

# ***THE BIBLE***

## **BIBLICAL MANUSCRIPT MISTAKES**



**SUMMARY:** You are free to choose to believe there is or is not a God, however, there is no credible alternative to there being a God. Of the pretenders to be God, the God of the Judeo-Christian heritage is the only one which demonstrates reasonable characteristics to be an actual God.

The Greek translations we base the Bible on are not mistake free and will never be. The mistakes in it appear to be in miscellaneous details rather than the Gospel message. Our problem today is not having the word of God to follow, it is in following the word of God.

This lesson summarizes the history of Biblical translation errors, corrections, the status today, and what our approach should be today.

There has been much discussion as to whether the original autographs of the New Testament were mistake free, how much the text has been changed in the generations of manual copies, and how reliable the Bible of today is. An implication is that if you can find a mistake in the New Testament, then God must not exist. Or if a God exists, is the New Testament qualified to be from that God.

A question here is does the Bible claim to be perfect or have we claimed something for it it does not claim for itself? II Tim. 3:16 says that “all scripture is inspired by God”, but does that mean it is perfect? “All scripture” when II Timothy was written probably referred to the Old Law as much of what was to become the New Testament was not even written.

### **THE ORIGINAL AUTOGRAPHS**

The initial writings of the New Testament (the autographs) are presumed to have been written in Greek rather than the Aramaic language which Jesus and the Apostles spoke. This may be true, or may simply be a conclusion because the oldest copies we have are in Greek. It is possible that some of them were written in Aramaic and translated into Greek, and we only have the Greek translations<sup>1</sup>. There is much discussion as to whether the original autographs were word for word inspired, were thought for thought inspired, were written by individuals which were inspired, or were written by witnesses to individuals who were inspired. Whatever you conclude, it cannot be proven today. It will be a belief.



### **CORRUPTING THE NEW TESTAMENT (GREEK TRANSLATION)**

We have historically taught that the Bible was inerrant, at least in the original autographs. We have suggested that our youth and others should believe this unquestioningly, and we have paid the price for this. It is functionally an easy target for Satan, and many here on earth which question that teaching.

Let's start with a few facts which are not in dispute:

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1. We do not have the original autographs (the piece of paper originally written). Some of the autographs may have survived to near the end of the second century<sup>2</sup>.
2. We do not have early copies, but rather have copies probably several generations down. We have a fragment (John Rylands Papyrus P152) which dates to as early as 125 AD<sup>3</sup>.
3. All early century documents were copied by hand.
4. All hand copies incorporate mistake. Most mistakes are unintentional but some intentional.
5. When a mistake is made in a copy, it is typically repeated in subsequent copies.
6. The number of mistakes in the Bibles generally continued to grow until the advent of the printing press in 1440 A.D. In 1550 John Mills estimated in his book called Stephanus there were 30,000 “mistakes” in the Greek manuscripts<sup>4</sup>. It is a testimony both to the inaccuracy of manual copying and the wealth of Greek manuscripts which existed.
7. Early people had limited access to the New Testament writings whether they were literate or not.
8. Probably 85-90% of the people were illiterate.
9. High literacy rates we are accustomed to today did not happen until after the printing press (A.D. 1440) and the Industrial Revolution (beginning about A.D. 1760).

### **RESTORING THE BIBLE (GREEK TRANSLATION)**

1. Since the advent of the printing press, mistakes have tended to be eliminated. Contemporary copies of the Bible can be fairly close to the original autographs, but will still contain some mistakes. The “mistakes being eliminated” was from the Greek versions which were used to make English translations.
2. By 1881 with The New Testament in Greek translation by Brooke Foss Wescott and Fenton John Anthony Hort<sup>5</sup>, the Greek had matured to a form very close to what we have today.
3. The Greek translations today (and any subsequent English translations) are not mistake free and are not back to the original autographs.
4. Versions of the Bible today vary from close to word for word to paraphrasing the thoughts of the Bible (in the understanding of the paraphrasers).
5. Some versions of the Bible are intentionally mistranslated, e.g. The Queen James Bible.

