

## **Have the New Testament texts as we have them been preserved well enough to be trusted?**

There is also the objection, one raised by many people, that the New Testament is about 2,000 years old and we can't possibly know that the versions we have of it now are accurate. So maybe the bible we have now has changed too much over the centuries for us to rely on the description of events that it gives us. We don't have original copies of the New Testament. So maybe what we have now is so different from the originals that we can't say whether or not we have reliable versions of them. Maybe everything I've already talked about when it comes to how Jesus died, his empty tomb, and the stories of those who saw him after his resurrection wasn't originally in the bible and is just the result of the stories about Jesus being changed over the centuries.

This next part is going to be the most complicated part of this argument, but the historical background it provides should prove very helpful. Let's compare the bible to some other ancient texts which most scholars would agree we have accurate translations of. These are books that scholars would say have been preserved well enough that our modern editions of them are accurate. One important ancient text is Tacitus's *Annals of Imperial Rome*, which was written in 116 AD. The most ancient copy of one part of this work is from the year 850 A.D. The other part of the book that is still in existence is based on a text from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. For the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish historian Josephus there is one copy of his book *The Jewish War* from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and the next most recent is from the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The text from antiquity for which there is the greatest number of ancient editions still in existence is Homer's *Iliad*. There are approximately 650 ancient

Greek manuscripts of this work still in existence. This work was written in approximately 800 B.C. The oldest surviving copies are from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D.<sup>1</sup> So for all of these extremely important texts, and what I just named are some of the absolutely most important books that historians of ancient Greece, Rome, and Israel rely on, there are tremendous gaps between when they were written and when the copies that still exist were produced. It's not these books didn't exist during those centuries, but every copy of them that did has been lost.

The difference when we compare these books to the bible is incredible. The earliest existing copy of a portion of the bible is five verses of the Gospel of John from the year 125 AD. It's only five verses, but to have a copy of even a tiny part of an ancient text from only thirty years after it was written is incredible. There are portions of 12 of the 27 books of the New Testament that have been preserved on texts from right around the year 200 AD. The oldest complete edition of the New Testament that is still in existence is from around the year 350 AD. So we have copies of the New Testament that are still in existence that are closer in date to the original texts than is the case for any other ancient text. Also there are approximately 24,000 biblical manuscripts from the first 1,000 years or so of Christianity that are still in existence. This is an absolutely incredible number when compared to any other ancient text.<sup>2</sup> The New Testament has been better preserved than any other text from the ancient world. The argument that somehow the bible we have now is substantially different from the bible as it was written does not stand up to well in the face of this sort of evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> Strobel, Lee., *The Case For Christ*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998),, 60.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 60-64.