WP-05 HISTORY

The Text Was Transmitted Reliably

STATEMENT

The Bible is the best-attested document of the ancient world. The number, age and agreement of its manuscripts allow scholars to reconstruct the original text with very high confidence, and modern translations are made from that reconstructed text.

Read time **3 min** Sources & resources **3** Series **History**

01 ABSTRACT

A common objection is that the Bible has been “translated and retranslated” until its meaning drifted. In fact, modern translations go directly back to Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, not through a chain of translations. The real engineering question is data integrity: how well has the source text been preserved? This paper compares the manuscript record for the Bible with other ancient works and examines the textual variants honestly.

02 HOW TEXTUAL CRITICISM WORKS

No original manuscript of any ancient book survives. Scholars reconstruct the original by comparing copies, the way an engineer reconstructs a signal from multiple noisy receivers. The more independent copies, and the earlier they are, the more reliable the reconstruction. Errors in one copy rarely appear in copies from other regions, so they can be identified and removed.

03 EVIDENCE

OBSERVATION	DATA & SOURCE	CONFIDENCE
Volume of copies	More than 5,800 Greek New Testament manuscripts are catalogued, plus about 10,000 in Latin and thousands more in other ancient languages. Homer’s Iliad, the next best-attested work, has fewer than 2,000.	HIGH
Time gap	The earliest New Testament fragments date within roughly a century of the originals. For works like Caesar’s Gallic Wars or Tacitus, the gap is often 800 to 1,000 years or more.	HIGH
Dead Sea Scrolls	The Great Isaiah Scroll (~125 BC) matches the medieval Masoretic text (~AD 1000) almost word for word; the differences are mainly spelling. That is over 1,000 years of copying with very little drift.	HIGH
Nature of the variants	Most textual variants are spelling, word order or obvious slips. Only a small fraction affect meaning and are plausible readings, and no core Christian doctrine depends on a disputed variant.	HIGH
Written within living memory	Most scholars date the New Testament books to the first century, while eyewitnesses were still alive. Traditional authorship attributes several to eyewitnesses or their close associates.	MODERATE

High = directly measured or widely accepted across worldviews. **Moderate** = well-supported, with recognized scholarly debate. **Interpretive** = consistent with the text, but depends on how the passage is read.

04 OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

OBJECTION

We don't have the originals, so we can't know what they said.

RESPONSE

The same is true of every ancient book, yet no historian doubts we know what Caesar or Plato wrote. The Bible's manuscript evidence is far stronger than theirs.

OBJECTION

There are hundreds of thousands of variants, more than words in the New Testament.

RESPONSE

The count is high because there are so many manuscripts. Each spelling difference in each copy counts as a variant. Even skeptical scholar Bart Ehrman acknowledges that essential Christian beliefs are not affected by them.

OBJECTION

Translations differ from each other.

RESPONSE

Differences between translations are mostly choices of wording (word-for-word vs. thought-for-thought), not differences in the underlying text. Notes in modern Bibles flag the few places where manuscripts differ.

05 CONCLUSION

Measured by the same standards historians apply to every other ancient text, the Bible's text has been preserved with exceptional fidelity. Readers can be confident that a modern translation reflects what was originally written.

> *"Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear." Matthew 24:35*

06 FURTHER RESOURCES

VIDEO **Was the Bible Translated Accurately? (Short)** Dr. Sean McDowell
https://www.youtube.com/shorts/Q3GlUXvN3YU

VIDEO **Reliability & Authenticity of the Bible** Josh McDowell
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24aYQdmLSlw

VIDEO **The BEST FACTS: Translated Correctly** GCA

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNZ8EPCXH-Y&list=PL59Qh4Scw7PebBz1Q-ixu5G7RPxCLWMt1&index=10

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