

# Why Trust the Bible - Week 4

## Chapter 3: Copies of Copies of Copies of Copies?

### Week 3 Highlights

- We examined the time gaps between New Testament translations versus other widely accepted historical translations and determined that the New Testament translations were actually written very closely to the original events.
- We looked at the number and quality of original ancient manuscripts available on papyrus and parchment.
- We reviewed the timing of the apostles' creed, early Christian traditions and Pauline creed to verify that they were established within just a few years of Christ's resurrection, while eye witnesses were still alive.
- We discussed how a good Bible translation is marked by both *accuracy* and *readability*.
- We introduced an apologetics bonus conversation centered upon ***Edwin Hubble & The Beginning - Understanding the Cosmological Argument*** and lightly discussed the question "Did God create sin?"

"There are more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane [secular] history." - Sir Isaac Newton

### Chapter Question

**The chapter focuses on the task of *transmission*. Have you ever given this subject any thought? What would you say to someone if they charged the Bible with just being "a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy"?**

***Transmission*** = to convey, to transfer, to communicate

The task of copying manuscripts was generally done by **scribes** who were trained professionals in the arts of writing and bookmaking. Scribes would work in difficult conditions, usually for 48 hours a week, with little pay beyond room and board. Some scribes were responsible for proofreading, closely examining texts to compare manuscripts to original copies. In the 6th century, a special room devoted to the practice of manuscript writing and illumination called the scriptorium came into use, typically inside medieval European monasteries. Sometimes a group of scribes would make copies at the same time as one individual read from the text.

***Scribe*** = a professional copyist

In the 2nd century, 97% of non-Christian manuscripts were written on scrolls. However, most New Testament manuscripts are codices. The adaptation of the codex form in non-Christian texts did not become dominant until the fourth and fifth centuries, showing a preference for that form amongst early Christians, likely due to the length of the books.

**Codex** = Ancient [manuscript](#) books, with handwritten contents. A codex, much like the modern book, is bound by stacking the pages and securing one set of edges in a form analogous to modern [bookbinding](#) by a variety of methods over the centuries.

### Chapter Question

**How many ancient manuscripts and transcripts of the New Testament do we have? Why does this enable us to know with *high confidence* what the originals said?**

While the author notes more than 5,400 complete manuscripts in existence, according to Wikipedia: “The [New Testament](#) has been preserved in more manuscripts than any other ancient work of literature, with **over 5,800 complete or fragmented Greek manuscripts** cataloged, 10,000 [Latin](#) manuscripts and 9,300 manuscripts in various other ancient languages including [Syriac](#), [Slavic](#), [Gothic](#), [Ethiopic](#), [Coptic](#) and [Armenian](#). The dates of these manuscripts range from AD 125 to the introduction of printing in Germany in the 15th century.”

According to author Charlie Campbell in *Answers for Skeptics*, there are also writings of church fathers, such as Polycarp (69-155), Justin Martyr (100-165), Tertullian (155-220), and Eusebius (260-340) that quote scriptures more than 86,000 times, allowing scholars to reconstruct 99.86% of the New Testament. There are only 11 verses that the early church fathers never quoted.

### Chapter Questions

**If you were to look at the various antique manuscripts of the Bible we have, you’d notice some differences. Did you know that? Does that lower your confidence in the Bible at your bedside?**

Remember that the purpose of this class is to develop historical confidence in the accuracy and reliability of **the message of the New Testament**.

When reviewing items like variations in copies of the original text, it is important to stay aware of the context in how this message has been delivered over time. Historians generally expect there to be variants in transmissions over time. After all, we’re all only human. We make mistakes. Put another way, in an era of hand-scribing duplicates, we would not expect to find droves of identical copies.

These variations, then, actually *lend* historical confidence to the authenticity of the *message*, which is an important point to ingest. To reiterate above, it’s additional evidence that no one is to “pull the wool over anyone’s eyes.”

How long is the gap between the original writers and our earliest surviving copies? Why is this not a big deal? How does this gap compare to other historical documents listed on pages 48 and 48?

Plato - Tetralogies - BC ~399-387 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ~ 200 complete manuscripts in existence</li> <li>• <b>Differential: 1,300 years</b></li> </ul>	Tacitus - Annals of Imperial Rome - AD ~116 (discussed in Week 3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Books 1-6 in one manuscript dating AD 850</li> <li>• Books 7-10 are lost</li> <li>• Books 11-16 in another manuscript dating AD 1000-1100</li> <li>• <b>Differential: 740 - 950 years</b></li> </ul>
Julius Caesar - Gallic Wars - BC ~58-52 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ~9-10 readable copies</li> <li>• <b>Differential: 900 years</b></li> </ul>	

### Chapter Questions

There are “up to 500,000 variants” in the Bible! (pg 49). What can we say about this audacious claim?

The author writes, “Believe it or not, at any given point in the New Testament where variants occur, it is precisely the existence of those variants that allows us to piece together what the original document most likely said.” (pg 52). How does this work in practice? How does the “harder reading” (pg 55) help us?

“... the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed.” - Sir Frederic Kenyon, *The Bible & Archaeology*.

The vast majority of noted variants are accidental errors made by scribes, and are easily identified as such: an omitted word, a duplicate line, a misspelling, a rearrangement of words. Some variations involve apparently intentional changes, which can make it more difficult to determine whether they were corrections from better examples, harmonizations between readings, or ideologically motivated. Variants are listed in critical editions of the text, the most important of which is the *Novum Testamentum Graece*, which is the basis for most modern translations.

