the copies of the copies of the originals.
- In the early Christian centuries, scribes were amateurs and as such were more inclined to alter the texts they copied.
- There are more variations among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.
- We have only error-ridden copies, and the vast majority of these are centuries removed from the originals and different from them, evidently, in thousands of ways.
- We could go on nearly forever talking about specific places in which the texts of the New Testament came to be changed, either accidentally or intentionally.
- The Bible began to appear to me as a very human book.

The Bibles we hold in our hands are the result of a miraculous process through which God has provided and protected His Word. We can trust the Bible contains the words and message of its original authors.

1. Definitions: autographs, manuscripts, texts, and translations

- Autographs: the original written copies of the books and letters
- Manuscripts: copies of the autographs
- Texts: manuscripts compiled into a complete New Testament or Old Testament

2. Can we trust the Greek and Hebrew texts?

- Approximately 30% of the variants are “nonsense variants”

“What father among you, if his son asks for a fish (ἰχθύς), will instead of a fish give him a serpent.” **Luke 11:11**

- In one manuscript, ἰχθύς (ixthun) has been replaced with ἰσχύν (isxun), which is a similarly spelled word that means “might or power.”
- The variant does not make any sense in the passage since Jesus repeats the word fish in the phrase that follows.
- Many of the remaining variants are a matter of one letter or of synonyms.

These are written so that you may believe (πιστεύσητε) that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. **John 20:31**

- πιστεύσητε (pisteusēte): that you may come to believe
- πιστευητε (pisteuēte): that you will continue to believe (one s is missing)

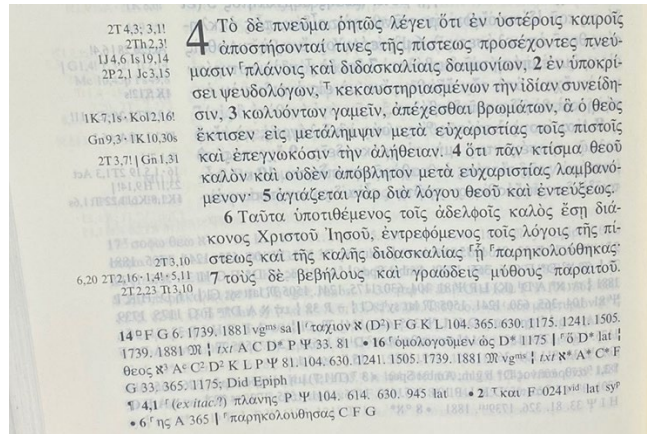
“For we have already charged (προητιασάμεθα) that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.” **Romans 3:9**

- προητιασάμεθα (proētiāsametha): we have charged before (pro)
- ___ ητιασαμεθα (ētiāsametha): we have charged
- There are 14 variants of the ending of Colossians 2:2 which all mean essentially the same thing with a few minor differences:

“In order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ.” **Colossians 2:2 NIV**

- of the God
- of the Christ
- of the God who is Christ
- of the God who is concerning Christ
- Of the God in the Christ
- of the God in the Christ Jesus
- of the God and Christ
- Of God the father Christ
- Of God the father of Christ
- Of God and Father of Christ
- Of God father and of Christ
- Of God father and of Christ Jesus
- Of God father and of Lord of us Christ Jesus
- Of God and father and of Christ

- By Peter Gurry’s estimate, approximately 3% of variants affect translation.
- As scholars study and translate the Bible, every significant variant is included in their study.



- Instead of looking at variants, another way to look at the issue is places where the variants occur.
 - Edward Andrews, a textual researcher and translator, has identified 153 places where variants occur.
 - Of these 153 places, only 1 has a translation that is very difficult.

“You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.” **Matthew 23:26**

- It is absolutely crucial to remember that there is no variant that makes any significant doctrinal change at all.

“Nothing we believe to be doctrinally true, and nothing we are commanded to do, is in any way jeopardized by the variants. This is true for any textual tradition. The interpretation of individual passages may well be called in question; but never is a doctrine affected.” D.A. Carson

“The Majority Text differs from the Textus Receptus in almost 2,000 places. So the agreement is better than 99 percent. But the Majority Text differs from the modern critical text in only about 6,500 places. In other words, the two texts agree almost 98 percent of the time.” Daniel B. Wallace

“For over 99 percent of the words of the Bible, we know what the original manuscripts said. For most practical purposes, then, the currently published scholarly texts of the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament are the same as the original manuscripts.” Wayne Grudem

3. What about translations? Haven't they been changed?

- Doesn't each new translation further corrupt the original message?
- What about changes in the past?



Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. **Romans 13:1-7**

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Sources

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