

The Preservation of the New Testament

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[0 : 00] I just wanted to press start on the thing. We'll jump in online a little earlier. So, what this means is that only later manuscript copies exist, and these copies sometimes are separated by hundreds or thousands of years from the original.

So, given all this, given that we only have later manuscript copies remaining of the New Testament, how can we be confident that the original wording of the Scriptures has been preserved for us? How do we trust that errors haven't crept in this process? Well, there are certain skeptical scholars, like this guy right here. His name is Bart Ehrman, and they don't believe that the New Testament has been preserved.

In fact, he claims that this process of copying the New Testament out by hand introduced so many mistakes and errors and corruptions that we cannot trust that we have the original text of the New Testament.

So, look what Bart Ehrman says here in his famous book. This is a quote from his book, *Misquoting Jesus*. He says, What good is it to say that the autographs, i.e. the originals, the original manuscript copies, what good is it to say that they were inspired?

[1 : 06] 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.

There are more variations among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.

Ouch. So, is he right about this? Do we only have error-ridden copies?

Are the vast majority centuries removed from the originals and different from them in thousands of ways? Are there more variations among our manuscripts of the New Testament than there are words in the New Testament? It's important that we get to the bottom of this, not only because it affects our faith, but also because we as Christians are followers of Jesus, and he calls us to follow the truth wherever it might lead.

So we should never be afraid to examine and test the factual claims of our faith. And I want you to know that whenever you come across claims like this, if they happen to crop up in your classroom or at work, whenever you encounter claims like this that are challenging to your faith, don't be afraid to investigate these things.

In fact, I urge you to do so. And you'll find that you don't need to be afraid to test your faith in Jesus against the facts, because the facts are always on Jesus' side. And that's what we're going to find out tonight with this quote from Bart Ehrman.

[2 : 24] We'll see that Bart Ehrman here is being very tricky. Some statements that he's saying are misleading, and some are just plain wrong, because the fact is we do have very good reasons to be confident that the manuscripts of the New Testament are of excellent quality, and that we can identify any errors that happen to have slipped in, and therefore we can be confident that we possess the original wording of the New Testament.

Now, to show you why this is true, I'm going to describe to you what scholars do to determine the original wording of an ancient publication. And then I'll show you what this process looks like for the New Testament.

So when scholars want to determine the original reading, the original wording of an ancient text, the very first thing they do is they gather all of the surviving manuscripts and textual witnesses.

And then they group these together into lines of transmission that lead back to the autographs. And the idea here is to group textual witnesses together that are related to one another in order to build a genealogy of transmission lines.

And this grouping of textual witnesses is called the manuscript tradition. Sometimes it's also called a manuscript stemma. You can see a picture of an example of one of an ancient text on the screen. It's a chart of how all these textual witnesses and manuscripts fit together, and it leads back chronologically to the original autograph manuscript.

[3 : 46] And in this way, scholars can reconstruct the transmission history of a text. They can check for errors in its transmission, and then ultimately zero in on the original reading. Now, the best manuscript tradition is one where scholars are the most confident in finding the original reading of an ancient publication.

And the best manuscript tradition has the following four characteristics. The first thing that it has, that the best manuscript tradition has, is a large number of manuscripts.

This gives scholars a large number of opportunities to check for errors. The second thing that scholars hope for is to find a large number of early manuscripts.

These are manuscripts that are close in date to the original. And this limits the number of generations of copying that separate the early manuscript from the original, and thus it limits the number of errors that can creep in.

In other words, the closer a manuscript is to the original chronologically, the more accurate it tends to be. So having a lot of early manuscripts is very important. The third thing scholars look for is they look for a large number of ancient translations.

[4 : 59] Back in the ancient world, books were often translated, just like they are today. And these ancient translations give scholars many opportunities to check for how a text has been transmitted over the centuries, and therefore it gives them many opportunities to check for errors.

So if a work was written in ancient Greek, it's very helpful to look at an ancient Latin translation that was done in the West, or an ancient Syriac translation that was done in the East, in order to identify errors.

