

# The Bible Text

Myths and Facts, #6

Understanding  
Christianity



**MYTH: "There are *thousands* of errors in the Bible. Therefore it can't be trusted as God's Word."**

FACTS: Like other ancient books, the Bible was copied by hand, and subject to copying errors. But 99.5% of the errors in ancient Bible manuscripts are irrelevant typos and spelling differences. Only about 50 passages of the New Testament are of unconfirmed authenticity, and these do not affect any central Biblical teaching, making the Bible the most accurately translated of all ancient texts:

*"When Professor [Bart] Ehrman [the skeptic and New Testament scholar] says there are errors in the transcripts of the New Testament, how can he say next that these errors are inconsequential? Because they are spelling 'errors' or typographical 'errors.'" (David Bowen PhD, Vanderbilt)*

**MYTH: "We don't have the original manuscripts of the Bible; only copies. We can't trust copies."**

FACTS: *"There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament."* (F.F. Bruce, New Testament scholar, Manchester University)

Originals do not exist for most ancient books- not even for Shakespeare's plays. Authenticity of ancient books is based on the number of surviving copies, and on the nearness of those copies to the original writing. More surviving copies means greater accuracy, since copies can be checked

against one another. Homer's *Iliad* runs a distant second to the Bible in verifiability among comparable books, with 643 surviving copies, the earliest of which date to 500 years after Homer's time. There are over 6,000 New Testament manuscripts surviving in Greek alone, the earliest of which date only 24-40 years after authorship.

If the Bible's copies aren't reliable, than no historic writing ever -secular or religious- can be reliable, because they are ALL inferior to the Bible in textual documentation.

**MYTH: "Even if only a few lines of the New Testament copies are in doubt, that means the Bible isn't perfect and can't be from God."**

FACTS: This type of logical fallacy is called a *non-sequitur*. It does not logically follow that the Bible can't be God's perfect word unless it is flawlessly transmitted. If the Bible is God's message, and has been copied accurately enough that the message is taught to others, then it is perfectly successful in its stated purpose, and can be called perfect.

**MYTH: "The Bible might have been like the 'telephone game'; after being translated so many times, the original meaning was lost."**

FACTS: Your Bible has only been translated once: from its original Hebrew and Greek into each language you read it in now. In the "telephone game" data is corrupted because of linear transmission (info passed along

from person A to B to C, etc.) and from being whispered or spoken rather than written. Neither of those apply to the Bible, which was written by eyewitnesses to Jesus and copied by hand thousands of times separately, making it nearly impossible for "loss in translation" to occur.

Scripture also has an extra layer of verification because ancient writers quoted it extensively:

*"Scriptures...gave rise to an immense output of early Christian literature which quoted them at length and, in effect, preserved them..."* (Paul Barnett, historian and New Testament Scholar)

*"[Quotations from early Christian writers] would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament."* (Bruce Metzger, textual critic and prominent New Testament scholar, Princeton)

**MYTH: "The books of the Bible were chosen by Constantine at the council of Nicea in the year 325."**

FACTS: This popular lie is found in the novel *The Da Vinci Code*. The *canon* (list of books that make up the Bible) was not discussed at the Council of Nicea at all. (Atheist/historian Bart Ehrman: *Fact and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code*)

The process of recognizing and gathering Bible books took place long before 325, with most of the books already firmly decided upon (Revelation, the last book written, was canonized last.)

*"From this it is clear that the Word...being manifested to men gave us the gospel, fourfold in form but held together by one Spirit."* (Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, cir. 175)

*"For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto...that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, said, 'This do ye in remembrance of Me...'"* (Justin Martyr, First Apology, circa 156 AD)

"The familiar four Gospels, which scholars commonly regard as the earliest such texts, were treated as a completed set at least by A.D. 150 in Christian circles. Still earlier, Paul's letters were circulated as scripture. In the early 3rd century, the Christian scholar Origen listed the writings regarded by most Christians of his time as scripture...he included most of what is now the New Testament." (Larry Hurtado, University of Edinburgh: *Scholarly Grips About The Da Vinci Code*, Slate)

**MYTH: "There are 'lost books of the Bible' that were suppressed or 'banned' for political reasons."**

FACTS: Even from a secular viewpoint, it's silly to claim that the Bible has "lost" books, because the earliest Christ's apostles and their successors chose what writings belonged there. No one else was qualified to decide what books represented Christianity.

In any case, the Gnostic "gospels" and other rejected writings are not authentic records of Jesus' teachings.

*"Both the gnostic texts and their more 'orthodox' 2nd-century competitors are clearly later...and considerably farther-removed from the Palestinian Jesus tradition than the Biblical gospels are."* (Dr. Craig Keener, New Testament Studies and Christian Origins Professor: *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*)

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