

The Reliability of the Gospels

#3: Has the Text of the Gospels Been Changed?

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I. The Challenge: Bart Ehrman's *Misquoting Jesus*

- A. Christian scribes were amateurs and lacked the ability to reliably copy books
- B. The NT manuscripts have between 200,000 and 400,000 variants

II. The Response: The NT Textual Tradition is Very Reliable

A. The Quantity of the Manuscripts

Tacitus, *Annals of History*: 3 copies

Josephus, *Jewish War*, around 50 copies

The New Testament: over 5,700 copies (and counting)

** It is the unusual quantity of manuscripts that explains why we have knowledge of so many textual variants!

B. The Date of the Manuscripts

Roman historian Tacitus, wrote his *Annals of History* around 100 AD. The earliest is from 9th century

Josephus wrote *Jewish War* in the first century. The earliest copy is from the 10th century.

New Testament was written between 47-90 AD. The earliest text we possess dates from 100-125 AD, about 25 years after the originals were written.

C. The Quality of the Manuscripts

1. What kind of changes do we find in our manuscripts?

**the vast majority of scribal changes do not affect the meaning of the text

2. What evidence do we have about the quality of Christian scribes?

- The use of the codex book format
 - o Why did early Christians prefer the codex?
 - o “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments” (2 Tim 4:13)
- The use of the *nomina sacra* (“sacred names”)
- - o Special abbreviations for the Greek words for God, Jesus, Lord, and Christ
 - o What do the *nomina sacra* tell us about early Christian scribal culture?