Now the fourth thing, and the last thing, that scholars look for in a good manuscript tradition is a large number of quotations. Quotations are quotes of the work they're interested in that are made by another ancient work.

Just like today, when authors back then were writing books, they're often quoted from other books. And you can go back to those quotations and see if they line up with the manuscripts we have today in order to check for errors.

And scholars do this so that they can increase their confidence about identifying the original reading. So let's review. For scholars to be most confident in finding the original reading of an ancient publication, they want to find a large number of manuscripts, a large number of early manuscripts, a large number of ancient translations, and a large number of quotations.

[6 : 13] So what I want to know is how the New Testament stacks up in these four categories, and how we would evaluate the quality of the New Testament's manuscript tradition up against these four categories right here.

So let's do that right now. We'll start at the bottom. We'll start with the last category of quotations. Does the New Testament have a large number of quotations that scholars can use to check its transmission history?

Well, yes, in fact it does. There are so many quotations that no one has been able to count them all. We don't even know how many there are because no one has had the time to do it. In fact, there are so many early and medieval Christian writings that quote the New Testament that if you go to Yale Divinity School and you go to a certain aisle of books, you'll find that an entire aisle of books still does not contain all the writings.

And in these writings, there are hundreds of thousands of quotations of the New Testament, and every single one of them can help scholars identify any errors that have happened in the transmission process.

And these quotations come from Christian writings that date back to the very beginning of Christianity, all the way up to the medieval era, and spread throughout the entire Christian world, from Western Europe and Eastern Europe, from the Middle East, North Africa, Ethiopia, Persia, everywhere the church was are where these writings come from.

[7 : 32] This is extraordinary. There is not a single ancient publication that even remotely approaches this number. And in fact, it seems that if we were to lose every single New Testament manuscript in existence, we could still reconstruct the entire thing simply based off of these quotations.

And in fact, I used to not actually believe that. I thought that was an exaggeration, but then when I started realizing how many hundreds and hundreds of verse-by-verse commentaries were written on the New Testament, I realized it was true!

You just go to these commentaries and you can find the quotations. But we're not done yet. Aside from quotations, scholars can also check for errors in the New Testament by looking at ancient translations.

And the more translations the text has, and the earlier these translations are, the better. Now, most ancient texts were never translated into any language. You had to have a really special text for someone to take the time to do a translation.

And as far as I'm aware, the classical text that has the most translations is probably some of the works of Aristotle. He made it into four or five different ancient languages, which is an extraordinary number.

[8 : 44] Aristotle has the most, that is, except for the New Testament, which has far, far more than Aristotle. And this is actually because many ancient languages only now exist because missionaries went there, learned the language, and created an alphabet for these people, which is why we still have these ancient translations.

Let me give you some examples of what I'm talking about. Here we have an ancient Latin translation of the four Gospels. It's just one page here. And this particular manuscript is very famous.

It comes from the 4th century. It's extraordinarily early. But the translation that it has is even earlier. It probably goes back to around the year 200. And so with just this manuscript, you have this extraordinary witness for the New Testament text that scholars can use to see how the New Testament text has been translated over the centuries.

But we're not done yet. This is a different Latin translation. It was done by St. Jerome around the year 400. This is a 5th century manuscript. Again, it's another opportunity to check for errors. And we can just keep going on down the list.

This is a Syriac manuscript. It comes from the year 586. It's very famous. But the translation comes even earlier. It comes from the 4th century. It's called the Peshittis Syriac Translation.

[10 : 01] Here's another Syriac translation. It's called the Curatonian. It probably comes from the 3rd century. This manuscript comes from the 5th. Here's another one. Another Syriac translation. It's called the Sinaitacan Translation.

Again, it's very early. And we can just keep on doing this. This is Bohairic Coptic. Coptic was the native language of Egypt. This manuscript comes from the 4th century.

