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On the Reliability of the Bible

by Daryl E. Witmer

THEY SAID, "Is your Bible reliable? How certain are you that your Bible is really reliable?"

HE SAID, "Well, I believe that the Bible is completely reliable."

THEY SAID, "But are you sure that the Bible is 100% accurate and that there are no mistakes whatsoever anywhere in the Bible?"

HE SAID, "Yes, I believe that the Bible is totally without error in the original manuscripts."

THEY SAID, "What do you mean, 'in the original manuscripts'?"

HE SAID, "I'm referring to those very first manuscripts – the actual parchment on which the men who were being directed and inspired by Almighty God Himself wrote what He moved them to write. I believe that the words on those original papers were completely, 100% error-free. So I believe that the Scripture is inerrant in the originals."

THEY SAID, "Now be honest with us about something. Do you know of anyone today who has access to even one of those original manuscripts? Are there any original manuscripts still in existence today?"

HE SAID, "Uh . . . well, no. Not really. None that I know of anyway."

SO THEY SAID, "Well, in that case, please tell us, what difference does it

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actually make that the original manuscripts, none of which are even around today, are supposedly inerrant? Since the Bible we have today is obviously translated from copied manuscripts, not originals,

and since nobody disputes the fact that the copied manuscripts are flawed, it seems clear to us that your Bible is really not much more than a erroneous text based on flawed copies. How can you call the Bible reliable?"

He stood there, silently, watching them walk away, shaking their heads.

But one of them was thinking that perhaps they had been a bit too hasty in drawing conclusions.

He sensed that they *themselves* might have erred. He recalled the time that his 6-year old daughter had come home from Sunday School with a story that he had found hard to believe. "We learned a new song today, Daddy," she had told him. "It was about a cross-eyed bear named Gadlee."

His little girl was always very honest. She pulled no punches and was usually very accurate in what she said. But this time it made no sense. Why would they be singing about a cross-eyed bear in Sunday School? Yet even after pressing the matter, she was adamant. That was the song. So — was this a case of mistaken judgement by her teachers?

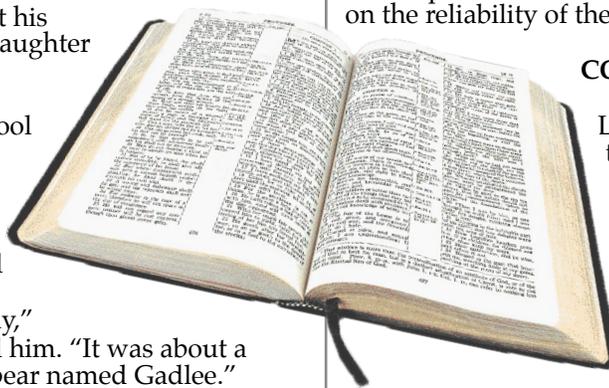
Later that night, just as he was falling asleep, he suddenly began to chuckle. From the back of his mind he had just recalled the words of an old hymn that he himself had once learned in church: "For Jesus I'd go anywhere. Gladly the cross I'd bear..."

A simple story. Simple miscommunication. Easily unravelled with a little context. His daughter had relayed the title inaccurately. Her teachers and the song's *actual* lyrics were never in error.

With a little time and thought what at first seemed to be an error melted away like a snowball in Summer.

SO HERE ARE THE FACTS

There appear to exist about 180,000 (and maybe even more) variations among the various copied New Testament manuscripts. These variations inevitably resulted from the sometimes flawed and always very tedious process of reproducing Scripture by hand. However, all but about 400 of these variations involve relatively minor differences of a mostly grammatical nature. The actual sense of the text is not at issue. All of them are rather easily discernible for what they are. And of the 400 instances where the sense of the passage is affected, never once is a single essential doctrine of the Christian faith at issue. Explainable as they are, these alleged "discrepancies" need cast no doubt on the reliability of the Bible.



CONCLUSION

Lacking access to the original documents on which the writers actually recorded the words that God's Holy Spirit

inspired them to write is not the problem that it may at first seem to be — for two main reasons:

- 1) the vast number of copied manuscripts that are still available.
- 2) the relatively brief time lapse between the originals and the copies.

These factors make today's formal translations of the Bible fully reliable using common standards of reliability in all notable ancient literature.

When we read the Bible today we can have complete confidence that what we are reading is exactly what God intended for us to read.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, Revised Edition, by F.F. Bruce, © 1977 Eerdmans
- *Nothing But the Truth*, by Brian H. Edwards, © 2006 Evangelical Press

More Evidence in Defense and Confirmation of the Christian Faith