

Can the Bible Be Trusted?

Before the invention of the printing press, scribes copied the Scriptures by hand for more than one thousand years—

- ◆ without eyeglasses
- ◆ by the light of candles
- ◆ using quill pens and ground charcoal mixed with gum and water to scratch the sacred words of Scripture on rough papyrus and vellum

What if these scribes got it wrong?

Some recent bestselling books—such as Bart Ehrman's *Misquoting Jesus*—argue that the scribes *did* get it wrong. Here's a summary of recent claims about the surviving manuscripts of the Bible: "Not only do we not have the originals [of the biblical manuscripts], we don't have the first copies of the originals. We have only error-ridden copies, and the vast majority of these are centuries removed from the originals and different from them in thousands of ways. Mistakes multiply and get repeated; sometimes they get corrected and sometimes they get compounded. And so it goes. For centuries. In some places, we simply cannot be sure that we have reconstructed the text accurately. It's a bit hard to know what the words of the Bible mean if we don't even know what the words are."¹

Thousands of people read and believe these attacks on the Bible. Still, millions of people continue to trust the Bible as an authoritative, written record that conveys consistent and reliable truth about God. So which is it?

Does the Bible still convey the truths that the original authors intended? Or were the ancient texts changed with such reckless abandon that contemporary biblical scholars are left with manuscripts so "error-ridden" they can't even be certain what the texts originally meant?

With these questions in mind, let's look at the history of the biblical texts to see what the historical record actually tells us!

Here's what we'll find:

- ◆ The Bible can be trusted.
- ◆ We can know what the Bible says.
- ◆ We can be confident that our Bible today is faithful to the original manuscripts, despite differences that exist in ancient copies.

GOSPEL	DATE (APPROXIMATE)	SOURCE
MARK	AD 65	Peter, written by Mark
MATTHEW	AD 75	Matthew
LUKE	AD 75	Luke, a companion of Paul

How Were the Stories Passed Down?

What the skeptics claim:

"[The Gospels] were written thirty-five to sixty-five years after Jesus' death, . . . not by people who were eyewitnesses, but by people living later."²

What history actually tells us:

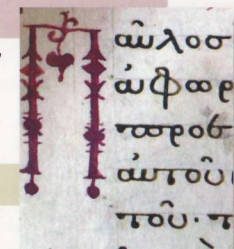
Yes and no. While it's true that the Gospels were probably written between thirty-five and sixty-five years after the death of Jesus, historical evidence strongly suggests that the sources of the New Testament Gospels were eyewitnesses of the events of Jesus' life. Mark's Gospel emerged around AD 65; the Gospels According to Matthew and Luke began to circulate a decade or so later. John's Gospel seems to have been penned around AD 90. Even with these dates, it is at least *possible* that the sources of these books were eyewitnesses of Jesus. The emergence of Mark's Gospel only thirty years or so after Jesus' death makes it unreasonable to deny that the Gospels, at the very least, *could* have been written by eyewitnesses.³

What matters most, though, isn't *when* the Gospels were written. *What matters most is whether the Gospels accurately represent eyewitness accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus.* According to ancient recollections from such early Christian leaders as Papias of Hierapolis, Polycarp of Smyrna, and Irenaeus of Lyons, each of the four New Testament Gospels represents eyewitness testimony about Jesus Christ. According to these recollections—recollections that bear every mark of originating in the first century AD—

- The anecdotes recorded in the Gospel According to Mark are the testimony of Peter, preserved in written form by his translator Mark.
- Luke's Gospel integrates written and oral sources gathered from eyewitnesses by Paul's personal physician, Luke.
- The materials that are unique to the Gospel According to Matthew came from Matthew, a tax collector who deserted a profitable profession to follow Jesus.
- The accounts in the Gospel According to John find their source in the apostle John.⁴

What the skeptics claim:

"Stories based on eyewitness accounts are not necessarily reliable, and the same is true a hundredfold for accounts that . . . have been in oral circulation long after the fact."⁵



(Courtesy of CSNTM.org)

In ancient epistles, the author's name appeared at the beginning of the letter, as in this copy of Paul's letter to the Romans. In ancient historical writings—such as the Gospels—the author's name was sometimes omitted.

