



2: Is What We Have NOW, What They Wrote THEN?

*"You can't trust what's in the Bible because it's been changed so many times."
REALLY? How do you KNOW that?*

We have good evidence that the Word of God has been preserved
and today we discover why that's true.

beourguest

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teachingnotes

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VISUAL NOTES

BIG TRUTH: We have GOOD EVIDENCE that the WORD of GOD has been PRESERVED

The further out we get from the original writings, the more confidence we have that what we have contains what was in the original writings.

- Many of the oldest copies of Scriptures we have were unearthed within the last 200 years in archaeological finds (Codex Sinaiticus between 1844-1859¹, Dead Sea Scrolls (981 manuscripts between 1947-1956).²

Definitions

- **Autographs:** Hand written originals; no originals of any writing in this time era exist.
- **Manuscripts:** Hand written copies of Scriptures before the invention of the printing press (Gutenberg's invention put to commercial use in 1454 - printing a 42-line Bible in 1455).³
- **Variants:** Differences between manuscripts including spelling, word order, additions, subtractions, ink smears or not legible.

Question #1: WHY were the Scriptures written?

Eye witnesses of events eventually die. Memories fade & myths multiply. Written history has been the long term option for preserving history with precision. Written documents make the message portable, for other people in other places & times.

Question #2: HOW were the Scriptures written?

- **Papyrus** was fairly cheap & reliable, but was also fragile and susceptible to both moisture and excessively dry conditions.
- **Parchment:** specially prepared animal skins - scraped and soaked in lime, lasting much longer than papyrus, but also more expensive & time consuming to produce.⁴ (Leather & vellum are 2 other kinds of animal hide usages)

*Note: We have NO ORIGINAL autographs of any of the Old nor New Testament documents...nor any other ancient manuscripts written on these materials during this time.

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¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Codex-Sinaiticus>

² <https://biblequestions.info/2019/11/16/where-are-biblical-manuscripts-found/>

³ <http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/mcdonald/incunabula/gutenberg/#note1>

⁴ Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1243.

Question #3: How do we know the Scriptures weren't corrupted?

OLD TESTAMENT PRESERVATION

By the time of Jesus, the Old Testament writings spanning about 1400 years were clearly recognized. All of the Hebrew Scriptures (what we call the *Old Testament*), had been translated and complied into Greek well before the time of Jesus (around A.D. 200) - this is known as the **Septuagint** (LXX). Jewish scribes had a long tradition of copying the Hebrew Scriptures with **precision**, continuing long after the earthly ministry of Jesus.

Scribes followed detailed disciplines for copying a manuscript.

- Dr. Kenneth Barker, a professor of the Old Testament, notes that Jewish scribes *"regarded the copying of any error as a sin. No imperfection, no matter how small, was tolerated."*⁵ If the mistake could not be fixed, the entire project was trashed & restarted.⁶
- Everything was prescribed - the numbers of words allowed per column (no more than 30 letters)⁷, the type of writing material used, the kind of ink, and the spacing of words were all prescribed.⁸
- The scribe was NOT ALLOWED to copy anything from memory—not even the shortest word. Instead, it had to be copied letter by letter while verbalizing the letter.
- Later scribes known as the **Masoretes** counted the number of times each letter of the Hebrew alphabet occurred in each copy and compare it to the original. Further, they were familiar with the middle letter of the middle word of the writing as a reference point, by which to make certain that no letters were missing.⁹
- When the scribe came to the Hebrew name of God (**YHWH**), he would not stop or allow himself to be distracted. Even if a king was to enter the room, the scribe was obligated to continue without interruption until he finished penning the holy name of the one true God.
- When copies of the Scripture started to wear, they were quickly removed from the collection and placed in a receptacle to separate them from the newer scrolls.¹⁰
- The new copy was considered to have the equal authority to that text it was copied from - an exact duplicate of the information.¹¹ If you were to ask, *"Is what we have now what they wrote then?"* They would have answered, *"Absolutely."*

Limited & Late Copies

The original autographs & early copies of the Hebrew Scriptures disappeared over time, due to wear and tear and persecution by oppressors who destroyed the Hebrew writings.