But the translation comes even earlier. From the 2nd or 3rd century. Here's a different Coptic translation. Sahidic Coptic. Sahidic was in the south. Bohairic was in the north. This comes from the 2nd or 3rd century.

The translation and the manuscript comes from the 3rd century. Totally extraordinary. And we can just keep right on going. And this is a Latin manuscript but those little marginal notes you see on the side, that's actually in Old English.

This is the earliest Old English document in existence. And it's a translation of the Gospels. And you can go back and use this to see the Gospel text in England at this time.

[11 : 00] In the 7th or 8th centuries. And then, oh, this is a beautiful one. This is called the Silver Bible. This is in Gothic. It was made in the 4th century by a missionary named Volfila.

Very beautiful story. This guy was a slave of the Goths and he escaped and felt called to go back to preach them the Gospel of Jesus. And then he came and he translated the Bible for them and created their alphabet.

And this manuscript comes from the 6th century. We can keep on going. This is an Armenian Bible. Here we have a Georgian translation. Here we have a Caucasian Albanian translation.

We didn't even know this language existed until a couple decades ago. when we found this manuscript and we realized that someone had translated the Bible into this language. It's north of Iran where these people lived.

This is Old Nubian. This is from modern day Sudan. They had the Bible in their language. This is Ethiopic. This manuscript is one of the most extraordinary manuscripts in existence.

[12 : 03] Scholars dated it to the 13th century. The Ethiopian church kept saying, no, no, no, no. This is from like the 5th or 6th century. Scholars ignored them and then they radiocarbon dated the manuscript. They found out the Ethiopian church was right.

It's probably the earliest illuminated manuscript in existence. The New Testament was translated into more languages in the ancient world than any other publication.

And many of these translations are extremely early. They're quite widespread geographically. This gives scholars an unprecedented opportunity to check for the accuracy of the New Testament at every single verse.

Sometimes even down to individual words. Quite literally hundreds of thousands of locations. And this is totally unprecedented amongst ancient writings. So, we've talked about quotations.

We've talked about translations. But we still haven't even touched on the actual Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. That's the language that the New Testament was originally written in. And of course, the original language is far more important than translations when it comes to establishing the text.

[13:10] And of course, the more manuscripts you have, the better. Because then you have more witnesses to the original and more opportunities to check for errors. Now, it's difficult to come up with an estimate. But it seems as though a typical ancient publication has about 20 or 30 manuscript witnesses remaining.

And the ancient public, that's like a typical number. And the ancient publication with the most manuscripts is the Iliad of Homer. It has about 2,000 manuscripts remaining, an extraordinary number.

But like I said, that's the most except for the New Testament, which has 5,500 New Testament manuscripts in Greek and thousands and thousands more in other languages. This number is totally staggering.

By this measurement, the New Testament ranks not just very high, but far and away has the most number of manuscripts of any other ancient text. Now, I need to say that having a lot of manuscripts is a good thing, but it doesn't necessarily mean that a text has been reliably preserved.

Because after all, many or even most of those manuscripts could be very, very, very, very late copies. Many of them could potentially even be poor copies that have a lot of mistakes.

[14:23] And in fact, this is exactly what happens with the Iliad of Homer. The Iliad of Homer has the most manuscripts of any book outside the New Testament, but it doesn't have the best manuscript tradition because its copies are very, very late and they're not very good.

There's a lot of mistakes. So let's go to our last category. Our last category, we talked about quotations, translations, total number of manuscripts. Let's talk about early manuscripts of the New Testament.

We want to get as ancient as possible, as close as we can to the originals of the New Testament. And this is important because these can help us eliminate the number of generations of copying and therefore eliminate the number of opportunities for errors to creep in.

Now, if we look at the number of manuscripts that date from within 300 years of the publication of an ancient text, we find that the vast majority of ancient publications have no manuscripts from this time frame.

None. All of those are much later. But with the New Testament, we find that we have over 60 manuscripts that date from within this narrow time frame.