■ What history actually tells us:

In a culture that passed on information orally—such as the biblical world—it was possible for oral histories to remain reliable for remarkably long periods of time. People in today's world—surrounded by high levels of literacy and easy access to writing materials—are accustomed to recording important information in *written form*. But, especially among the ancient Jews, important teachings were told and retold in rhythmic, repetitive patterns so that students could memorize key truths.⁶ These teachings were known as *oral histories*. In these forms, it was possible for teachings and accounts of historical events to remain amazingly consistent from one generation to the next.⁷ Much of the Old Testament and some portions of the New Testament—for example, the eyewitness accounts mentioned in Luke 1:2—may have been passed down as reliable oral histories before they were written.

■ What the skeptics claim:

Stories in the New Testament “were changed with what would strike us today as reckless abandon. They were modified, amplified, and embellished. And sometimes they were made up.”⁸

■ What history actually tells us:

The New Testament accounts of Jesus were not made up or changed with “reckless abandon.” Consistent oral histories about the life of Jesus and the early church emerged among eyewitnesses shortly after the events occurred; these oral histories remained consistent as they spread across the Roman Empire.

As an example, let's take a look at one of these segments of oral history, recorded in written form in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7.⁹ How do we know that these words from the apostle Paul represent part of the oral tradition about Jesus? Paul introduced this summation with two Greek words—*paradidomi* (“handed over” or “delivered”) and *paralambano* (“received”)—that indicated it was oral tradition. Ancient readers understood these two words, when used together, to imply that the writer was citing oral history.¹⁰

A quick examination of these verses demonstrates how quickly oral histories emerged among the eyewitnesses of Jesus



This painting from the ruins of Pompeii shows how widely wax tablets and styluses were used to record thoughts in written form.

*The word “canon” comes from the Greek word *kanon*, which meant “measuring stick.” In the fourth century AD, the writings that Christians accepted as authoritative began to be known as a “canon” because these witnesses measured the church's faithfulness to Jesus Christ. Christians embraced the Jewish canon—the books known to us as “the Old Testament”—because they believed that the God of the Jewish Scriptures was also the Father of Jesus Christ. Each writing in the New Testament was expected to be connected to an eyewitness of the risen Lord, to be recognized in churches throughout the known world, and not to contradict other writings about Jesus.*

and how consistent these traditions remained. Even though Paul wrote in Greek, he called the apostle Peter by his Aramaic name, “Ā Cephas.” Then, there's the repeated phrase “and that.” The phrase rendered “and that” is the Greek translation of an Aramaic method for joining clauses.¹¹ Based on the grammatical patterns in these verses, it's clear that this oral history originally circulated in Aramaic. And where did people speak Aramaic? In Galilee and Judea, the places where Jesus walked and talked, died and rose from the dead! And when could Paul have received an oral history of the death and resurrection of Jesus in Aramaic? The point at which Paul seems to have learned this version of the historical account was around AD 35 when he visited Jerusalem and heard the story of Jesus from an eyewitness (Galatians 1:18). For Paul to have received a consistent oral history in Aramaic at this time, scholars estimate that this account—a tradition that clearly affirms the essential facts of Jesus' resurrection—first surfaced near Jerusalem shortly after Jesus was crucified.¹²

From this bit of oral history, it's clear that the earliest Christians did *not* recklessly alter their traditions. Otherwise, how could Paul—writing three years after he first visited Corinth—have said to the Corinthians immediately before he quoted this oral history, “I am reminding you, brothers, about the good proclamation that I proclaimed to you,” suggesting that Paul proclaimed similar words in each place that he visited? (1 Corinthians 15:1). Clearly, this example from the oral accounts of Jesus' life was *not* “made up” long after the events or “changed with . . . reckless abandon,” as the skeptics claim. To the contrary, this oral tradition about Jesus emerged soon after his resurrection and remained relatively unchanged as it spread across the Roman Empire.