- 586-587 B.C. **Destruction of the 1st temple** and scattering of the Jewish people
- 167 B.C. **Antiochus Epiphanies** took over the 2nd Temple and **outlawed the Hebrew Scriptures, destroying many of them.**
- A.D. 70: **2nd temple destroyed.** The Romans scattered & enslaved many Jews, once again meaning the Hebrew Scriptures were in danger.
- Until 1947, the oldest Hebrew texts available dated from A.D. 600 to A.D. 1000.¹²

Dead Sea Scrolls

In 1947 a shepherd boy found jars of scrolls in caves while searching for a lost goat, some dating as far back as 250 B.C. The Hebrew scrolls contain all OT writings except for Esther. Some are dated over 800-1000 years older than any previously discovered scroll.¹³

One leather scroll wrapped in linen cloth was a complete Hebrew text of Isaiah, believed to be from **100-250 B.C.** It was compared to the Hebrew text of Isaiah from around A.D. 900.

95% of the Isaiah text proved to be word-for-word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible. The 5% variations were obvious slips of a pen or different spellings, none of which changes the meaning of any of the passages!¹⁴

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⁵ Kenneth L. Barker, "Copying the Old and New Testament manuscripts" http://helpmewithbiblestudy.org/5Bible/TransCopyingTheOTNTManuscripts_Barker.aspx

⁶ Josh & Sean McDowell (2010-10-13). *The Unshakable Truth* (Kindle Locations 1971-1975). Harvest House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

⁷ James Warner Wallace, "Establishing the Reliability of the Old Testament: A Trustworthy Process of Transmission": <http://coldcasechristianity.com/2013/establishing-the-reliability-of-the-old-testament-a-trustworthy-process-of-transmission/>

⁸ "How does the translation process impact the inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility of the Bible?" <http://www.gotquestions.org/translation-inspiration.html>

⁹ Hank Hanegraaff (2011-08-30). *Has God Spoken?: Proof of the Bible's Divine Inspiration* (Kindle Locations 415-423). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

¹⁰ James Warner Wallace.

¹¹ Hanegraaff, Kindle Locations 1968-1970.

¹² Mark Driscoll, *A Book You'll Actually Read: On the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books), Kindle 430.

¹³ Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 211.

¹⁴ Gleason Archer, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 19.

Jesus Trusted the Copies of Scripture

Luke 4:16-21 (NET) Now Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*" Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to tell them, "**Today this scripture has been fulfilled even as you heard it being read.**"

How did Jesus react to this COPY? Jesus treated this COPY as Scripture, the Inspired words of God through Isaiah. He even claimed those preserved words...WERE ABOUT HIM!

The Old Testament was written for **Preservation** and **PRECISION**.

BIG TRUTH: We have GOOD EVIDENCE that the WORD of GOD has been PRESERVED

NEW TESTAMENT PRESERVATION

Is what we have now what they wrote then?

- **New Testament** manuscripts are hand written copies of the Scriptures before the invention of the printing press.

- Oldest New Testament fragment: **p⁵² - John Ryland's Papyrus** (A.D. 125). This copy is about 60 years from the original, found in Egypt, about the size of a credit card, with parts of John 18 on both sides.

- **Chester Beatty Papyri**: (A.D. 200-250) These Greek writings were in book form & contain several fragments OT writings: (portions of Genesis, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Esther, Ecclesiastes.) The NT fragments include both small & large portions of: Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), Acts, writings of Paul, & Hebrews.¹⁵

- **Codex Sinaiticus** & **Codex Vaticanus**. *Codex* means 'book'. **Vaticanus** has long been held at the Vatican. **Sinaiticus** was discovered in a monastery on Mt. Sinai and is the oldest complete copy of the New Testament (Greek). Both were written on parchment near or before A.D. 350 (only 300 years after originals).¹⁶

The Old Testament is known for the **PRECISION** of the professional scribes, but the New Testament is known for its **PORTABILITY**. They wanted to get the copies *RIGHT*, but they were even more focus on getting the copies OUT to other people in other places and times. The 27 separate writings that compose the New Testament were originally written in Greek yet quickly exploded into other languages & cultures.

- As of Jan. 2016, there were 5,856 catalogued Greek manuscripts of the New Testament¹⁷, around 20,000 more exist in other ancient languages including: Latin (over 10,000), Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Old Church Slavonic, & Arabic, & more. The gospel message was quickly being carried across borders & into different cultures.
- Compared to other ancient manuscripts, the New Testament is the most well attested document of all time.
- If all the manuscripts had been destroyed. The early church fathers quoted so often from the New Testament we could put much of the New Testament back together from their quotes.

