

Session 11: Has The Bible Been Miscopied?

(1). Is The Bible Trustworthy?

In his bestselling book, *Misquoting Jesus*, modern textual critic, Bart Ehrman, wrote the following:

“There are clear reasons for thinking that, in fact, the Bible is not...inerrant...”¹

Joining Ehrman are a host of other voices who hold the scriptures in similar derision. Noted popular author, Reza Aslan, for example, notoriously views the Bible as flawed.

“The Bible is replete with the most blatant and obvious errors and contradictions—just as one would expect from a document written by hundreds of hands across thousands of years...”²

(2). Rising Bible Skepticism:

Such accusations have grown _____ in our day.

They are further presented with _____ information.

Scholarly sources, such as *The New Interpreter's Bible Dictionary*, are generally referenced to support these sad agendas. Example:

“It is safe to say that there is not one sentence in the New Testament in which the [manuscript] tradition is wholly uniform.”³

Such a salutary statement, though technically correct, is nonetheless _____ when read in isolation.

(3). What Should Christians Thinking?

All of this has brought on a massive erosion. Confidence towards the scriptures has sunken dangerously low. Churches are reeling from skeptical opinions which threaten to destroy the very _____ of our faith.

¹ *Misquoting Jesus*; Bart Ehrman; Harper San Francisco; 2005; pg. 14.

² *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*; Reza Aslan; Random house Publishing; 2014; pg. xix

³ *The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, Abingdon Press, 1962 edition pg. 595

For this reason, many today question: Can we be _____ that our modern, printed Bibles bear any resemblance to their hand-written ancestors?

Still others conclude that it is impossible to know whether the sacred texts have been accurately preserved.

In light of such problems, what are Christians to think?

- Are the biblical texts really in a state of disarray?
- Have the sacred scriptures been guarded from corruption?
- Or does a thorough examination prove the opposite to be true?

Will the sacred scriptures survive a narrow critique? Or will they rather _____ under the massive weight of modern thinking?

In this session, we will seek to explore the subject of the general _____ of the Bible.

And we will test the _____ of the scriptures to see if they indeed be the very words of God.

(4). Have The Scriptures Really Been Preserved?

We will thus begin by asking the question:

Have the scriptures have been properly _____?

This question seeks to know whether our sacred records have been reliably _____.

It genuinely inquires: Can we _____ what the original author's intended to say?

It further seeks to know whether our scriptures have been attended by a routine tradition of clear textual transmission.

Centuries ago, such questions simply had no answer. But with the advent of the modern-day science of textual criticism—everything has changed.

Through examining differing copies in a given family of texts, scholars are able to spot tiny _____.

These minor textual differences, often called “variants,” are then compared with one other in order to _____ our reconstructed texts.

At times, a reconstruction will deliberately distort a given reading in order to remain true to an _____, original text.

(5). Testing The Scriptures:

We’ll thus begin this process by delineating the concept of “inspiration.”

According to one well known statement, signed by nearly 300 noted evangelical scholars, biblical inspiration should be understood as follows:

- “...inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture...”⁴
- “...in the providence of God [these texts] can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy.” (The Chicago Statement)⁵

Hence, the concept of inspiration here is, in actuality, quite modest. It only pleads for a miracle in the case of the _____.

These scribal masterpieces, which were written by the biblical author’s themselves, are referred to in this document as the “autographic texts.”

However, as the above statement shows, these signature editions are no longer _____ to us.

They have crossed irretrievably into the hidden, distant past. They are now survived only by a large collection of handwritten copies, which are preserved for us in the form of numerous carefully lettered manuscripts.

The absence of a signature text, however, does little in advancing the cause for doubt.

⁴ <http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html>.

⁵ <http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html>.

For our inability to collate our Bibles against these “ancient originals” does not warrant the conclusion that the Bible is therefore _____.

This is true, in part, because our collection of Greek manuscripts is so large.

One timely estimate, for example, numbered them at over _____.⁶

This would mean that scholars have no less than _____ opportunities to redundantly demonstrate by experiment that the scriptures have been preserved.

(6). Case Study: *The Gospel of Philip*

To illustrate why this is so, consider the extra-biblical _____.

The text was discovered in Egypt in 1945 and is believed to have been set down roughly in the _____.

Since the time of its discovery, however, no additional copies have been found.

Moreover, the text itself is in very poor _____.

We therefore possess only a single copy of the Gospel of Philip showing what the original author may have attempted to _____.

For this reason, most scholars regard the text of “Philip” as _____.

The reason why is that there is no way for us to properly _____ it’s claims.

This is true because no additional copies have survived which allow us to know how accurately the text has been transmitted.

Add just one additional copy, however, and the stakes become dramatically altered.

Using the secondary text, our certainty about the first can be _____.

For wherever the texts agree, showing identical words and phrases, our primary (or earliest) text is generally seen as _____.

⁶ The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict; Josh McDowell; Thomas Nelson Publishers; Copyright 1999; pg. 34.

This therefore shows us a basic rule of thumb:

The more copies we have, the easier it will be to _____ the original.

Thus, when we compare the manuscripts of the New Testament, we find that our surviving texts agree with _____ accuracy. ⁷

(7). Remaining Arguments:

What then is left for us to conclude regarding any outstanding skeptical objections?