[15:32] This number is, as far as I'm aware, far beyond any other ancient publication. And I want to give you some examples of these. So perhaps the most famous biblical manuscript in existence is this one.

It's called Codex Sinaiticus. It dates to around the year 350. It contains the entire New Testament. This manuscript is so early that if we lost every single manuscript, except for this one, then the New Testament would still have one of the best manuscript traditions of any ancient text, just with this one, because it is so extraordinary.

It is completely unprecedented. But we can do better than that. Why don't we go a little earlier? This is Papyrus 47. It's of the book of Revelation.

My dissertation is on Revelation. I love this manuscript. This dates from the year 200 to 300, even earlier, and it contains a very large portion of the text of Revelation. This is just one leaf of the manuscript.

There's a lot of leaves there. But we can go even earlier. This is Papyrus 45. It has large portions of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the book of Acts. And it dates a little earlier, 200 to 225 AD, 200 to 250 AD.

[16:45] And we can just keep on going earlier. This is Papyrus 46, extremely famous. It contains almost all of Paul's letters. Again, this is just one leaf. And it dates to around the year 200 to 225.

We have a lot of manuscripts that date from the 3rd century. But I want to go even earlier. Let's go to the 3rd to the 2nd century. This is Papyrus 98.

It's of Revelation. This is Papyrus 104. It's of the Gospel of Matthew. This is Papyrus 52. It's of the Gospel of John. All three of these plausibly date to the 2nd century.

Perhaps even the early part of the 2nd century. Meaning that these manuscripts may have been copied within 40 or 50 years of the original publication.

Or even earlier. This is extraordinary. No ancient publication has so many early manuscripts attesting to it. In fact, there are so many early New Testament manuscripts that we discover a new one just about every year.

[17:45] What this means is that every year we can confirm the original text of the New Testament with greater and greater certainty. Several years ago I gave a version of this talk and I mentioned how in the year 2015 we discovered this manuscript of the Gospel of John.

It was found on eBay. Some guy died. He had a collection of manuscripts. People put it on and oh look at that. It's really, really, really, really early. We found that in 2015. But I keep having to update my slides.

Last year I gave a version of this talk and I said in 2018 we found not one, not two, but three early New Testament manuscripts and the one you see here is the earliest fragment of the Gospel of Mark ever discovered.

That was found last year. And now in 2019 I have to update them again because it was announced in March that the Egyptian Exploratory Society had identified 20 New Testament manuscripts that it was going to be publishing in the coming years some of which date extremely early.

So there's no expectation that this pace of discoveries will pause at any time soon. And what this means is that every year our knowledge of the original New Testament text gets more and more certain.

[18:55] So let's sum up. The New Testament has the most manuscripts, the most translations, the most quotations, and the most early manuscripts of any ancient text. And these numbers increase and get better every single year.

So according to these categories and the New Testament has an extraordinarily reliable manuscript tradition. But let's go back to our friend here, Bart Ehrman. Remember that quote I said in the beginning, right?

Now actually, Bart Ehrman would agree with probably every single thing I just said. And I've heard him do things like that. But he would have a reply to this. He would have an objection.

And this objection is contained in his original quote. Remember that he said, yes, but these manuscripts are error-ridden. It might be hard for you to see the underline there.

But he says these are full of errors. And they're different from the originals in thousands of ways. And then at the bottom he says there are more variations among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament. That's what he would say.

[19:51] He'd say, yes, yes, yes, you have all these things. But they stink. They're bad copies. They're full of errors. We don't know what the New Testament says. Well, is this true? Well, Bart Ehrman is being very sneaky here with what he's saying.

He is right. There are more variations in manuscripts of the New Testament than there are words in the New Testament. But the only reason why this is the case is because we have so many manuscripts of the New Testament.

In fact, every time we discover a new manuscript, the number of variants goes up because the scribe who made the manuscript may have skipped a word or misspelled something and we chalk it up to a textual variant.

And indeed, I can show you ancient works like this one by Athanas that have very, very, very few variants because we only have one manuscript. Obviously, having only one manuscript is not a good way to guarantee the preservation of a work because then you have nothing to compare it against.

