

Seth, thank you for the e-mail. Your question is a worthy one and oft asked. Below is how you posed the question.

In light of the divine influence of the Holy Spirit in the writing of the Bible and in its preservation, how can we get so many discrepancies in the Old Testament -- especially between Kings and Chronicles, when it talks about numbers and such? In my study bible, it says something ambiguous about a copyist's error -- how is that okay? With these inconsistencies, how can we defend the infallibility of all Scripture in its present form?

Keep in mind that the Bible's trustworthiness is absolute with regard to its original manuscripts and that in its more important doctrines and facts the manuscript evidence demonstrates that the original words have been well-preserved. However, in some minor points, the original words are less well-preserved, but not so badly that we cannot reasonably determine what the original probably said, and not so badly that any significant doctrine is in question.

I really do appreciate the difficulty these texts can pose, and I'm not trying to be flippant in attributing things to scribal error. Personally, I think that, given the size of the Bible and the millennia over which its texts have been preserved, it is remarkable that there are not more such errors. Moreover, I am encouraged to trust the Bible by noting that these errors do not occur in critical areas, and that they do not affect important doctrines.

Here's what you need to understand about inerrancy. Get this, because it is critical to the proper understanding of the trustworthiness of the Bible. Properly understood, the doctrine of inerrancy—the teaching that the Bible contains no errors — applies only to the original copies of the biblical documents. The original writings came directly from God through human authors. As you know from reading *Learning to Walk in the Spirit*, the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic, and the New Testament was penned in Greek. After the Old and New Testament books were written, scribes produced and distributed copies of the original manuscripts. They took painstaking care to craft those copies by hand, long before the days of the printing press.

In the providence of God, we no longer have the original documents. They disappeared over time. What we have available now are copies of those original documents—copies produced over a number of centuries. By comparing and analyzing those copies through a process called textual criticism, we are able to determine what the original manuscripts said and where variations crept into the copies. That process has confirmed that God has accurately preserved His Word for us.

The "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" correctly notes:

*Since God has nowhere **promised an inerrant transmission of Scripture**, it is necessary to affirm that **only the autographic text of the original documents was inspired** and to **maintain the need of textual criticism as a means of detecting any slips that may have crept into the text in the course of its transmission**. The verdict of this science, however, is **that the Hebrew and Greek text appears to be amazingly well preserved**, so that **we are amply justified in affirming...a singular providence of God in this matter and in declaring that the authority of Scripture is in no way jeopardized by the fact that the copies we possess are not entirely error-free...Similarly, no translation is or can be perfect, and all translations are an additional step away from the autograph**. Yet **the verdict of linguistic science is that English-speaking Christians, at least, are exceedingly well served in these days with a host of excellent translations and have no cause for hesitating to conclude that the true Word of God is within their reach**.*

Sethers, it's true that we can't handle the original documents today, we can have confidence that most English Bibles faithfully represent what was contained in those documents. God has providentially preserved His Word for subsequent generations despite the best efforts of many of His enemies to eliminate it. We have thousands of manuscripts and the **errors can be detected by comparing the manuscripts** because not everybody makes the same error at the same place. For example, let us suppose we have 5 manuscripts and they read in a particular sentence:

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Several of the copist of the text made some scribal errors.

Several of the copyist of the text made some scribal errors.

Several of the copyist of the text made some scribble errors.

Several of the copyist of the text made some scribe errors.

What would you conclude is the true text? Well, to any reasonable person it would be clear that the copyist is original and "copist" is a copy-error / misspelling. Furthermore, the their activity was not "scribbling" but copying and the adjective to 'scribe' (the name of their profession) is 'scribal', so 'scribal' was original and the one who wrote "scribble" was only seeing the 'scribble', recognized it was wrong and thought it was a copy error of the word 'scribble' instead of 'scribal'. Because he misunderstood where the mistake came from he made an wrong 'correction'. The context will make clear that we are talking about a past action, so it is 'made' instead of 'make'.

And even though only the third line [of five versions] is error free, we can with absolute confidence conclude what the original correct text was. And because we usually do have several hundred handwritten old copies we have many with the correct version and also many with errors but the textual critics can trace the errors pretty well and with very high confidence establish the

original text. And the above example also shows that even with the lines containing the error, the message was clear and the same in all of them. Now we know that the early Christians didn't burn their books so we can restore the original text even from "corrupted" manuscripts.

Out of over 15,000 lines in the New Testament only 40 are in some doubt. All others are established above all reasonable doubt. And no Christian doctrine depends on any of the doubtful lines. Christian scholars honestly admit that there are some doubts about the text of the New Testament. But taking a fair look at the data we have, it is clear that the massive information from the many manuscripts of the New Testament is a far more reliable witness to the faithful transmission of our scripture than anything Muslims, let's say, can show for their book. And especially since the Quran variants were burned you will have to live with the nagging question that the others might have been indeed quite a bit different. And many of the variants can actually be found still today in the commentaries of the early Muslim scholars who still knew the other codices before they were burned.

This is truly a difficult issue to grasp. Only the original autographs (original manuscripts written by the apostles, prophets, etc.) are under the divine promise of inspiration and inerrancy. The books of the Bible, as they were originally written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21), were 100% inerrant, accurate, authoritative, and true.

There is no Biblical promise that copies of the original manuscripts would equally be inerrant or free from copyist errors. As the Bible has been copied thousands of times over thousands of years, some copyist errors have likely occurred. How do we deal with this? First, it is important to remember that **the Biblical manuscripts we have today are in 99% agreement with one another**. Yes, there are some minor differences, but the vast majority of the Biblical text is identical from one manuscript to another. **Most of the differences are in punctuation, word endings, minor grammatical issues, word order, etc. – issues easily explainable as scribal mistakes**. No important theological or Biblical issue is thrown into doubt by any supposed error or contradiction. **Biblical manuscripts from the 15th century agree completely with manuscripts from the 3rd century**. We can have absolute confidence that the Bible we have today is very much almost identical to what the apostles and prophets wrote 2000+ years ago.

Second, we should not be quick to say "Oh, that is just a scribal error." I strongly hold that the vast majority, if not all, of Bible "errors" can be explained in a logical and believable manner. Those that cannot be explained, or are very difficult to explain – could very well have an answer that we simply do not know at this point. Just because we cannot find a solution – that does not mean that there is not a solution. Believing there to be a scribal error must be the absolute last resort in any supposed Bible "error."

Ultimately, though, it is possible that errors have crept into our modern manuscripts and translations of the Bible. Copyists and translators are human beings and they make mistakes. The fact that the Bible is as accurate as it is – is a testimony to its inspiration and preservation by God.

Can we still trust the Bible? Absolutely! The Bibles we have today is God's Word. The Bible today is just as authoritative as it was in the 1st century A.D. We can completely trust the Bible as being God's message to us today. Yes, the Biblical promises of inspiration and inerrancy only apply directly to the original manuscripts. That does not impact, though, whether our modern Bibles are accurate and authoritative. As I said in one of my sermons on the inspiration of the Bible last year, ***the Word of the Lord endures forever***, despite the occasional failings and mistakes of copyists and translators.

For more good apologetics on the inspiration of scripture, please go to **www.apologeticsindex.org**. Scroll down to ***next page*** and click on it. Scroll down to ***Articles*** and click on the first one, entitled, **101 cleared up contradictions in the Bible**. Hope this helps a bit.

How is TDSC coming? Keep working on it. We really need to get it done. Pastor Pete