



Reliability of the NT

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Can we be sure that the NT we have today is what was originally written?

- ▶ We don't have the NT autographs (originals)
- ▶ No two copies we have agree completely
- ▶ Among closest related copies, there are about 10 differences per chapter
- ▶ Leads to between 300,000 and 400,000 differences among NT manuscripts



DO NOT DESPAIR!

Ancient Manuscripts (Adapted from ETDAV, Josh and Sean McDowell)

Work	Earliest MS (old)	Earliest MS (new)	# of MSS (old)	# of MSS (new)
Homer's Iliad	About 400 BC	About 415 BC	1,800+	1,900+
Herodotus--History	1st c. AD	150-50 BC	109	About 106
Sophocles' Plays	3rd c. BC	3rd c. BC	193	About 226
Caesar's Gallic Wars	9th c. AD	9th c. AD	251	251
Tacitus's Annals	1st half: AD 850	1st half: AD 850	33	36
	2nd half: AD 1050	2nd half: AD 1050		
Demosthenes' Speeches	Fragments 1st c. BC	1st c. BC; poss. Earlier	340	444
Greek NT	AD 130 (earlier)	AD 130 (earlier)	5838	5856



What Are We Working With?

- 5,856 Greek Manuscripts
- Add 18,130+ non-Greek manuscripts
- Approximately 24,000 manuscripts of the NT!
- Approximately one million quotations from the early church fathers through the thirteenth century



What About Those Differences?

- Spelling differences/Nonsense errors
- Minor differences that do not affect translation/Synonyms
 - Mary, or “the Mary”
 - Replacing “he” with “Jesus”
- Differences affecting meaning, but are not viable
 - Scribes would sometimes add words to help harmonize similar gospel accounts
 - Matthew 9, some add “and drink” to verse 11 to conform to Luke 5:30
- Differences affecting meaning and are viable
 - 1 John 1:4 – “our joy” vs. “your joy”
 - Romans 5:1 – “We have peace” vs. “Let us have peace”



So What?

- Same tests applied to NT as any other historical work
 - NT is unmatched in number
 - Only about 1% of variants change meaning of the text
 - No essential doctrine or belief of Christianity is affected by any variants
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Komoshewski, Sawyer and Wallace

- ▶ “The manuscript copies of the New Testament are far more plentiful and earlier than any other Greek or Latin texts. In terms of manuscript data, any skepticism about the Jesus of the Gospels should be multiplied many times for any other historical figure. We have more and earlier manuscript evidence about the person of Jesus Christ than we do anyone else in the ancient world—including Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great.” (*Reinventing Jesus*, 106)



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