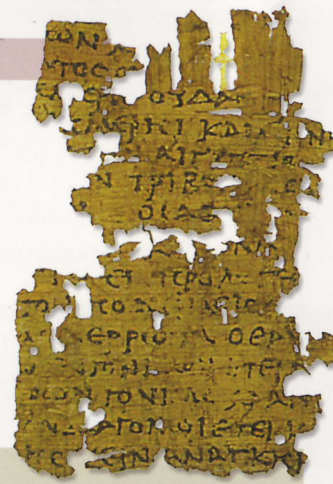
■ What the skeptics claim:

“There is not a sentence concerning Jesus in the entire New Testament composed by anyone who had ever met the unwilling King of the Jews.”¹³ “Jesus' own followers . . . were mainly lower-class peasants—fishermen and artisans, for example—and . . . they spoke Aramaic rather than Greek. . . .

In the end, it seems unlikely that the uneducated, lower-class, illiterate disciples of Jesus played the decisive role in the literary compositions that have come down through history under their names.”¹⁴

■ What history actually tells us:

Not all of Jesus' first followers were illiterate; even if some of them *were* illiterate, professional scribes—people who were capable of turning oral histories into polished Greek—were readily available even to working-class persons.



(Courtesy of the Schoyen Collection, Oslo and London)

This summary from a medical manual, copied shortly before the time of Jesus, demonstrates some level of literacy among first-century physicians such as Luke.

In the book that bears the name “Matthew,” the apostle Matthew is presented as a tax collector (Matthew 10:3). It’s unlikely that any early Christian would have fabricated this bit of vocational trivia. Since Roman governors expected tax collectors to stockpile personal wealth by cheating people, tax collectors rarely made it to the top of anyone’s list of most-loved citizens. But there was one skill that tax collectors *did* possess. *They could read and write.* Tax collectors carried *pinakes*, hinged wooden tablets with beeswax coating on each panel.¹⁵ Tax collectors etched notes in the wax using styluses; these notes could be translated later and rewritten on papyrus.¹⁶ Papyri from Egypt prove that tax collectors also wrote receipts for citizens in their villages.¹⁷ So, a tax collector such as Matthew could *not* have been illiterate. The daily tasks of a Galilean tax collector required him to copy and record information in multiple languages.

What about another character whose name is ascribed to a Gospel, the companion of Paul named “Luke”? Compared to other people in the New Testament, Luke is a quite obscure character. He’s mentioned only three times in letters attributed to Paul (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 1:24; 2 Timothy 4:11). Considering how many of Paul’s partners enjoy far greater prominence in the New Testament—Timothy, for example, or Barnabas or Silas—it’s difficult to explain why anyone would ascribe the third Gospel to Luke...unless, of course, Luke actually *was* responsible for the book that bears his name.

According to Colossians 4:14, Luke was Paul’s “beloved physician.” Ancient physicians seem to have possessed, at least, the capacity to read the summaries of medical knowledge that flourished in the first century. Papyri from Egypt prove that many physicians also wrote reports for law-enforcement officials regarding suspicious injuries, as well as statements for slave-masters certifying the health of slaves.¹⁸ So, it’s unlikely that Luke was completely “illiterate.” What’s more, many physicians could pull together various eyewitness accounts into coherent reports, just as the preface of Luke’s Gospel suggests that the author has done (Luke 1:1-4).

That leaves Mark and John. Though it is by no means certain, these men *may* have been illiterate. Still, in the first century AD, professional scribes were readily available to render messages from other languages, including Aramaic, into polished Greek. Complex legal titles, epistles to family members, and simple commercial receipts all required secretarial skills—and provided livelihoods for a multitude of scribes.¹⁹ Even though Paul was completely capable of writing in Greek (Galatians 6:11; Philemon 1:19-21), scribes penned Paul’s letters for him (Romans 16:22; see also 1 Peter 5:12).²⁰ It’s entirely possible that Mark and John employed professional scribes to render their oral accounts of Jesus’ life into Greek documents. If so, they would still have been the *sources* of these Gospels.²¹



(Courtesy of CSNTM.org)
John Rylands Papyrus 52 records portions of John 18. The writing style and material suggest that this fragment was copied around AD 110.

How Can We Know that the Bible was Copied Accurately?