So criticizing the New Testament for having a large number of total variants is very disingenuous because the total number of variants is really just a signifier that the New Testament has a lot of manuscripts.

[20 : 59] And that's a good thing to have. Another issue that Bart Ehrman doesn't tell you in his quotation, though he will admit it elsewhere when he's forced to, is that the vast, vast, vast majority of all these variants he's talking about are inconsequential differences in spelling, grammar, or obvious errors that occur when a scribe accidentally skips a word or a line.

In other words, well, well over 99% of all these variations are either completely meaningless or are very easy for scholars to detect. And this is totally different from other ancient works.

Other ancient works have manuscripts whose errors are so severe and so pervasive that we can no longer recover the original reading. In these instances, scholars have to do something called conjectural emendation.

That's a fancy word for making an educated guess about what the original reading said because the original reading is gone from every single ancient manuscript. And this is the case with, as far as we know, every single ancient publication, at least those of significant length, require this.

Where there's a part that just is gone. And if it's a big part, scholars just leave a blank. If it's a little part, maybe they can make a guess about what was there. This is not true, though, for the New Testament.

[22 : 20] For the New Testament, we have no locations where scholars are required to conjecturally amend the text. And the ironic part in all of this is that even our very skeptical Bart Ehrman acknowledges this in one of his publications that he co-did with a very famous scholar named Bruce Metzger.

He said, the amount of evidence for the text of the New Testament, whether derived from manuscripts, early versions, that's translations, or patristic quotations, is so much greater than that available for any ancient classical author that the necessity of resorting to emendation is reduced to the smallest dimensions.

And then he leaves a footnote. And he goes on to say, well, if we wanted to conjecturally amend the text, maybe we could do it in this one location. And then he concludes, quote, even this cannot be accepted.

And thus, even the most skeptical scholar around admits that the New Testament does not require conjecturally amend the text. And because conjecturally amend are not required to restore the text of the New Testament, this inescapably means that the original still exists.

Now, the only caution I will say to this is that scholars are sometimes confronted with multiple reasonable variants for a wording of a particular New Testament passage.

[23 : 35] And they're unsure of which variant is authentic. They're confident that one of the variants is authentic, but sometimes they have trouble deciding between them. And in important cases, most English translations of the Bible will insert a note explaining this uncertainty and then list an alternative manuscript variant so the reader will be aware of it.

Fortunately, it is very rare that this happens with any significant part of the text and by far the two most important instances of this are with the last verses of the Gospel of Mark and I've got a little picture up here of that and the woman caught in adultery in the Gospel of John.

These two are by far and away the most important areas where this happens. But I need to tell you that it's also possible that our New Testament authors wrote multiple editions of their work.

Ancient authors did this all the time. Remember back then everything was done by hand so it was a less formal process to have something disseminated. You read something out, people start copying it, you go back, you make some changes or you update it.

That happened all the time in the ancient world. So it could be the case with certain variants that actually both are authentic. That could potentially be the case. But these places of uncertainty should not trouble you because they're so minor that no Christian doctrine is affected by these variants.

[24 : 51] And do you know who effectively agrees with us? Our friend Bart Ehrman. He says in one of his publications essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variations in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament.

Yeah. Now I would go even farther than that. I would say it's not just essential Christian beliefs but pretty much anything that we would identify as a Christian doctrine is not affected by any of these potential variants.

And furthermore, there's no expectation that any manuscript discovery will change this because since the advent of modern textual criticism, which is about 130 years, no manuscript discovery has

provided a new authentic variant for any New Testament passage.

Every single one of the many discoveries that we have made over the past 130 years have only confirmed readings we already knew about. And I suspect that this will continue for the future.

So if we gather all these points together, the New Testament wasn't just accurately preserved, it was extraordinarily preserved. And this is because it has the most manuscripts, the most quotations, the most ancient translations, the most early manuscripts of any ancient text.

