

Theological Equipping Class: Where We Got the Bible

From God to the Original Authors

Revelation

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve have fellowship with God and direct communication with Him.

- General revelation is not distorted.

But after the Fall, man is separated from God and no longer has direct communication.

- Our sinful hearts distort and misinterpret God's general revelation.
- There is a need for Special Revelation: the Scriptures

The Scriptures are God's Words

God's Word, the Scriptures, are the actual words spoken by God.

- 2 Timothy 3:16 – "*All Scripture is breathed out by God...*"
- We're not interested in the physical stone tablet or scroll that the words are written on. We're interested in the words themselves.

We believe that God's Word comes from God.

- It doesn't become any more God's Word when its chiseled on to stone or scribbled on a scroll.
- God speaks His words to the original authors and the words themselves are the inspired Scripture.

From the Original Authors to Today

Facts of Preservation

We do not have the original manuscripts of the Scriptures. In fact, we don't even have copies or copies of copies.

- The materials the original authors used weren't suited for preservation.
- There were several persecutions of the early church where the primary orders that were given were to destroy the Christian Texts.
- Also the Early Church's attitude towards the Scriptural letters was that they were from God, so the original or a copy makes no difference.
 - Again, what matters are the words from God.

The Old Testament:

- So, for most of history, we did not have many Old Testament manuscripts at all and the ones we did have were dated very late (9th and 10th century A.D.).
 - Jewish Scribes would meticulously copy an old manuscript on a new scroll and then burn the older copy before it became illegible.
- The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1946, showing the accuracy of the manuscripts that we have.
 - The Dead Sea Scrolls date from 1 or 2 century's B.C.
 - They found that they were almost identical to the manuscripts from the 9th and 10th centuries.

The New Testament: By far the best-preserved writing from the ancient world.

- Greek manuscripts: 5,856
- Latin manuscripts: 10,000+
- Other ancient versions: 5,000-10,000
- Quotations from the New Testament in writings of Church Fathers: over 1 million

As we receive these copies, we use them to reconstruct God's original words to the Biblical Authors. This is a field of study called Textual Criticism.

Our confidence is only getting stronger.

- We have better technology than ever.
- We keep discovering manuscripts.

As God uses fallible men to write His infallible Word, God also uses fallible men to preserve His infallible Word.

Main Accusations against the Preservation of the Scriptures

“How does it help us to say that the Bible is the inerrant word of God if in fact we do not have the words that God inerrantly inspired but only the words copied by the scribes – sometimes correctly but sometimes (many times!) incorrectly! What good is it to say that the autographs (the original writings) are inspired? We don't have the originals! We have only error-ridden copies, and the vast majority of these are centuries removed from the originals and different from them, evidently, and thousands of ways.” - Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*

1. We don't have the Word of God because we don't have the original manuscripts. We only have “error-ridden” copies of copies of copies.
2. Those copies are much later than the original manuscripts and therefore we can have no confidence in what the original wording said.
3. There are so many variants in our manuscripts, as a result of incorrect copying, that there is no way we have what the original authors wrote.
4. The earliest scribes of the Church changed what the original authors wrote to suit their own theological convictions.

The Christian Response to these Accusations

1. We don't have the Word of God because we don't have the original manuscripts. We only have copies of copies of copies.
 - Our goal isn't to get back to the original manuscripts. It's to get back to the original wording.
 - God's words are the inspired thing and don't get less inspired when copied.
 - What we're interested in is not the physical manuscript itself but the wording on the physical manuscript.
 - This accusation is either irrelevant or misleading. We do have the original wording.

2. The copies, that we do have, are much later than the original manuscripts and therefore we can have no confidence in what the original wording said.

- The fact that the copies we have are dated much later than the originals is something all Christians scribes would have been aware of 1000 years ago.
- Something being later doesn't inherently make it wrong or "error-ridden."

3. There are so many variants in our manuscripts, as a result of incorrect copying, that there is no way we have what the original authors wrote.

- There are so many variants because we have so many manuscripts.
- Types of variants:
 - Skeptics will group all of the variants into the same category, as if they all carry the same weight.
 - "We could go on for nearly forever talking about specific places in which the texts of the New Testament came to be changed, either accidentally or intentionally... The examples are not just in the hundreds but in the thousands." Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*
 - Over 99% of all variants make virtually no difference at all.
 - Over 70% of all variants are spelling errors, that are so easy to trace.
 - "If we can say "John loves Mary" over 1000 times in Greek without substantially changing the meaning, the number of textual variance in the New Testament is meaningless. What counts is the nature of the variance." - Daniel Wallace
 - The variants that actually do change the meaning of the text and could be the original wording are less than 1/5 of 1%.
 - Mark 9:29 – "And he said to them, 'This kind can only be cast out by prayer [and fasting].'"
 - The two longest variants in the New Testament are the ending of the Gospel of Mark (Mark 16:9-20) and the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-8:11). Both 12 verses long. The next longest passage is 2 verses long.
- No essential doctrine of Christianity is touched.
 - "Essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament." - Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*
- The Bible is not uncertain because of a tiny degree of meaningful variants.
 - "You don't say, nothing's going to happen because my uranium isn't completely enriched." - Peter Williams

4. The earliest scribes of the Church changed what the original authors wrote to suit their own theological convictions.

- Skeptics start with the assumption that scribes deliberately changed the text, which is backwards.
- It would be impossible for the early scribes to change the text, even if they wanted to.
- Somehow as the evidence grows, the doubts have grown with it.
 - "There will always be a gap. Even if we had a picture of Moses coming down the mountain, someone would say, 'what happened before he came around the corner?'" – Peter Williams
 - We don't need to prove that there's been no change.
 - What we know about the history of transmission is that it is incredibly stable.

Conclusions about the preservation of the Scriptures:

- We can have great confidence! Almost every accusation simply points out facts in a misleading way with no explanation.
- Put in the proper perspective, where we got the Bible (the process of preservation) is secure and only growing in its security.
- We can have great confidence in God's sovereign preservation of the Scriptures to us today.

Translations Today

The strength of our translations today compared to Church history

- We have way more manuscripts to use as the basis for our translations.
 - The King James Version was translated with 7 manuscripts, the earliest of which was from the 11th century A.D.
 - Now we have 5800+, the earliest of which goes back to the 2nd century
- Translation is done by teams of scholars, not just one person.
- We are continuing to find more manuscripts.
- Technology continues to improve.
- We can have confidence that our translations today are incredibly reliable.

Conclusion:

- As God is in control over the writing of the Scriptures, He is also in absolute control over the preservation of the Scriptures.
- We do not have a blind faith. But our ultimate hope isn't in the evidence of preservation that we have. Our ultimate hope is in the God who does the preserving.