If we postulate that if the Bible is perfect there is a God or if the Bible is imperfect there is no God, God will lose that decision. It does not matter if you are discussing the theoretical but unavailable autographs or any copies, the answer will be the same. Atheist would like to engage us in that discussion, we can't win and they can chip away at our children so we effectively lose.

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This discussion has produced some best sellers on the New York Times Best Seller lists, not because it is a surprise but rather because religions authorities have said it was not true for years.

### **IS THERE A GOD?**

Instead of attacking the Bible, let's again start with some facts on a different track:

1. **There is a supernatural force.** The mere existence of the Universe is a violation of scientific principles, is therefore a supernatural event.
2. That **supernatural event** of coming into being had to be caused by something which already existed, even if that something is inexplicable.
3. The **definition of God** is something which has always existed and can violate the laws of nature. **We have capitalized the word God to indicate the being who has existed forever and has the power to violate the laws of nature.** (That definition of God is offered here as there seems to be no real definition of God available.) Other levels of gods may exist such as powerful gods created by God which can violate the laws of nature down a personal hand made object which you choose to worship as a god. [2.1-] (Numbers in square brackets indicate other lessons in this series)
4. Therefore, God exists by definition, this discussion just hasn't identified him yet.
5. That God does not talk to us today personally and personally control our lives. We are free moral agents and can choose to believe in Him, to ignore Him, or to teach against Him.
6. There is no positive way to prove that God continues to exist today. If you are going to believe that God continues to exist today, you must look at the evidences and conclude that there is still a God, and who that God is among the choices we have today.
7. If there is a God, it can be important to know as that God may or may not have communicated with us and may or may not have expectations of us.

### **WHICH GOD?**

Given that there is a God and He doesn't force Himself on us but let's us be free moral agents, what are the characteristics you would expect to see to believe? Consider the following:

1. Would have communicated His message in writing so that it could be reasonably passed on from generation to generation.
2. Would have buried scientific prophecies in the writings so that future generations could know He had more than human knowledge.
3. Would not have included scientific mistakes in the teachings. You need to keep in mind here that sometimes what we call a scientific mistake means that we don't understand the science, yet.

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4. Absence of myths, scientific or otherwise: With a solely human author there is a tendency to include contemporary scientific mistakes in writing. Consider it was a scientific fact that the Sun orbited the earth at one time and that the earth was flat at another time.
5. The writers understood that the writings were the writings of God when they were written, even if they did not fully understand them. If a prophet was on earth and a few hundred years later someone decided he was a god, that would not be the sign that he was actually a god.
6. Non-obvious teachings

The only God which qualifies to be God on this basis is the God of the Judeo Christian heritage. He provides creation of the Heavens and the Earth, the intelligence of creating all life (e.g. DNA programming), and has communicated to us through the Bible. [2.4] Some other religions such as Islam and Mormonism claim to come from the same God, but do not demonstrate themselves through scientific prophecies or lack of errors and teaching of myths. [5.3] Literally that list of qualifications eliminates all other offerings to be the God. If you have a better list of qualifications, let us know.

### **WHAT IS THEIR ALTERNATIVE?**

The question is not whether someone can criticize the Bible. They can. Anything can be criticized. The question is what is the other choice or they just tearing down something which is right and true?

The primary alternative is a Big Bang (a supernatural event), the accidental creation of life (They give no explanation and don't even know what "life" means), and creation of species by evolution (a long series of lucky but impossible accidents). That is impossible, impossible, and impossible.

