

# Manuscript Errors?

Liberal scholars of many groups, Islamic scholars and the leaders of many other religious organizations question whether the Bible has been accurately handed down to us. It's been over 50 years since I studied textual criticism so this little synopsis may not be in keeping with the latest science, but it's the best I can do from memory.

Undoubtedly some friendly Greek -- Hebrew scholar or conservative textual critic will bring any additions or corrections to my attention via e-mail.

Some believe the Bible has been corrupted over time. It isn't true and here is how we know it isn't.

The last books of the New Testament were written by about 100 A.D. by the apostle John who was still alive at that time. We have over 5300 partial or complete manuscripts of the New Testament penned prior to fourth century A.D. Though not assembled into what we now know now as the New Testament until 300 A.D., those canonical writings of Jesus' apostles were being read all over the known world. Though it is disputed by some Messianic Jews, the New Testament manuscripts were originally written in Koine` Greek and then copied by early Christians into every language known to the world. Our major manuscripts are in Greek, yes, but we also have important early manuscripts in Latin, Syriac, Aramaic, Hebrew, and several other lesser-known languages. We have one small piece of the Gospel of John, found on the Egyptian island of Elephantine, that is early enough to be a piece of the original.

It is impossible to support any kind of later corrupting when we have those 5300 early manuscripts that prove otherwise. In fact, because of this breadth of early manuscript support, textual scholars have concluded -- that for all practical purposes -- we have the original documents themselves. For a claim of tampering to be seriously considered, one would have to show that scribes from Syria, Babylonia, Galatia, Asia, India, Rome, India, Egypt, Greece, Carthage, Tarshish and Macedonia -- to name a few -- all made the same mistake, at the same time, for the same doctrinal purpose. An utterly ridiculous idea.

We have similar textual support for the authenticity of the Old Testament. Until a few years ago, the earliest documents we had for the Old Testament were later copies of a 70 B.C. Septuigent in Greek and a Massoretic Text in Hebrew that could be positively dated to the ninth century A.D.. However, with manuscript discoveries at Qumran made in the late 1940s (the Isaiah scroll, the book of Daniel, the book of Jubilees, the Temple scrolls, etc. etc.), some of which could be dated to the third century B.C.. Internal evidence within one Daniel scroll dates it at 350 B.C. As a result, we can now state with some certainty that there has been no tampering with the canonical Old Testament manuscripts between 300 B.C. and 900 A.D..

Despite the span of over a thousand years, the canonical manuscripts are virtually identical !!!!

To suggest there was tampering to the Old Testament documents prior to 300 B.C. shows a misunderstanding of Israelite scribal methodology and of their reverence for the Scriptures. First

of all, biblical scrolls were written on the inside only to prevent any smudging or smearing that might lead to a missreading of the text. When being copied -- besides many parallel readings -- the copy was compared with the original in every way humanly possible.

The words in each column were counted and then the letters. The first, last, and middle letter and word in each column had to be identical to the original. If the number of words or the number of letters of the copy differed from the original, the copy was destroyed. Then they counted the words and letters in the whole document. They divided the document into quarters and into eighths. The first, last and middle letter in each section had to be the same. The number of words and the number of letters in each section had to be the same. The middle word and the middle letter in each section had to be the same, and they had to be the same for the whole document. If not, the copy was destroyed. Not corrected, but destroyed!

Since there is absolutely no textual or historic evidence that the Old Testament was ever corrupted, any claim of editing must have been made by those religious authorities who didn't like what the Old Testament taught. There are some who claim late-dating for Old Testament prophets, but that claim is unfounded, as well. The books of Moses, originally penned in the 15th century B.C. contain Egyptian words and idioms that fell out of usage a few centuries later. When the Hebrews entered Canaan, Canaanite words appeared in Scripture, when in contact with the Assyrians, Assyrian words appeared in Scripture. During the Babylonian captivity, when Daniel and Ezekiel were written, Babylonian words and Babylonian idioms appeared in Scripture. So rest assured, these canonical books were contemporary books, written when the prophets claimed they were, and they remain unchanged to this day.

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