

# MANUSCRIPT ERRORS IN THE BIBLE?

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#FYI2017

The Doctrine of Scripture

# INTRODUCTION

## Top NT Scholars Referred To:

### 1) Dr Daniel B. Wallace

- Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary

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### 2) Dr Bruce Metzger

- George L. Collord Professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Princeton Theological Seminary (passed away in 2007)

### 3) Dr F.F. Bruce

- Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester (passed away in 1990)

# INTRODUCTION

## 4) Bart D. Ehrman\*

- James A. Gray Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

## 5) Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland

- Kurt: Professor of Church History and New Testament Textual Criticism at the University of Münster, Germany & founder of Institute for New Testament Textual Research (passed away in 1994)
- Barbara: Professor of New Testament Research and Church History at Westphalian Wilhelms-University of Münster until 2002



# Definitions

## a) Autograph

- “The first or original copies of the biblical documents, that is, the material that the author actually wrote himself.” [1]
- The original text

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## b) Manuscript

- “An old document or book written by hand in the times before printing was invented.” [2]
- Copies of the original text & copies of the copies of the original text

# Definitions

## c) Variant

- “A textual variant is simply any difference from a standard text (e.g., a printed text, a particular manuscript, etc.) that involves spelling, word order, omission, addition, substitution, or a total rewrite of the text.” [3]
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## d) Textual Criticism

- “The discipline that attempts to determine the original wording of any documents ...” [4]

Question: Do we have the autograph of the  
Old & New Testament?



# NT Manuscripts vs Classical Texts

## A) THE NEW TESTAMENT

- Greek (5,800+ copies) [as of 28th September 2015] [5]
- Latin (10,00+ copies) [6]
- Slavic (4,000+ copies) [7]
- Armenian (2,587 copies) [8]
- Coptic (975 copies) [9]
- Syriac (350+ copies) [10]

# NT Manuscripts vs Classical Texts

## B) CLASSICAL TEXTS

(Refer to p.7 of THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST by Josh D.  
McDowell & Clay Jones (Updated 08.13.14))



“There are more variations among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.” [11]

“What good is it to say that the autographs (i.e., the originals) were 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, in thousands of ways.” [12]

Is Bart Ehrman right?

**TOTAL NUMBER OF WORDS IN THE NT: 138,020**

“There are 138,020 words in the New Testament.” [13]

**EST. NUM. OF VARIANTS: 300,000-500,000**

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“...with the work done on Luke’s Gospel by the International Greek New Testament Project, Tommy Wasserman’s work on Jude, and Münster’s work on James and 1-2 Peter, the estimates [of textual variants] today are closer to 400,000. Some even claim half a million.” [14]

# Scribal Work

Rules:

- 1) You are to copy down what I will dictate
- 2) You are **not allowed** to ask anyone around you to reconfirm what was said  

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- 3) You are **not allowed** to refer to your bible or to any other external source
- 4) You are **not allowed** to refer to what the people around you are writing



“Fortunately, if the great number of MSS [manuscripts] increases the number of scribal errors, it increases proportionately the means of correcting such errors, so that the margin of doubt left in the process of recovering the exact original wording is not so large as might be feared; it is in truth, remarkably small.” [F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are they Reliable?* (1943), Chapter 2]

# Types of Variants

## a) Not meaningful and not viable

- Unlikely to be in the original, and they don't alter the meaning of the text
- “Spelling and nonsense readings are the vast majority, accounting for at least 75% of all variants.” [15]
- e.g. John's name (Iōannēs (Ἰωάννης) or Iōanēs (Ἰωάνης)?)

## b) Viable but not meaningful

- Could be part of the original text but make no meaningful change to the text
- e.g. Luke 2:16

Luke 2 Version Commentary Language

2532 [e]	2064 [e]	4692 [e]	2532 [e]	429 [e]	3588 [e]	5037 [e]	3137 [e]	2532 [e]	3588 [e]	2501 [e]		
kai	ēlthan	speusantes	kai	aneuran	tēn	te	Mariam	kai	ton	lōsēph		
16	καὶ	ἦλθαν	σπεύσαντες	, καὶ	ἀνεύραν	τὴν	τε	Μαριάμ	καὶ	τὸν	Ἰωσήφ	,
	And	they came	having hurried	and	found	-	both	Mary	and	-	Joseph	
	Conj	V-AIA-3P	V-APA-NMP		Conj	V-AIA-3P	Art-AFS	Conj	N-AFS	Conj	Art-AMS	N-AMS

2532 [e]	3588 [e]	1025 [e]	2749 [e]	1722 [e]	3588 [e]	5336 [e]	3708 [e]	1161 [e]	1107 [e]		
kai	to	brephos	keimenon	en	tē	phatnē	idontes	de	egnōrisan		
καὶ	τὸ	βρέφος	, κείμενον	ἐν	τῇ	φάτνῃ	. 17	ιδόντες	δὲ	, ἐγνώρισαν	
	and	the	baby	lying	in	the	manger	having seen	moreover	they made known	abroad
	Conj	Art-ANS	N-ANS	V-PPMP-ANS	Prep	Art-DFS	N-DFS	V-APA-NMP	Conj	V-AIA-3P	

4012 [e]	3588 [e]	4487 [e]	3588 [e]	2980 [e]	846 [e]	4012 [e]	3588 [e]	3813 [e]	3778 [e]	
peri	tou	rhēmatos	tou	lalēthentos	autois	peri	tou	paidiou	toutou	
περὶ	τοῦ	ῥήματος	τοῦ	λαληθέντος	αὐτοῖς	, περὶ	τοῦ	παιδίου	τούτου	.
	concerning	the	saying	-	having been told	them	concerning	the	child	this
	Prep	Art-GNS	N-GNS	Art-GNS	V-APP-GNS	PPro-DM3P	Prep	Art-GNS	N-GNS	DPro-GNS

