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Section: Doctrine of Scripture

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**Q24. Can we trust the Bible?**

Yes. The Bible is completely true and without error in its original manuscripts.

* **Intro**

**Textual Variant (explained):** Any place among the manuscripts in which there is variation in wording. This includes word order, omission or addition of words, spelling, or punctuation differences.

**John 17:14-19** “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

* **Textual Variants**

**Textual Variant (defined):** A textual variant is a difference between similar texts from different sources in the manuscript copies that we possess.

* **Understanding the Numbers**

We have at, or slightly more than, 400,000 textual variants in the New Testament manuscripts.

Ninety-nine percent don’t even translate into English; they have to do with nuances in the original Greek language, and they have zero effect on the text or the meaning of the text.

* **Some reasons for the variants**
* Movable nu: This is a phrase relating to a rule in Greek grammar, similar to the English use of the word “a” and “an.”
* Similar endings: Scribe would pick up at a different location because they recognized the end of the word and thought that’s where they had left off. The end of the word was similar to the end of the word they were copying, and they accidentally skipped an entire line of text.

Of the handwritten, Greek New Testament texts that we possess, we have approximately two million pages of Scripture. Of these two million pages, we have about 1500 viable, meaningful textual variants.

* **Scripture Compared to the Writings of Antiquity**

The New Testament writings are hands-down the earliest contested writings of antiquity (copies of the texts are dated within the first century of the actual writing—far earlier than other writings from antiquity). The New Testament writings are the most accurate writings of antiquity. The New Testament writings are the most contested writings of antiquity (we have the most copies to compare). If we cannot trust the New Testament writings, then we cannot trust any other writing of antiquity.

In comparison, the average length of writing between most works contemporaneous with the New Testament--such as the historical works of Pliny, Suetonius, or Tacitus—and their first extant copies is 500 to 900 years. This means that writings of these historical figures do not have any manuscripts to show what they wrote until 500 to 900 years after they had written them. The New Testament has nearly the entirety of it attested for within 100 years of the original authors. c

* **The Benefit of a Wide Geographical Collection**

Many of the attacks on the New Testament claim that there were wholesale changes made to the text of Scripture; however, the manner in which the New Testament was copied and transmitted would actually make this impossible. There would have to have been a centralized body capable of gathering all the copies that were spread out all over the world in order to make wholesale changes in this widely distributed writing. No such agency existed or could have existed in this time.

* **Transmission vs. Translation**

The transmission of the text is the way that the various texts were copied and spread across the world.

The translation of the text is when we take a Greek or Latin text (typically the oldest texts) and translate it into a different language. We have over 450 English translations. The differences in translation are not the same things as a difference in transmission.

The textual variant is a difference found in a transmitted copy of Scripture. The difference in translations either come from the original text used or errors in meaning due to difficulties in differing languages.

* **Brief History of Transmission**

Shortly after Christ (even during His earthly ministry), Rome began a truly intense time of persecution for this new sect called “The Way.” This persecution went on for 250 years. Rome tried to destroy the Church’s documents along with the Church itself. During this time, you didn’t want to be caught with a copy of these letters or manuscripts. People had to copy these things in secret, often at night by candlelight.

Entire libraries would be burned during the Roman persecution. It’s truly amazing we have all the manuscripts we do have. God clearly preserved His word through time and even persecution.

* **Viable Textual Variants**

The two multiple verse textual variants that we have in our Bible are found in the longer ending of Mark (16:9-20) and the end of John chapter 7 through the beginning of John chapter 8—the story of the woman caught in adultery.

When it comes to the woman caught in adultery found in the gospel of John, there are two very clear reasons why we would believe it to be an addition instead of the original text. The first reason is a theological reason; what transpires in the account could create challenges to the honoring of God’s law given in the Old Covenant that the people were still living in. The second reason is because in the earliest manuscripts, we don’t see this account. It’s a story that shows up in latter manuscripts, and in those manuscripts, it shows up in multiple different books.

* **Another Poor Argument**

**The argument**: The early church did not believe in the deity of Jesus until the council on Nicea in 325.

**The truth**: In “P66” (dated to 175-200 AD), we have the Gospel of John where the writer used a symbol called the *nomina sacra*—a symbol only used to take the place of God’s name, out of what seems to be a superstition that by writing the name of God you might be taking His name in vain. Also, a copy of the Gospel of John dating long before the council of Nicea, showed that the copyist and the letter being copied called the “Word” found in John 1, **God**!

**John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God

* **Conclusion**

We have about 400,000 variants, 99% or more are not even understandable in the English language. Of the remaining 1%, half have zero bearing on the text. The remaining variants are usually marked in your Bible and typically removed from the text with a footnote, or they are bracketed to show that it is a variant.

* **Sola Scriptura**

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

**Acts 5:29** But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.”

**Matthew 4:4** But he [Jesus] answered, “It is written, “‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’’’

Sola Scriptura or Scripture Alone is a phrase that declares the inerrant and infallible Holy Bible is the sole source of written divine revelation

**Romans 2:1-2** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.