■ What the skeptics claim:

“The [Old Testament] is filled with lots of textual problems—as we have come to realize, for example, with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.”²²

■ What history actually tells us:

In truth, the Dead Sea Scrolls proved the precise opposite. The Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrated was how carefully the Old Testament had been copied through the centuries. Around AD 900—nearly a millennium after the time of Jesus—groups of Jewish scribes known as Masoretes began to copy the Old Testament texts according to strict guidelines. The Masoretes maintained nearly perfect accuracy in their copies. Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, these Masoretic texts were the oldest available manuscripts of the Old Testament. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were unearthed in the mid-twentieth century, scholars compared the text of Isaiah from the Dead Sea Scrolls with the text of Isaiah preserved by the Masoretes. What these scholars discovered was that—even though more than 1,000 years separated the Dead Sea Scrolls from the Masoretic texts—the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic texts agreed word-for-word more than 95% of the time!²³ The remaining differences stemmed primarily from minor spelling variations. Even the scrolls that differ a bit more than the Isaiah scrolls—for example, the copies of 1 and 2 Samuel and Deuteronomy—do not differ in any way that affects any crucial Jewish or Christian belief.

Sir Frederic Kenyon, former director of the British Museum, commented concerning the Gospels, “The interval between the dates of the original composition and the earliest extant evidence [is] so small as to be negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed.”²⁴

■ What the skeptics claim:

“There are more differences 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...in thousands of ways.”²⁴

■ What history actually tells us:

More than ninety-nine percent of the variants in the New Testament are not even noticeable when the text is translated; of the remaining differences, *none* affects any vital aspect of Christian faith.²⁵

Scholars have 5,700 or so ancient biblical manuscripts available to them. Although many of these manuscripts include the entire New Testament, most are partial copies, found in fragmented form in the sands of Egypt or in the monasteries of Europe and western Asia. All totaled, these manuscripts include more than two million pages of text. In these two-million-plus pages of biblical text, there are between 200,000 and 400,000 variations in wording or spelling. In a complete Greek New Testament, there are approximately 138,000 words. So, yes, there *are* more differences among the total manuscripts than there are words in one complete Greek New Testament. What the skeptics don't clearly communicate to their readers, though, is *the sheer insignificance of these variants*.



Most of these 400,000 variations stem from differences in spelling, word order, or the relationships between nouns and definite articles—slight variants that are easily recognizable. After minor spelling errors and slight variations in word order are factored out, there is more than 99% agreement between all of the known manuscripts of the Bible! Of the remaining variants, none affects any crucial element of the Christian faith.

■ What the skeptics claim:

"Scribes who were not altogether satisfied with what the New Testament books said modified their words to make them ... more vigorously oppose heretics, women, Jews, and pagans."²⁶

■ What history actually tells us:

With more than 5,700 manuscripts and fragments of the New Testament available to us, it would be impossible for anyone to have modified major portions the New Testament without their changes being quite easily noticed. In the few cases when changes *were* attempted, the original text can—in all but the tiniest handful of instances—be easily restored by examining the most ancient New Testament manuscripts.²⁷

(continued on page 8)

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Some scribes after the New Testament era may have altered texts that placed women in prominent positions. For example, in Romans 16:7, someone named Junia—a name that appears to be feminine—is said to be “significant among the apostles,” but a later scribe seems to have turned “Junia” into “Junias,” a man’s name.²⁸ In the most ancient manuscripts of Acts 18:26, a woman named Priscilla is the primary teacher of Apollos. Centuries later, a copyist switched the order of names, placing the name of Priscilla’s husband first. These kinds of changes are, however, obvious and easy to identify.

WORKS OF PLATO	NEW TESTAMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written around 400 BC • Only seven copies have survived • The earliest surviving manuscript was copied between AD 800 and 900—more than 1,200 years after the original documents were written 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written between AD 60 and 100 • More than 5,700 portions have survived • Complete manuscripts of the New Testament have survived from the late third or early fourth centuries—less than three centuries after the original documents were written • Hundreds of fragments and manuscripts have survived from the second, third, and fourth centuries

Even in the very few cases that remain uncertain, the problem is not with the texts themselves. The difficulty is with the choices of individuals to twist biblical texts to sanction negative attitudes toward women, Jews, or non-believers. In any case, the claim that the Bible as we have it today has been modified for the purpose of opposing women, Jews, and pagans has no substantive foundation in the actual texts.

■ What the skeptics claim:

“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.”²⁹

TIME LINE

AD 50

28–30: Approximate dates of Jesus’ earthly ministry, beginning in the fifteenth year of Caesar Tiberius (Luke 3:1).

33: Paul saw Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9).

47–49: Paul went to Asia Minor on his first missionary journey. In AD 49, Caesar Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome—according to Roman historian Suetonius—because of riots “on account of a certain Chrestus,” probably a reference to Jesus Christ (Acts 13–15).

57–62: Paul arrested in Jerusalem, spent two years in Roman custody before appealing to Caesar (Acts 21–28).

66–70: After years of enduring oppression from Roman governors, the Jews revolted. Their rebellion resulted in the destruction of the Jewish temple in AD 70.

■ What history actually tells us:

This claim is simply not true. Firm belief in the divinity of the Jesus, the threefold nature of God, and the divine origins of the Bible emerged among Christians before the New Testament was even completed. None of these beliefs depends on disputed or altered passages in the Bible. It is true that one verse that mentions the Trinity was not originally present in the biblical text: The last half of 1 John 5:7—a text that, in some later manuscripts, reads, “There are three that testify in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, and these three are one”—doesn’t appear in the most ancient New Testament manuscripts. But the doctrine of the Trinity does not depend on this verse. God’s nature as three-yet-one is affirmed just as clearly in Matthew 28:19, where Jesus commanded his followers to baptize in the *name* (singular) of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Similarly, the most ancient copies of 1 Timothy 3:16 declare, “Great is the mystery of godliness; he was manifested in the flesh,” while a few later texts read, “*God* was manifested in the flesh.” But, again, the doctrine of the deity of Jesus does *not* depend on this text; the deity of Jesus is clearly affirmed in several undisputed texts, including John 20:28, where Thomas recognized Jesus as Lord and God. No essential Christian belief is affected by any variant in the biblical manuscripts.

Who Chose the Books in My Bible?

■ What the skeptics claim:

“Many Christians today may think that the canon of the New Testament simply appeared on the scene one day, soon after the death of Jesus, but nothing could be farther from the truth. As it turns out, we are able to pinpoint the first time that any Christian of record listed the twenty-seven books of our New Testament as *the* books of the New Testament—neither more nor fewer. . . . In the year 367, Athanasius wrote his annual pastoral letter to the Egyptian churches under his jurisdiction, and in it he . . . lists our twenty-seven books, excluding all others.”³⁰



(Courtesy of the Schøyen Collection)

The sermons of the theologian Origen clearly recognized the New Testament

AD 100

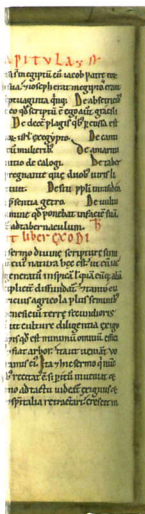
■ What history actually tells us:

This statement leaves out several key facts about the selection of the New Testament books. It is true that Athanasius was the first author to list the exact same twenty-seven books that we find in the New Testament today. Yet, from the beginning, Christians unanimously accepted the four Gospels, Acts, Paul's letters, and the first epistle of John. Although disputes about a few New Testament books lasted into the fourth century, widespread agreement about which writings were authoritative existed among Christians from the first century onward. The primary standard for

deciding which books were authoritative emerged long before the fourth century—and the standard *wasn't* the word of a powerful bishop. Hints of this standard can, in fact, be found in Christian writings of the first century AD. The basic idea was this: *Testimony that could be connected to eyewitnesses of the risen Lord was uniquely authoritative among early Christians.*³¹ From the beginning, authoritative testimony about Jesus Christ had to have its source in eyewitnesses of the risen Lord. Even while the New Testament books were being written, the words of people who saw and followed the risen Lord carried special weight in the churches (see Acts 1:21-26; 15:6–16:5; 1 Corinthians 4–5; 9:1-12; Galatians 1:1-12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26-27). The logic of this standard was simple: The people most likely to know the truth about Jesus were eyewitnesses who had encountered Jesus personally or their close associates.

Although debates continued into the fourth century about a few writings—including the letters of Peter, John's second and third letters, and the letters of James and Jude—Christians universally agreed at least as early as the second century on the authority of no fewer than nineteen of the books in the New Testament—and these are the writings that reflect some of the most essential truths about Jesus. Even if this score or so of books had been the only documents that represented eyewitness testimony about Jesus, every vital truth of Christian faith would remain completely intact. What directed this

process was the conviction that these writings must be rooted in reliable, eyewitness testimony about Jesus Christ.



(Oslo and London)

3rd-century
of Alexandria
the authority of
the writings.

AD 150

..... c. 60–c. 135: Papias of Hierapolis was a disciple of John, the author of the Gospel; Papias recorded several ancient traditions about the origins of the Gospels.

..... c. 35–c. 117: Ignatius of Antioch was a disciple of John, the author of the Gospel; he wrote seven letters to churches as he traveled to Rome to suffer martyrdom during the reign of Emperor Trajan. In these letters, he quoted sayings that are found in Gospels of Matthew and Luke as well as Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Thessalonians.³⁶ These quotations demonstrate that early Christians treated these texts as authoritative.

When deciding which Old Testament writings to accept, Christians embraced the same listing of books as the Jewish people. When the Septuagint—a popular Greek-language version of the Jewish holy writings—was translated around 200 BC, the translators had included some Jewish writings which never appeared in the Hebrew Scriptures and which Jewish rabbis rejected around AD 90 at the Council of Jamnia (Yavneh). The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches recognize these additional books from the Septuagint as authoritative; these writings appear in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Bibles as “deuterocanonical” or “apocryphal” books.

■ What the skeptics claim:

Among the earliest Christians, “there was no agreed-upon canon—and no agreed-upon theology. Instead, there was a wide range of diversity: diverse groups asserting diverse theologies based on diverse written texts, all claiming to be written by apostles of Jesus.”³²

■ What history actually tells us:

Among the people who walked and talked with Jesus, a consensus emerged very early regarding both the identity of Jesus and all but a few biblical books. It's true that there *were* several divergent sets of beliefs that circulated within the earliest churches. It's also true that debates about a few biblical books lasted beyond the first and second centuries. Yet the persons who actually walked and talked with Jesus agreed about the nature of Jesus even before the New Testament was completed. Consensus about all but a few New Testament books was reached by the mid-second century, probably earlier. According to the records found in the New Testament—the only writings about Jesus that were written early enough to be connected to eyewitnesses of Jesus—Jesus was human and yet divine, he was the messianic king predicted in the Hebrew Scriptures, he was physically raised from the dead, and it is only by trusting in him that anyone can enjoy the life that God created humanity to live, both now and in eternity (see Jn. 20:28-31; 1 Cor. 15:1-7; 1 Jn. 2:22; 4:1-3). According to the eyewitnesses of Jesus, to deny such truths as these was to exclude oneself from fellowship with Jesus Christ and with his followers (see 1 Jn. 4:1-6).

This is
the be

AD 200

..... c. 69–c. 155: Polycarp of Smyrna was a disciple of John, the author of the Gospel. In 155 or 156, Polycarp suffered martyrdom for his faith.

..... 150–202: Irenaeus of Lyons repeated the same traditions that Papias reported nearly a century earlier, adding, “The heretics boast that they have many more gospels than there really are. ... But there are only four authentic gospels. These alone were written by Jesus' true followers.”



(Courtesy of CSNTM.org)

Painting of the apostle John appears at the beginning of John's Gospel in a thirteenth-century manuscript.

in Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, Ephesus, and Rome still possessed original manuscripts from the apostolic authors.³⁵ Many portions of the New Testament that were copied between AD 100 and 200 have been found in Egypt; it is entirely possible that scribes copied at least a few of these documents from the original manuscripts.

What matters most, however, is not the *age* of the existing manuscripts but their *reliability*. When the manuscripts are compared, they completely agree with one another more than 99% of the time. Of the differences that remain, *not even one* difference decisively affects any aspect of Christian faith.

A Final Word

So will there be more sensational new findings about the Gospels—findings that supposedly demonstrate that these writings don't contain the gospel truth after all? Of course! The Holy Bible has withstood thousands of attempts to destroy its truth and to discredit its authority, and yet no one has succeeded. The truth and the authority of the Scriptures stand strong, regardless of every attempt to render them ineffective. So can the Bible be trusted? In a word, *yes*.

How Reliable is My Bible?

■ What the skeptics claim:

"Not only do we not have the originals [of the biblical manuscripts], we don't have the first copies of the originals. . . . What we have are copies made later—much later."³³

■ What history actually tells us:

Although the original manuscripts from the biblical authors *have* been lost—probably forever—the copies that we possess today reliably reflect the inspired message of the original authors. Ancient people saw no reason to revere original manuscripts from important people, and—once documents became too worn to read easily—they did not retain the original manuscripts.³⁴ Instead, they made reliable copies and burned or buried the originals. Occasionally, the ink was scraped from the original, and the parchment was reused.

Despite the critics' claims, it *is* possible that we possess first-generation copies of the original New Testament manuscripts. In AD 200, churches

Endnotes

- 1 Representative selections from Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005) 7, 10-11, 57. Hereafter, *Misquoting Jesus* will be cited as *MJ*, followed by the page numbers.
- 2 Bart Ehrman, *Jesus, Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford University, 1999) *JApP* 44-45. Hereafter, *Jesus, Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* will be cited as *JApP*, followed by the page numbers.
- 3 R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006) 8-9, 20, 252-289.
- 4 Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3:39; 5:8, 20; Bauckham, 14, 295-296; M. Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ*, trans. John Bowden (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2000) 36; C.-J. Thornton, *Der Zeuge des Zeugen: Lukas als Historiker der Paulusreisen*, ed. M. Hengel *WUNT* 56 (Tubingen, Germany: J.C.B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1991) 10-82.
- 5 *JApP* 47-52.
- 6 For survey of orality in rabbinic and early Christian practice, see A. Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 188-192; R. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings* rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994) 27-32; J. Harvey, *Listening to the Text: Oral Patterning in Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).
- 7 J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003) 192-254; B. Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995) 80; see also J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1985) 15, 190-195.
- 8 Bart Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend* (New York: Oxford University, 2006) 259. Hereafter, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend* will be cited as *PPM*, followed by the page numbers.
- 9 K. MacGregor, "1 Corinthians 15:3b—6a, 7 and the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49 (June 2006): 225-234.
- 10 N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 2003) 318-319.
- 11 The repeated word-pattern which "and that" apparently translates is the distinctly Semitic *vav* consecutive. See P. Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1983) 98-99; G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987); 719, 722-726.
- 12 G. Ludemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (London, UK: SCM, 1994) 38; R. Funk, et al., *The Acts of Jesus* (San Francisco, CA: Polebridge, 1998) 454.
- 13 H. Bloom, *Jesus and Yaweb* (New York: Riverhead, 2005) 19.
- 14 *JApP* 45.
- 15 Millard, 28-29. Some scholars have argued that the apostles were literate and that they would have carried *pinakes* and noted significant sayings of Jesus. It seems to me, however, that this assumes a higher rate of literacy in Galilee and Judea—especially among persons in trades such as fishing—than the available evidence can sustain. For discussion and references, see B. Gerhardsson, *The Origins of the Gospel Traditions* (London, UK: SCM, 1979) 68-161, and, S. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: JTS, 1962) 203.
- 16 The abundance of surviving Roman taxation receipts, written in Greek, clearly demonstrates this fact. The epigraphical evidence includes not only brief receipts that follow simple formulas—for examples, see the numerous pieces of Elephantine and Egyptian ostraca in U. Wilken, *Griechische Ostraka aus Ägypten und Nubien* (Manchester, NH: Ayer, 1979) and in F. Preisigke, et al., *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974)—but also more lengthy and complex receipts on papyrus, such as *PQxy* 51:3609.
- 17 Millard, 31, 170. See the taxation documentation from the pre-Christian era and from the first and second centuries AD found in the Oxyrhynchus papyri *PQxy* 49:3461; *PQxy* 62:4334; *PQxy* 24:2413; *PQxy* 45:3241; and, *PQxy* 66:4527, as well as more extensive contractual agreements such as the third-century *PQxy* 43:3092.
- 18 J. Huskinson, *Experiencing Rome: Culture, Identity, and Power in the Roman Empire* (London, UK: Routledge, 2000) 179-180; Nutton, 263-264. For a few of the many documentary examples of literacy among ancient physicians, see *PMich* 758; *PQxy* 44:3195; *PQxy* 45:3245; *PQxy* 54:3729; *PQxy* 63:4366; *PQxy* 63:4370; *PQxy* 64:4441; *PQxy* 66:4529.
- 19 Millard, 176-185; R. Cribbore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1996) 1-5.
- 20 Ehrman seems to view the fact that a scribe wrote on Paul's behalf as being problematic for persons who embrace the Bible as divine truth (*MJ* 59), but Paul's use of a scribe does not preclude Paul's position as the source of the epistle. Certainly, he would have approved the letter before it was sent.
- 21 It is crucial to note that ancient persons were considered to be the writers of a document, even if they used a scribe to write the words. Notice how Paul declared, "I have written to you" in Romans 15:15, even though Tertius penned the actual document (see Romans 16:22). In the oral culture of the ancient Roman Empire, what scribes apparently recorded was the speaker-writer's oral performance of the document. This performance was then "re-performed" by the courier of the document. See J. Small, *Wax Tablets of the Mind: Cognitive Studies of Memory and Literacy in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 160-201; Gregory Snyder, *Teachers and Texts in the Ancient World: Philosophers, Jews and Christians* (London, UK: Routledge, 2000) 191, 226-227; R. Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 36-40, 124-125.
- 22 Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus* expanded paperback edition (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007) 254.
- 23 Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994) 29.
- 24 *MJ* 7, 10-11.
- 25 D. Wallace, "The Gospel According to Bart," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49 (June 2006): 330.
- 26 *MJ* 149.
- 27 Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 288-290.
- 28 Though I agree with Ehrman that "Junia" was a woman, the case is—in all fairness—not quite as clear-cut as Ehrman presents it. For an alternative viewpoint, see D. Wallace, "Junia among the Apostles": Retrieved December 1, 2006, from http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=1163/.
- 29 *MJ* dust jacket.
- 30 Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 54, 230.
- 31 Ehrman places the emergence of this principle later and summarizes it in this way: Authoritative texts had to be "ancient" (from the time of Jesus) and "apostolic" (from the first followers of Jesus or their associates) (*LC* 242-243). As Ehrman notes, two other standards came into play later in addition to antiquity and apostolicity: these two additional standards were *catholicity* (widespread usage among Christians) and *orthodoxy* (agreement with other Scriptures). For the earliest Christians, the three categories of *orthodoxy*, *apostolicity*, and *antiquity* do not seem to have been distinguished; all three categories were rooted in the assumption that eyewitness testimony was authoritative.
- 32 *MJ* 153.
- 33 *MJ* 7, 11.
- 34 Millard, 20, 33-34.
- 35 "Age iam, qui uoles curiositatem melius exercere in negotio salutis tuae, percurrere ecclesias apostolicas apud quas ipsae adhuc cathedrae apostolorum suis locis praesident, apud quas ipsae authenticae litterae eorum recitantur sonantes uocem et repraesentantes faciem uniuscuiusque" (Tertullian of Carthage, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, 36:1; Retrieved November 4, 2006, from <http://www.terrtullian.org/>).
- 36 *To the Ephesians* 10:2; 14:2; 18:1; 20:2; *To the Magnesians* 5:1; *To the Trallians* 1:3; 12:3; *To the Romans* 5:1-2; 6:1; *To the Smyrnans* 3:1-2; 6:1; *To Polycarp* 1:2; 2:2; 5:1.