Writing	Original	Earliest Copy	Gap	Copies
Homer's Illiad	800 B.C.	400 B.C.	400 yrs	647
Caesar's Gallic Wars	100-44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,000 yrs	10
Tacitus - Annals	A.D. 100	A.D. 1100	1,000 yrs	20
Suetonius	A.D. 100	A.D. 950	850 yrs	8
New Testament Greek Copies	50-70 A.D.	A.D. 125 (Fragments) A.D. 200 (Individual Books) A.D. 250 (Most NT) A.D. 350 (Complete NT)	+ 55 yrs 130 yrs 180 yrs 280 yrs	5,856 Over 25,000 including other languages

Of 5,856 New Testament manuscripts, 61 that are complete New Testaments & the average size of these manuscripts is over 450 pages long.¹⁸ That doesn't prove the manuscripts to be true, but it DOES demonstrate that the New Testament is the most well attested document of all time.

¹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chester_Beatty_Papyri

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Sinaiticus

¹⁷ Dan Wallace. Spring Cooley Lecture at Gordon-Conwell Charlotte: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZYIBS77fg> (published Feb. 8, 2016).

¹⁸ Ibid.

New Testament Portability

- Since the New Testament scribes were largely unprofessionals who wanted to get the message out, we have many, many more New Testament manuscripts than Old Testament Manuscripts.
- The earliest New Testament manuscripts also date much closer to the autographs (originals) than do the earliest Old Testament manuscripts.
- Because of the large number of New Testament manuscripts there are many more variants (differences between copies) in the New Testament manuscripts compared to the Old Testament.

☀ **DAN WALLACE: “No essential Christian is jeopardized by any viable variant.”** (see DAN WALLACE on YouTube!)

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WRITE YOUR OWN NOTES HERE



1. **READ IT** Take the 10-minute challenge: Read 1 chapter of Scripture each day. (choose 1 gospel)
2. **WRITE IT** Write down *INSIGHTS* you gain and the *QUESTIONS* you have.
3. **SHARE IT** *SHARE* what you *READ* with another *CHRISTIAN*.
4. **LIVE IT** *OBEY* what *GOD SAYS*.

heretoserveyou

Have questions and need some help? ...real soon...how about now? Please **call** or **text** us soon!

- * Contact **Jackie** (850-673-1582), **Christy** (850-673-9764), or another follower of Jesus soon!
- * Or call our **deacons & wives**: Alan & Christy Androski (850-464-1428), Freddy & Joyce Howard (850-973-0047), Tim & Joni Hughey (850-464-1156), Mark & Dot Mancil (850-253-5405), Boss & Amelia Mulkey (850-464-6717), Jim & Derita Pinkard (850-464-6188), or Tom & Martha Waddail (850-973-0011).

discussionquestions

Take some time to discuss these questions with your family, friends, or group.

1. What challenged or encouraged you most from today's teaching? You might need to look back in your notes to help explain your answer.
2. Someone you know makes the claim, *"You can't trust the Bible because it has been changed so many times, translated & retranslated."* How would you respond? What are 2 simple questions you could ask? (Hint: ask what has changed & ask for an example)
3. Give an example of a time when you examined the evidence rather than just listened to another person, and it brought you to a conclusion you were more confident to defend.
4. **Why were the Scriptures written down & what were they written on?** With that in mind, what is the importance of making copies of these writings?
5. How does the **preservation process of the Hebrew scribes** & the evidence from the **Dead Sea Scrolls** help you answer the question, *"Is what we have now what they wrote then?"* Share some of what impacted you about the preservation of the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures).
6. **Read Luke 4:16–21.** Knowing that what Jesus read from in the 1st century was a copy (possibly a copy of a copy of a copy) of Isaiah's writing in 700 BC, how does Jesus' response impact how you respond to whether this text should be trusted?
7. Why are there so many more variants in the New Testament copies than the Old Testament copies? How might comparing the copies help show us where copyists made errors AND allow translators to use the best copies?
8. At this point of our study, how would you answer this question: *"Why do you believe what we have now is what they wrote then?"* (e.g. manuscript evidence - quantity & quality, types of variants)
9. **Remember our FEET2FAITH steps?** *Read it. Write it. Share it. Live it.* What have you been reading? Share your insights or questions. How have you LIVED OUT what you read this past week?
10. **Share prayer needs and pray for one another.**