[26 : 04] And these combine to make the manuscript tradition of the New Testament of such high quality that no conjectural emendations are needed because simply put, the entire text has been preserved.

And those locations where scholars find several variants and can't be completely sure which one is authentic, these are so inconsequential that no Christian doctrine is affected by any of them.

And every year more discoveries are made and every year these discoveries do not add any new authentic readings, but instead they confirm what we already have long known.

So given this, we can trust that the New Testament has been reliably preserved. But in all of this, I want us to remember the purpose of Scripture.

The purpose of Scripture, the purpose of the New Testament is not to testify to itself. Its purpose is to testify to Jesus. Our faith is ultimately not in the New Testament.

[27 : 00] It's in the one the New Testament talks about, in Jesus. And this is what the New Testament itself says. The Gospel of John describes how Jesus was talking to the Pharisees and he said, you search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life.

These are which testify about me, but you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life.

So we should never make the New Testament the goal, the ultimate goal and object of our faith.

It does not have eternal life in it. It points to our Lord and Savior Jesus. And so all this information that I've shared with you today, it can help bolster your faith in Jesus, but remember that all these statistics about manuscripts and translations and quotations and things like that, they're useful for that purpose, for growing someone's faith, for witnessing to others, but the greatest and most powerful testimony that you can have with your coworkers or classmates or professors is not any of this information.

It's the power of a life that has been changed and forgiven by Jesus and overflows with his love for that person and points that person to him. So why don't I just close in prayer real quick and then we'll see if we have any questions.

Father in heaven, we thank you so much that you saw fit to preserve your word for us and we just give you glory and honor for that and we pray, Lord, that you would boost our confidence in the New Testament.

[28 : 21] You would increase our faith so that we can share with others, that we can better love others, that we can forgive those who've wronged us, that we can confess our sins when we've wronged others, that we can share your gospel message with this world.

And we pray all this in the name of Jesus. Amen. Alright, so I think we have time for questions, right? Alright, yeah. 10 minutes. So today, many translations are accused of having an agenda. Presumably that's based on there's a couple choices that are made in the given translation and the translators have to make a choice and then through systematic decision-making, you know, an agenda is inferred.

Yeah. Does that, did that happen in the ancient world or did they just, like in your genealogy chart, you show that, I think, every translation had, like, a single parent. Like, was that the case?

Like, were there agendas of any sort? And if so, can you, I don't know, try to back, infer what that agenda was and back that out? Great question. Great question.

[29 : 24] Yeah, so I'll say two things. One is that some of these translations that I showed you and some of the manuscripts I showed you also, they might have had, like, a single parent, but many of them didn't.

Many of them, scribes would reference multiple manuscripts. And so, the word genealogy actually isn't always the best term because a genealogy implies you just have two parents or one parent, but with manuscripts, you can have multiple parents because you can line up multiple texts.

And we know that some translators did that. Like, St. Jerome did that. It was Latin. Thomas of Harkle with Syriac did that. So, that's one thing. So, that helps get out, you know, an agenda that might have come in.

The second thing about an agenda is sometimes you do see. I mean, sometimes you will see. In my dissertation, I went through the book of Revelation and I looked for precisely this thing you were talking about in some of these translations and in some of the copying.

And what I found is that you could sometimes find a place where a scribe or a translator seemed to be a little uncomfortable with something and tried to just tweak it a little bit.

[30 : 30] But in the vast majority of cases, this doesn't happen. And I can give you an example. So, in the book of Revelation, there's a passage that says that Jesus is the beginning of God's creation.

Now, that word beginning can also be translated ruler. Ruler or beginning. So, you can say he's the ruler of God's creation or you can interpret it and he's the beginning of God's creation which could imply that he is part of creation.

He's not divine. He's subordinate to God the Father. It's an ambiguous verse. And so, what I did is I went to ancient translations. I went to about six or seven of them and I wanted to see how do they handle this?

