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But if no one has ever discovered any of the original Bible manuscripts, how can anyone know what the original manuscripts said?

Exactly where are these copyist errors in my Bible?

One example would be 2 Chronicles 22:2. The KJV says that the age of King Ahaziah was 42 when he began to reign in Judah. But 2 Kings 8:26 says that he was 22. Because Joram, Ahaziah's father, was 40 when he died (see 2 Kings 8:17 and do the arithmetic: 32 plus 8), and if 2 Chr. 22:2 is correct, Ahaziah would have actually been older than his father when his father died. So the number "42" is obviously a copyist error.

Another example would be 1 Kings 4:26, which says that Solomon had 40,000 horse stalls. But that would imply that he had over 28 horses for each of his 1,400 chariots (1 Kings 10:26). 2 Chronicles 9:25 says that he had 4,000 stalls. That would imply 2-3 horses per chariot, which is far more realistic. The visual distinction between the two Hebrew numbers is very slight. So we can assume that the manuscripts from which the scribe copied the text in 1 Kings 4:26 were defective in some way.

Other examples would include 1 Samuel 13:5, 2 Samuel 21:19, and Mark 14:30, although there are other rational ways of resolving the Mark passage.

What resources would you recommend if I want to learn more about copyist errors or manuscript variations in my Bible, and the best way to handle them?

Here are two excellent resources:

- *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, ©1982 Zondervan, by Dr. Gleason Archer
- *When Critics Ask*, ©1999 Victor Books, by Dr. Norman Geisler

Why is a correct understanding of such matters so important?

Knowing the truth about copyist errors in the Bible is important for believers *and* skeptics. As a believer you can be better prepared to answer the charges of Bible critics, and you can be even more confident in the integrity and authority of Scripture.

By examining the context of a passage, and by comparing the many manuscript copies that *have* been discovered, it's usually quite clear what the original manuscripts would have said. The number of manuscript copies and their proximity in time to the original manuscripts makes this "deduction" process even more reliable. And it's important to know that both of those factors far excel the same for almost every other important ancient writing.

Why didn't God inspire the scribes and make them infallible just as He made the authors infallible?

God directly inspired about 35-40 godly Bible writers. Contrast that with hundreds and thousands of scribes and copyists and translators and typesetters and typists down through history, many of whom were not even necessarily believers. Some of them did their copying as just a job, and many of the earliest scribes would have performed their tedious work by flickering candlelight, often late at night, with absolutely no help from word processors or spellcheckers!

If I accept the fact that errors exist in my Bible, how can I trust it?

Evangelical scholars have long since discovered, pointed out, and resolved every single copyist error and manuscript discrepancy. So it's altogether accurate to say that the Bibles which we now read are trustworthy. And because none of these problems involve any key doctrine, the message of the Bible should also certainly be considered authoritative — in every sense of the word. God intends His Word to be our only ultimate guide in all matters of faith and conduct, i.e. what we believe and how we behave.



Errors in My Bible?

by Daryl E. Witmer

No. I can't accept this! I've always believed that God inspired Scripture. All Scripture. And I know that God would never make a mistake. I trust Him and I trust His Word. So — errors in my Bible?! No way. I don't believe it!

Well, you're right about God never making a mistake. He doesn't. And He didn't. So we can agree that there were no errors in the actual message that God gave the authors of Scripture. But God didn't inspire the scribes and copyists of Scripture as He inspired the authors. And the copyists were human. So they made mistakes. Which means that the manuscripts, and the copies of the manuscripts, and the copies of the copies of the manuscripts, do not always accurately represent those originally-inspired records.

Then why don't the people who print our Bibles today go right to the original manuscripts?

Because no one has ever found any. All that anyone has today are copies, or copies of copies of copies.

Well, my pastor and church teach that the Bible is inerrant. We use the King James Version (KJV).

Copyist errors exist in the King James Version just as they do in other versions. And as for inerrancy, I'm sure that if you check closely, you'll find that your pastor and church say that "the Bible is inerrant *in the originals*" or in the "*original autographs*" — referring to the actual first manuscripts that were penned by the men whom God directly inspired. That's a very important distinction.