Have you noticed the footnotes in your Bible that describe different translations? Far from inviting insecurity, these parts of Scripture should encourage you. As the author writes, “There’s no conspiracy to pull the wool over anyone’s eyes” (pg 57). Use your own or an online study Bible and spend the next 15 minutes looking for these footnotes. What have you learned from this exercise?

# Apologetics Bonus

DISCLAIMER: When we're discussing apologetics, it's important to understand that responses to these questions can never be deemed "The Answer." We are all human. We have wildly differing worldviews and opinions. In many of these cases, the answers and logic chains we present are simply potential answers to a question, and not reflective even of our own opinions.

The goal here is to make you think; to engage you with the concepts and issues.

And remember, we are human, and God is not. Arminians argue with Calvinists, atheists with theists, and on and on. Our tendency will always be to anthropomorphize God. This is an error, and leads to hubris, rather than humility. To remain humble, we must always realize that God is above time, space, matter and energy.

Trying to understand God's ways are akin to an ant trying to build a Tesla.

## Question: Did God create sin?

There's an old sign that reads...

- FAST
- GOOD
- CHEAP
- ◆ You can only pick 2

A similar argument exists among anti-theistic scholars...

- ALL KNOWING
- ALL POWERFUL
- ALL GOOD
- ◆ God can only be 2

Some examples of this logic:

- God is all knowing and all powerful, but sin exists, so God cannot be all good.
- God is all powerful and all good, but sin exists, so He must have created it by accident, and can therefore not be all knowing.
- God is all knowing, and all good, but sin exists, so He must not have had the ability to prevent it, which means He can't be all powerful.

There are a few issues with these logical chains, however:

1. They all presume that because sin exists, God explicitly created it
2. They fail to consider other potentials for God's purpose
3. They presume that our understanding of good and evil are cosmically accurate and complete

*Let's dive into an argument that could possibly overcome these issues.*

#### Point 1: Did God create us on purpose?

While we are obviously incapable of understanding God's entire purpose, we can look to scripture to try to understand some of His purpose, in particular, with respect to the creation of humans.

Riddled throughout God's Word is the concept that God loves people. From the very beginning He said He wanted to make men and women "like Us." In fact, the entire Bible is the story of God's great love and rescue of His people, culminating in John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world..."*

If we presume that God created the universe, as the Bible tells us, and that God loves us, as the Bible reinforces countless times, then we can infer that His action of creating us was on purpose. He meant to do it. We are also told explicitly He chose to create us in Genesis.

#### Point 2: Who we are

So if God purposefully created us, there are a few other things we can deduce:

- The act of creating us was good (because God is good)
- His creation was good, ergo, we were originally created good (Genesis tells us this as well)
- He gave us choice (ostensibly to make us more like Him)

So far, God is still all-knowing, all-powerful, and all good, right?

#### Point 3: We have choice

And there's the rub. Did God give us "choice"? If He did, this is where the **potential** for evil is born. With choice, we have the capacity for sin, but that doesn't necessarily mean God created evil.

##### **Objection:**

*"Yes, but creating the potential for sin is the same as creating sin itself. Why not just create a sinless universe?"*

Remember that without choice, sin is impossible, but so is love. So a sinless universe would have to, by default, be a loveless universe. If God is a God of love, would He create a universe like this?

##### **Objection:**

*"Choice is just an illusion that God gives us."*

#### Point 4: The Lego Problem

Maybe that's true, and certainly lots of Calvinists head down that line of thought, but I think there's a Lego problem with that.

Imagine that you could breathe life into your kid's Lego characters. You're faced with the decision of whether or not to give that Lego character the ability to choose, or make them a robot who thinks they're making choices, but really aren't.

In trying to solve this dilemma, you find yourself asking "Hmm, which one would be better? Which one would I care for more? Which one would I be able to more fully love?"

### **How would you answer that?**

#### **Point 5: Love**

For me, the answer is simple. I would choose to give the Lego character choice. Without choice, love cannot be genuine. I understand the Lego character may not choose to love me, but I would rather have the genuine opportunity for a relationship, than have a duped robot at my beck and call.

Applying this to God directly would be anthropomorphization, which we know is a no-no. Remember... God of the Universe... time, space, matter ... you get it.

But we *can* look at God's description of *Himself* through His Word, and see that love is a pretty big deal to Him:

#### **Matthew 22:34-40**

*37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." [c] 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' [d] 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

#### **Nehemiah 9:17**

*17 They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.*

#### **John 13:34-35**

*34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

#### **Isaiah 54:10**

*"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you.*

#### **John 15:9-17**

*9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each*

*other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. 17 This is my command: Love each other.*

**Psalm 36:7**

*7 How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.*

**Romans 5:8**

*8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

**Conclusion?**

God shows us over and over again that He loves us. He tells us with His own Words that we are to love Him, and love one another. Tantamount to Jesus' teachings is love. So important, He names it as His command to us.

If God desires love, both the love of Him, and the love of each other, I would conclude that He would care if that love were genuine, and not forced. Ergo...

The argument can be adequately made that in order to create a universe that supports this kind of love, God gave us choice. In giving us choice, God understood the potential for **not choosing Him** (sin). To support the notion of choice, a tempter had to be allowed (we must have the opportunity to not choose God if choice is to be real). Humanity **enacted** sin, by not choosing God, and thus the fall.

So in conclusion, God created a universe in which genuine love could exist, which necessitated choice, and therefore allowed for sin, but humans made the decision to enact it, originally.