Only that our remaining 0.5% of textual variants are _____.

Even atheist Bible scholar, Bart Ehrman, admits that these scriptural textual variants are essentially, _____. He writes:

“Many of these differences are completely immaterial...[They] simply show us that [the] scribes...could spell no better than...people...today...” ⁸

Therefore, if even an atheist admits that these variants don’t altar our doctrine, why, we might wonder, has this point figured so strongly into the debate?

The only answers skeptics give are based on faulty views of inspiration. Once again, it is Bart Ehrman who elucidates these phony problems the clearest. He writes:

- “... it would have been no more difficult for God to preserve the words of scripture than it would have been for him to inspire them in the first place.”
- “...if [God] didn't perform that miracle, there [seems] to be no reason to think that he performed the earlier miracle of inspiring [them].” ⁹

The problem with this argument however is that it overlooks the obvious—namely, that the scriptures _____ preserved!

⁷ B. M. Metzger, "Recent Trends In The Textual Criticism Of The Iliad And The Mahabharata", Chapters In The History Of New Testament Textual Criticism, 1963, E. J. Brill: Leiden, pp. 142-154.

⁸ Misquoting Jesus; Bart D. Ehrman; Harper Collins Publishing; Copyright 2005; pgs 10-11.

⁹ Misquoting Jesus; Bart D. Ehrman; Harper Collins Publishing; Copyright 2005; pg. 11.

In fact, the number of available manuscripts is so high so as to make the case for biblical trustworthiness difficult to object to.

For this reason, it is hard to understand what Ehrman finds objectionable.

It seems that his main problem is that we don't have the "_____."

However, this gripe is so vastly impractical so as to be made utterly _____ to the work of textual criticism.

For it is conceivably impossible for such signature texts to _____.

With the exception of a handful of verses taken from 2nd century fragments, these ancient documents have become, by and large, _____.

Therefore, it is surely right to conclude that this objection is _____.

Moreover, our case for biblical accuracy is shown to be very strong.

For all of our textual discoveries have consistently proven one thing, that the Bible has remained _____.

(8). Discovering The Ein-Gedi Scroll:

In a September 2016 article published by National Geographic, young science writer, Michael Greshko, reported the following:

"Computers decipher burnt scroll found in ancient holy ark." ¹⁰

The scroll was found in 1970. It was discovered in a fire scorched region of the Ein-Gedi.

Israeli Antiquities Authorities were immediately contacted to take possession of the charred scroll in order to preserve it's deteriorating remains.

¹⁰ Computers Decipher Burnt Scroll Found in Ancient Holy Ark; Michael Greshko; National Geographic; September 21st, 2016.

Remarking on the venture, project leader Brent Seales commented that many thought the scroll would be impossible to read.¹¹

But when the preliminary scans turned up several visible columns of Hebrew text, the team soon began to realize they were on the cusp of a major biblical archaeological find.

Providentially, the detailed images revealed the true identity of the scroll. It was a copy of the Book of Leviticus—the oldest ever found.

Of the roughly 1,155 characters, not a single vowel was visible in the entire text.

Therefore, most scholars today view this as an indication that the scroll would necessarily predate the 9th century.

But a deeper examination would only increase the age of the scroll, a point which would serve to greatly enlarge the significance of the find. Michael Greshko noted that radiocarbon dating suggested that the scroll may be 1,800 years old.

In light of this, study coauthor, Michael Segal, said that the Ein-Gedi scroll (so named) is the most important biblical text from antiquity.

And world famous Hebrew scholar, Emanuel Tov, agreed, suggesting that the scroll is “identical” to later medieval biblical texts.

Emanuel Tov thus concluded his expert assessment by issuing the following remarkable statement:

“The...stream of Judaism that used this...scroll in...the early centuries of our era was to continue using it until the late Middle Ages when printing was invented.”

¹²

(9). Summary Points:

- The text of scripture (the NT) has been _____ in transmission.

¹¹ 1,700-Year-Old Dead Sea Scroll ‘Virtually Unwrapped,’ Revealing Text; Laura Geggel; Live Science; September 21st, 2016.

¹² Computers Decipher Burnt Scroll Found in Ancient Holy Ark; Michael Greshko; National Geographic; September 21st, 2016.

- Using the science of textual criticism, the text of the Bible can be _____.
- Our modern texts are 99.5% _____ to one another.
- The remaining 5% are mostly _____.
- The text of the Bible has thus been preserved.

Answer Key:

- Common
- Partial
- Destructive
- Foundations
- Certain
- Crumble
- Reliability
- Trustworthiness
- Preserved
- Cared For
- Certain
- Variations
- Create
- Imagined
- Original text
- Available
- Unknowable
- 5,000
- 5,000
- Gospel of Philip
- 4th century
- Condition
- Say
- Uncertain
- Test
- Increased
- More reliable
- Recreate
- 99.5%
- Uninteresting
- Negligible
- Have been
- Original texts
- Irrelevant
- Survive
- Untraceable
- Meaningless

- In tact
- Corrupted
- Reconstructed
- Identical
- Spelling errors