

Can I Really Trust the Bible? Copies of Copies of Copies?

I. REVIEW

→ *A chain of five big questions* (Greg Gilbert):

1. Can we be confident that the *translation* of the Bible from its original language accurately reflects the original?
2. Can we be confident that the copyists accurately *transmitted* the original writing to us?
3. Can we be confident that we're looking at *the right set of books* and that we haven't missed or lost a set of books out there that gives a different, but equally reliable and plausible, perspective on Jesus?
4. Can we be confident that the original authors were themselves *trustworthy*?
5. Can we be confident that the authors did, in fact, intend to give an accurate account of what happened and that what they described really took place? In other words, is it *true*?

→ *The translation question*

II. THE TRANSMISSION QUESTION

Responding to the claim that we only have copies of copies of copies:

1. Consider the number of NT manuscripts and portions of manuscripts we have: 24,000+
2. Consider how far back these manuscripts and portions
Date: 2nd century

Responding to the claim that there are so many variants between all the copies that they just can't be trusted:

1. Make sure your method of counting is correct: 400,000 variants, but spread across 24,000+ manuscripts
2. Understand that comparing the variants is very revealing

An example of how scholars might reason through variants to arrive at a confident conclusion of what the original said:

Fragment ‘A’: “Now we are engaged in a great civil war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live.”

Fragment ‘B’: “Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives so that the nation of which we speak might live.”

Summary:

- The variants are spread across 24,000+ MSS
- They cluster around the same verses or passages
- Most variants are very boring and non-descript
- None impact any significant Christian doctrine
- Your Bibles have footnotes that are alerting you to any issues that are there

What about the Old Testament?

- Septuagint
- Masoretic Text
- Dead Sea Scrolls

“It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that *no orthodox doctrine or ethical practice of Christianity depends solely on any disputed wording.*”

~ Craig L. Blomberg

“The charge that we cannot know what the originals said is patently and utterly false. The gap between the originals and our earliest extant copies of them is – in the grand scheme of things – not that long at all. And far from *diminishing* our ability to identify what the originals said, the vast number of existing copies actually allows us to reason out deductively, to a very high degree of historical confidence, what... [the biblical writers] actually wrote.”

~ Greg Gilbert

Spring Equip Classes 2019

The Bible: The Word of God for the People of God

(This course runs for 9 weeks from April 7 to June 16, excluding Easter Sunday and Memorial Day weekend.)

A general outline of the course:

- I. Introduction: *Rejoicing in God and His Word*
- II. What is the Bible? (dealing with doctrinal issues)
 - a. *God’s Word Written: Inspiration & Inerrancy*
 - b. *Carried Along by the Holy Spirit: Human Authorship*
 - c. *Attributes of the Bible: Authoritative & Clear*
 - d. *Attributes of the Bible: Necessary & Sufficient*

III. Can I really trust the Bible? (dealing with apologetic issues)

- a. *Copies of Copies of Copies?*
- b. *Why These Books and Not Those?*
- c. *True Events from Trustworthy People?*
- d. *Taking the Resurrected Jesus at His Word*

For how to better study, interpret, and disciple others with the Bible, join us for our upcoming *Impact* workshops:

- June 8 for men – *Fundamentals of Reading the Bible Well*
 - June 21 & 22 for women
-

Resources used for the structure and content of this course:

- Craig Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe the Bible?*
- F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*
- F.F. Bruce, *The NT Documents: Are They Reliable?*
- Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word*
- Greg Gilbert, *Why Trust the Bible?*
- Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*
- Walter Kaiser, *The OT Documents*
- Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited*
- J.I. Packer, *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God*
- Derek Thomas, *The Bible*
- B.B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*
- Paul Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations*