

Lesson 2: Do We Have a Reliable
Text? Or “A Quick Guide to
Textual Transmission”

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A Comparison of the NT & Other Ancient Texts

- “If Christians were familiar with the vicissitudes of all ancient literature, and then heard about NT transmission problems, they would be amazed at how the NT testimony is so very much richer and more reliable than other literature.” - Moises Silva
- Epectitus, 1st – 2nd c. philosopher: Only 4 of 8 Discourses have survived. Of those four, the earliest manuscript is AD 1100. All other copies derive from this one.
- Aeschylus, 4th c. BC Greek tragedian: Earliest manuscript from 1000 AD. Parts missing.
- Homer, 9th c. Greek mythologizer: 2500 ancient or early medieval texts, earliest from 400 BC
- New Testament:
 - Over 5700 ancient and early medieval manuscripts.
 - Entire NT well attested.
 - Over 100 manuscripts from 2nd – 5th c. AD.
 - Numerous ancient translations: Latin, 2nd c., Syriac, 2nd/3rd c., Coptic, 2nd/3rd c.
 - Counting all versions, there are over 24,000 ancient and early medieval NT manuscripts.
 - Thousands of quotations from the Greek and Latin church fathers.
 - “The New Testament is the best attested collection of writings from the ancient world. Hands down. It’s not even close.” Dr. Matthew S. Harmon

Is Our Bible Filled with Errors?

- Can we trust that we have the actual words of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, etc. in our New Testament? According to Bart Ehrman, the answer is No!

“It is one thing to say that the originals were inspired, but the reality is we don’t have the originals – so saying they were inspired doesn’t help me much, unless I can reconstruct the originals... What we have are copies made later – much later. In most instances, they are copies made many *centuries* later. And these copies differ from one another in so many places that we don’t even know how many differences there are... There are more differences among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament” – Dr. Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 10.

“What can we say about the total number of variants known today? Scholars differ significantly in their estimates – some say there are 200,000 variants known, some say 300,000, some say 400,000 or more!” Dr. Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 89.

This proves that “the Bible is a human book from beginning to end” Dr. Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 11



New Testament Textual Evidence

P 52 Rylands Fragment

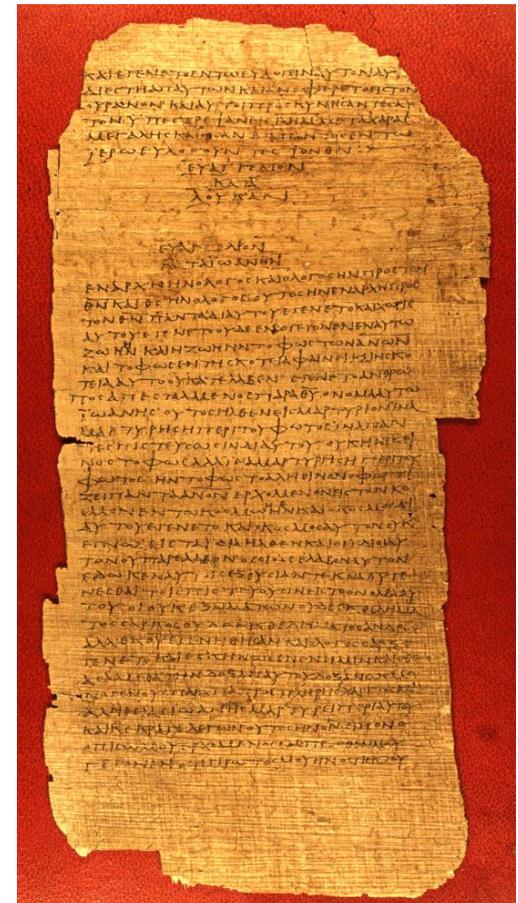
- Front: 7 lines from Jn. 18:31-33; Back: 7 lines from Jn. 18:37-38
- 3.5" x 2.5"
- Dated 100-150 a.d.
- Discovered in Egypt in the 1920's



The New Testament Textual Evidence

Papyrus 75

- Gospels of Luke and John (51 pages)
- Dated 175-225 a.d.
- Shows a high degree of skill and editorial effort.



The New Testament Textual Evidence

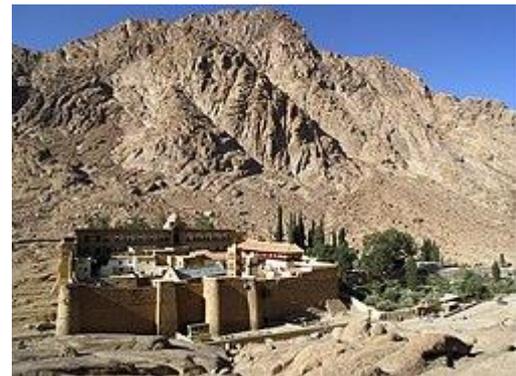
7Q5 Gospel of Mark Fragment (Mk. 1:17).

- Found in cave 7 of the Dead Sea Scrolls (Qumran), which contained only Greek writings.
- The Qumran community dissolved in 68 a.d.
- How long was it written before placed in the cave?
- Mark is thought to have been written approx. 65 a.d.



Constantine von Tischendorf

- Student in Leipzig, 1845
- Travels overland (by camel) to the 6th c. monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai
- Discovers ancient manuscripts in a trash barrel. Takes and publishes 43 leaves of the OT (from the LXX)
- Returned in 1859, presented his volume to the abbot, who showed him his ancient Bible, Codex Sinaiticus.
- Later arranged for it as a gift to the Russian Czar.



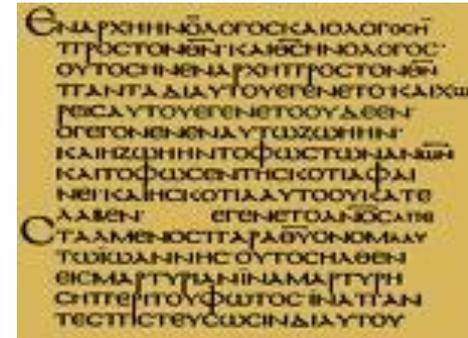
Codex Sinaiticus

- Discovered by Tischendorf on Mt. Sinai in 1859.
- 694 pages of the whole Bible on vellum parchment.
- Produced in Rome in mid 4th c.
- One of 50 copies produced by Eusebius of Caesarea for the Emperor Constantine.

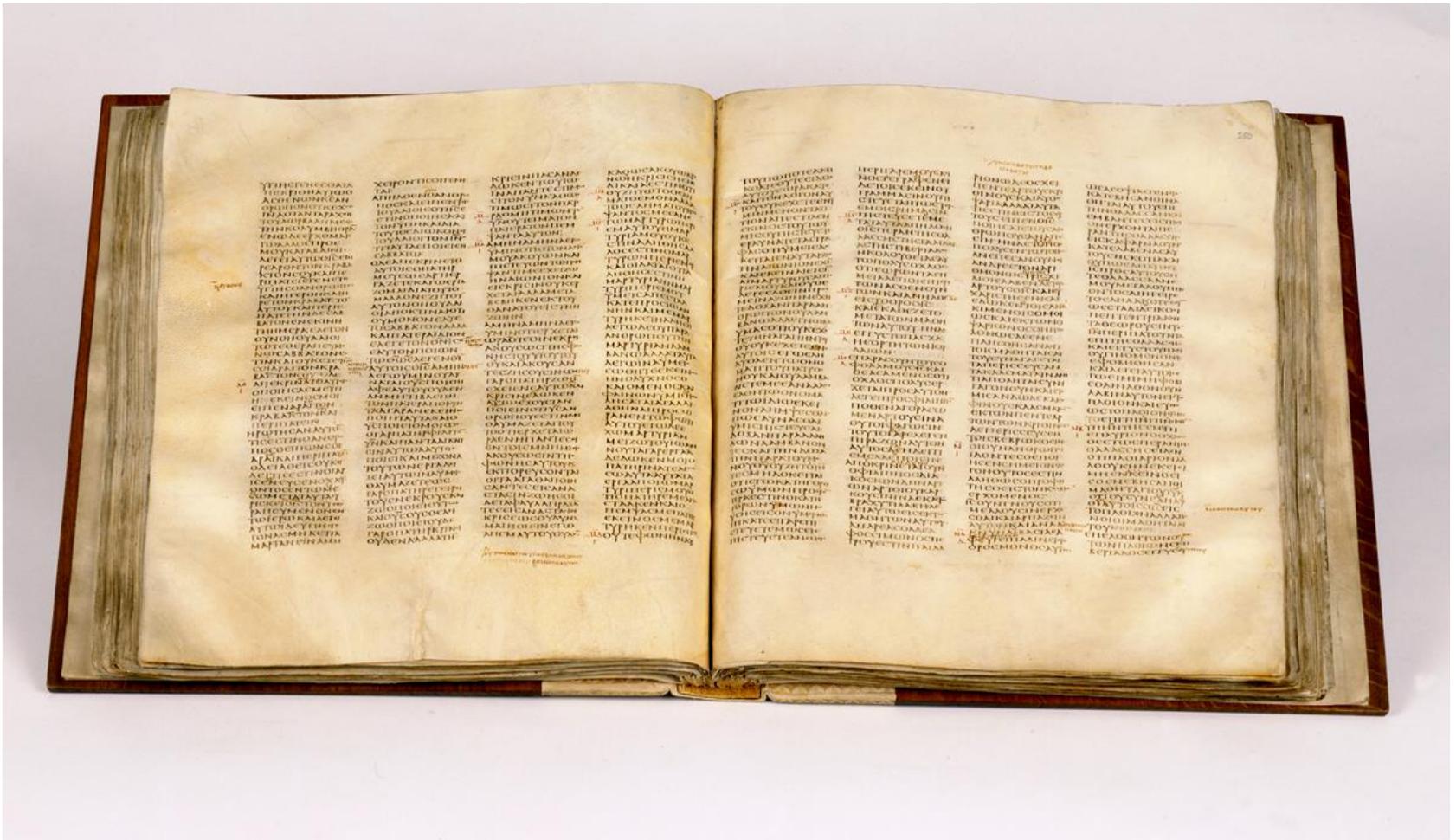


Codex Vaticanus

- Also from Constantine's Roman scriptorium
- 759 pages of the whole Bible on vellum parchment
- Known from the 16th century, not made public until after the discovery of Codex Sinaiticus
- Other early codices: Alexandrinus, 5th c.; Ephraemi, 5th c.; Bezae, 5th c.



Codex Sinaiticus (early 4th c.)



Other Important Figures

- Apostolic Fathers: Clement (d. 110); Ignatius (d. 118); Polycarp (d. 130). Their writings, from 95-110 a.d. quote from almost every book of the NT.
- John Chrystostom (b. 349 AD). Antiochene preacher/Patriarch of Constantinople. Thousands of known sermons, letters, etc., containing NT.
- Erasmus of Rotterdam.
 - Published first modern, complete Greek NT in 1516, based on six 13th/14th c. texts. Doesn't have entire NT, so back-translates where needed from the Latin *Vulgate*.
 - Continues to improve text over years, but can't remember all his changes.
 - His final edition is known as the *Textus Receptus*.
 - Comma Johannine: “**For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one**” 1 Jn. 5:7. Not attested in any early manuscript or church father, but is in the *Vulgate* and was used to support doctrine of the Trinity. Included in TR, and thus in King James.



Examining the “Problem” of Errors

- What do we make of the 200,000-400,000 variants?
 - The reason for this “problem” is the sheer number of manuscripts. Given 24,000 texts, at the highest this is about 16 variants per text, an incredibly small amount.
 - The overwhelming majority of these variants are mistakes in spelling, differences in word order, or the use of synonyms with no effect on meaning.
 - Less than 1% of textual variants have *any* impact on the meaning of a verse at all.
 - Example: Romans 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Some manuscripts put this, “let us have peace with God”. Greek ἔχομεν vs. ἔχωμεν.
 - Example: Luke 2:33, “his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.” There are some variants that read “Joseph and his mother.” *This is supposed to overturn Christianity? This proves a devious suppression of the truth?*

Assessment of the Accuracy of Our New Testament

- While we do not have the original manuscripts, God has providentially given an overwhelming and compelling testimony through the manuscripts to the entire NT.
- The very words of the NT are certain in over 99% of the verses. In the remaining 1%, there is no question as to the meaning.
- There are no doctrines in any question because of textual variants.
- There are no elements of the story of Jesus in in question because of the textual variants.

Is Our Bible Accurate?

Conclusion:

- The Bible we hold in our hands contains the books that God intends for us to recognize as authoritative for faith and practice.
 - What we read in the New Testament is exactly what God inspired the human authors to write. They are the most carefully transmitted and preserved documents from the ancient world. There are no places where a doctrine or belief of the Christian faith is at stake.
 - When you open your Bible to read about the good news of who Jesus Christ is and what he has done for us, you can rest your eternal destiny on what you read there.
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- Bart Ehrman's conclusion relies on the assumption that God could not preserve and transmit the NT text through normal historical processes, providentially overseen by God. He argues that unless the preservation of NT manuscripts mirrors the divine miracle of inspiration, then it is not divine at all. He fails to realize that the *inspiration* of Scripture was a divine miracle using normal historical processes, just as is the *transmission* of Scripture to us.