Do they try to disambiguate it to make it seem like he's the ruler of creation? What do they do? And I thought this is a great test case because you can make a legitimate translation and just say ruler of creation and just move on.

And then the reader doesn't even know this ambiguity is there. And I was shocked because every single one of the translations except for one of them preserved the ambiguity.

[31 : 31] They went into their language. They found a word that preserved this ambiguity even though they knew that someone could mistake what the intention of this verse might mean. They still did that.

And so, I thought that's a beautiful testimony that yes, occasionally you'll find a manuscript where someone has clearly been tweaking something. But that by no means seems to be ordinary.

It seems to be that when there were mistakes, they're unintentional. Scribes are doing their very best. And what that means is that we have greater confidence in what they have before us.

So, I've read some Ehrman and I think the lack for a need of scholarly adjustments to the manuscript for clarity, the fact that there's no need for doctrinal variance within Christianity is probably a thorn in his side though you would admit it.

I feel like other scholars kind of reluctantly kind of give in that point. But, I myself have noticed a renewed interest in the last few years among scholars in a lot of those 4th century and 3rd century Gnostic texts, extra-biblical gospels, you know, Peter, Mary, Thomas.

[32 : 49] And do you think that it is calculated on their part to say, well, let's pull this into the scholarly conversation, specifically, you know, the reliability of the New Testament as a whole because of that coincidence, if you will, or just the fact that most of the datings of those Gnostic texts kind of fall into that same, you know, glut of, you know, rich manuscripts that we have from around the same period and within similar geographical regions.

Yeah. That's a great question. The question is about, okay, so the manuscripts of the New Testament are good, they're reliable, but what about all these other false gospels out there? What about those? So what if the New Testament is reliably preserved? Maybe these should be in there, or maybe certain New Testament texts shouldn't be there and should be thrown out. That's a great question.

We're going to talk about that week three, the canonicity of the New Testament. We'll be talking about the false gospels of, you know, Peter, Mary, and John. Just to give you a quick preview, you know, this is also, I think, going to disappoint the hopes of skeptical scholars because when you go back and you look at these, they really have no historical backing to them like the four gospels do. They have very, very weak ancient attestation. There's numerous reasons why these are dismissed. And you do hear loud voices in the academy, you know, trumpeting this, Elaine Pagels does and stuff like that.

[34 : 19] But most scholars, even ones who are not devout Christians, they don't think these really have anything to do with the historical Jesus. They will argue these should be considered as variants of Christianity.

And sure, we can consider them a variant of Christianity. I mean, I don't have a real problem with that. I don't think they're orthodox variations of Christianity. Or variants that go back to the apostles. But, I'm sure, if you want to class them that way, you can.

But, we'll be talking about that week three. So stay tuned. Is there an estimate of the number of ancient translations that the Bible is translated into?

So the question is, is there an estimate for the number of ancient translations the Bible is translated into? I have not seen one. I've tried to come up with one myself. And there's a lot.

First, it depends on what you count as ancient. So you have to have a cutoff time. And then we have to work backwards. And then we have to decide, you know, for instance, there's a translation that seems to have been done into an African language called Baja, which is now in Sudan.

[35 : 26] And we only know about it because it exists on a clay ostrakon, a fragment of a pot. It's a version of the Psalms in Baja. And, do we count that?

I mean, it's a scrap. It's someone clearly was ministering with these people. So, I would estimate that if you want to say, like, let's say before the year 900 or something, I would say, you know, at least two dozen were made that we have some witness of.

There may have been more, like, Jerome talks about a Dalmatian translation that we have no scrap at all of. Who knows if that actually existed. People wonder if a Punic translation existed. It seems likely, but we don't have it.

We didn't have the Caucasian-Albanian translation, and then we found it 20 years ago. So, who knows what we'll dig up. But that's an estimate, so someday I want to sit down and just try and get it all out.

You said new fragments are being discovered all the time. Where are they coming from? So, most new fragments are coming from a collection of papyri called the Oxymachus papyri. About a hundred something years ago, a group of scholars went to a garbage dump in the sands of Egypt, and this was an ancient garbage dump where people were just throwing out manuscripts.

[36 : 38] And they, you know, 1,500 years ago, and so they collected all of these into boxes, tons and tons of boxes, brought them back to Great Britain, and they are still going through these.

So, actually, that fragment of Mark I said was from that collection. Those 20 more manuscripts that have been found are from that collection, and it's because they found hundreds of thousands of manuscripts.

And most of these are little fragments, and most of them are like tax receipts, bills of sale, things like that. But, you know, sometimes you find a little piece of the New Testament in there. Some of the, most of the early manuscripts that we have actually are from that one, that location, Oxymachus, has been very fertile for finding manuscripts.

What are the ways you think that the New Testament has got inspired? What are some of the ways? Yeah, what are the reasons or like that? What do you think? I'm going to be talking a lot about this next week, but there's numerous, there's numerous reasons.

One, the most fundamental reason is that there's this self-authenticating nature of it. The New Testament changes lives. People are redeemed, they're forgiven, they're brought into new life through the writings and teachings of the New Testament.

[37 : 50] But there's many others. There's historical veracity, there's a lot of historical reasons why what the New Testament says can be considered to be true and accurate, which we'll talk about next week.

And this even goes to the miracles of Jesus, that we have lots of reasons for trusting what the documents say about his miracles and about his statements. And there's other prophecies also that I'll mention next week too, that we can confirm today are accurate, that Jesus made, that points to him having some divine inspiration, that increases our reliability for things like when he says, I'm the way, the truth, and the life.

Well, this guy just said something no one could ever know. And then he knew it. So he probably knows what he's talking about. But we'll talk more about that next week. Do other religious texts have the same reliability?

Very good question. Do other religious texts have the same reliability? I've done, I've tried my best to look into this. Certainly the Old Testament is much older, so if you want to talk about the Jewish scriptures, they have very good arguments, but they don't, we don't have as early manuscripts because they're very, the documents are much later.

or much earlier. In terms of other religions, like let's take the Quran. The Quran, the sacred text for Islam, was written early 600s, and it has a big advantage because it was written 500 years after the New Testament.

[39 : 14] That's 500 less years of variation. It also was written in a climate where Muslims were in charge, where they had the political and financial means to preserve this.

It was also written in a very arid environment, which is ideal for preserving manuscripts, but I would say the New Testament is still far better than the Quran. The Quran has a lot of problems with it textually.

If you go to Zoroastrian texts in Iran, it's like, you know, the earliest Zoroastrian texts. We have Zoroastrianism as a very ancient religion. It's older than the New Testament, not as old as the Old Testament, but older than the New Testament, and their manuscripts, you know, come from like the 16th century.

Like, you know, and then if you go to Buddhism, Buddhist texts, unfortunately, India is very hot, wet climate. Manuscripts just deteriorate like crazy there and that means that their stuff is really recent. And so Buddhism, you know, the Buddha lived, you know, we don't really know 500 BC, 400 BC, something like that. The earliest life of the Buddha was written in Sanskrit several hundred years after he lived and the earliest manuscript in Sanskrit we have of it comes from the 1800s in Nepal.

[40 : 33] Now, in China, you do have some early manuscripts like the Tao Te Ching. We've got some very early manuscripts of the Tao Te Ching. That's really the only even possible comparison, I would say, for an ancient document would be the Tao Te Ching but I haven't been able to look into it.

I know there are some issues there also. So when I say ancient publications, I'm talking about everything. The Quran usually is considered medieval and usually we have, like for instance, we have documents from the time when the Quran was written and we have the original documents. The Quran doesn't have that. We don't have the originals. We have later copies and things like that. So certainly relatively to other medieval documents the Quran is not, would not be considered well preserved by medieval standards.

It's 9.50. I don't know if we should wrap up. Okay. Why don't we wrap up? Come next week and the next two weeks and I'd be happy to answer more questions you guys have. Thanks. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.