2532 [e]	3056 [e]	3588 [e]	191 [e]	2296 [e]	4012 [e]	3588 [e]	2980 [e]	5259 [e]	3588 [e]
kai	pantes	hoi	akousantes	ethaumasān	peri	tōn	lalēthentōn	hypo	tōn
καὶ	πάντες	οἱ	ἀκούσαντες	ἠθαύμασαν	περὶ	τῶν	λαληθέντων	ὑπὸ	τῶν



# Types of Variants

## c) Meaningful but not viable

- Do change the meaning of the text, but they are unlikely to be in the original
- e.g. Luke 6:22

## d) Viable & meaningful

- Good chance of being in the original and they change the meaning of the text
- “These comprise less than 1% of all textual variants.” [16]
- e.g. 1 John 1:4, Romans 5:1, 1 John 5:7\*, Mark 16:9-20\*, John 7:53-John 8:11\*

Question: So what if we have a bunch of manuscripts with lots of variants? How do we know we have the original wording?

# Text Reconstruction (Example)

Manuscript #1: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Manuscript #2: In the beginning, God created the earth and the heavens.

Manuscript #3: At the beginning, God made the heaven and the earth.

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Manuscript #4: In the beginning, Jesus created the heavens and the earth.

Manuscript #5: In the beginning, God created the sky and the earth.

**ORIGINAL: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.**



# Text Reconstruction (Exercise)

## A) Aim

- To reconstruct the original text based on the “manuscripts” provided

## B) Basic assumption

- Each of the “manuscripts” provided are the same in terms of weight

# Text Reconstruction (Exercise)

## C) Rules:

- Work together with all your groupmates
- You are to use all of the “manuscripts” given to your group
- You are **not allowed** to refer to your bible or to any other external source

Discussion question:  
What happens if we do not have any  
manuscripts?



Answer:

We have quotations of the early Church Fathers  
which would allow us to virtually reconstruct [17]  
/ reproduce the contents of [18] the New  
Testament

"These quotations [of the early Church Fathers] are so extensive that the New Testament could be virtually reconstructed from them without the use of New Testament Manuscripts." [17]

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“even if we lost all the Greek manuscripts and the early translations, we could still reproduce the contents of the New Testament from the multiplicity of quotations in commentaries, sermons, letters, and so forth of the early Church Fathers.” [18]

“Besides textual evidence derived from New Testament Greek manuscripts and from early versions, the textual critic compares numerous scriptural quotations used in commentaries, sermons, and other treatises written by early church fathers. Indeed, so extensive are these citations that if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament.” [Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th Edition (2005), p.126]



# Conclusion

We can take heart knowing the following things:

- a) The Bible we have today is well attested to (i.e. we have plenty of manuscript evidence)
- b) There is an entire field of study dedicated to discovering the wordings of the original text
- c) There is no conspiracy to hide the variants
- d) The viable & meaningful variants have no impact on core Christian doctrine

# Conclusion

“For most practical purposes, then, the current published scholarly texts of the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament are the same as the original manuscripts.” [20]

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[1] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (1994), p.96

[2] “Manuscript.” Dictionary.cambridge.org. Accessed October 6, 2017.

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/manuscript>

[3] Daniel B Wallace, “The Number of Textual Variants: An Evangelical Miscalculation.” Danielbwallace.com. Accessed October 6, 2017. <http://danielbwallace.com/2013/09/09/the-number-of-textual-variants-an-evangelical-miscalculation/>



[4] Justin Taylor, “An Interview with Daniel B Wallace on the New Testament Manuscripts.”

TheGospelCoalition.org. Accessed October 6, 2017.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/an-interview-with-daniel-b-wallace-on-the-new-testament-manuscripts/>

[5] Robert D Marcello, “National Library of Greece Summer Recap.” CSNTM.org. Accessed October 6, 2017.

<http://www.csntm.org/News/Archive/2015/9/28/NationalLibraryofGreeceSummerReca>

[6] J. K. Elliott, "The Translations of the New Testament into Latin: The Old Latin and the Vulgate," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt, Widmen Dieses, et., al., eds.* (1992), p.224

[7] Henry R. Cooper, *Slavic Scriptures: The Formation of the Church Slavonic Version of the Holy Bible* (2003), p. 170, fn 61

[8] Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th Edition (2005), p.117

[9] Karlheinz Schüssler, *Biblia Coptica: Die Koptischen Bibeltexte Band 3* (2004)

[10] Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th Edition (2005), p.98

[11] Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus* (2005), p.90

[12] Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus* (2005), p.7



[13] Edward D. Andrews and Don Wilkins, *The Text of the New Testament: The Science and Art of Textual Criticism* (2017), p.335

[14] Daniel B Wallace, "The Number of Textual Variants: An Evangelical Miscalculation." Danielbwallace.com. Accessed October 6, 2017. <https://danielbwallace.com/2013/09/09/the-number-of-textual-variants-an-evangelical-miscalculation/>

[15] Justin Taylor, "An Interview with Daniel B Wallace on the New Testament Manuscripts" TheGospelCoalition.org. Accessed October 6, 2017. <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2012/03/21/an-interview-with-daniel-b-wallace-on-the-new-testament-manuscripts/>

[16] J. Ed Komoszewski, et al, *Reinventing Jesus* (2006), p.63

[17] Harold Greenlee, *Introduction To New Testament Textual Criticism* (1993), p.54

[18] Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th Edition (2005), p.126

[19] D A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate* (1979), p.56; see also Philip W. Comfort, *The Complete Guide to Bible Versions* (1991) & Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus* (2005), p.252

[20] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (1994)