Critics get to do a nice thing. Just say something bad about something else. If you say God is not real, what does that mean? Does it mean that we in fact did not come from nothing? Did life happen by accident? Did DNA programming of all life just happen by an infinitely long series of lucky accidents? It is for sure we did not simply appear from nothing, life did not happen accidentally, and DNA programming didn't just happen. If God did not do this, the critic should offer a better explanation. An infinite series of luck accidents is not an answer, it is a naïve dodge. **It may be a naïve dodge well funded by your tax dollars, but it is still an impossible answer. That matter exists and is not cold and dead is a supernatural event. [1.1-] There is no getting around it. Their answers are just fairy tale responses.**

It is easy to be a critic of almost anything. The weather is too hot for one person and too cold for another, while the temperature is the same for both. There is no temperature which cannot be criticized. Most situations are that way. A person who has no ability to write, can criticize how Shakespeare wrote. A person with little musical talent can criticize Mozart.

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ALTERNATELY, if you want to disbelieve in atheistic evolution and believe someone else is God, let us know who that is. Someone else may have a favorite because of their heritage and background, but we have reviewed them all and find none with a legitimate claim to be God. If you think you can show why, please let us know as if you can we need to include that information here.

The Bible has the hallmarks of being written by a real God. No other writings have those hallmarks. The Bible explains creation (in a simple overview) and provides the power and intelligence to make it happen. The Bible cannot be a perfect book. Even if it was it would be proclaimed to be a fake because nothing is perfect without collusion.

### **THE CONCLUSION**

The point to this is that we let the perfection of the Bible be the battle ground for discussions, **we will lose** as there will be no resolution. What we see today is flawed, and the original autographs may have been flawed at least in grammar but we can never know. It is not the issue.

If we let the battle ground be recognizing that supernatural happenings required a supernatural force, fulfilled prophecies, scientific statements, the lack of scientific errors, and historical accuracy, **we can win**. We must compare that with normal human history of prophecies and scientific statements to show how truly special the Bible is. Other lessons are provided with this information.

We may have to give up some of our “sacred cows” interpretations like perfection of the writing of the Bible and 24 hour creation days and simply teach what the Bible teaches, and that is what we claim to do in the first place. Let’s do what we have said we are doing.

A few hundred years ago it may have been workable to overstate the case and claim the Bible was perfect. It is no longer true that this a workable point of view. If you want to do your part to defend/promote God today, you need to make realistic claims about the situation and be able to defend them.

Our problem is not that we don’t have access to the word of God. Our problem is we don’t follow it.

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### **IN SUMMARY:**

The original autographs of the Bible may or may not have been perfect, however, we don't have access to them to prove/discuss it.

There have been numerous copying errors in the (Greek) manuscripts, which would have been expected from manual copying.

Most of the (Greek) manuscript errors have been eliminated, but not all. By 1881, the original meaning in Greek has been pretty well restored. Hundreds of thousands of hours have been spent in the restoration of the text.

The errors identified are in details, not the Gospel message.

English translations (and paraphrases) follow the manuscripts to a differing amount. You should select one which is closer to word-for-word instead of thought-for-thought if you want to know what the message was instead of what someone else thought it was.

We do not have the resources to objectively choose which part of the Bible to believe (if that was appropriate to do). Any part you choose to leave out will have "scholars" who agree with the deletion and "scholars" to disagree.

Our path should be to pick a translation as close to the Greek as is practical and follow it.

You should also get other translations for comparison and a Greek-English interlinear for specific word studies.

Our problem is not that we don't reasonably have the message from God. Our problem is in deciding to follow it.

Foot notes:

1. [Rose Guide to the Gospels](#), Hendrickson Publishers, page 9.
2. [Rose Guide to the Gospels](#), Hendrickson Publishers, page 135.
3. [Rose Guide to the Gospels](#), Hendrickson Publishers, page 24.
4. [Misquoting Jesus](#), Bart D. Ehrman, Harper One of HarperCollins Publishers, page 84.
5. [Misquoting Jesus](#), Bart D. Ehrman, Harper One of HarperCollins Publishers, page 121.

[X.X] Numbers indicated in square brackets are lesson numbers in this series of lessons.