

The Preservation of Scripture

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1. God spoke at different times in different ways through the prophets, but in these last days God has spoken through his Son Jesus, the Word made flesh (Jn 1:1, 14; Heb 1:1).
2. Jesus, as the Word incarnate, is the express image of God in whom dwelled all the fullness of God (Jn 14:9; Col 1; Heb 1). Jesus spoke to mankind through all he did and said.
3. An important aspect of Jesus' earthly ministry was his teaching and preaching. He did not speak in a heavenly language, but the earthly languages of mankind.
4. Jesus referred to the Old Testament documents of his day as scripture (γραφή) from God. (Mat 4:4-7; 5:17-18; 21:42; 19:4-5; 22:29; 26:54-56; Mark 12:10; 14:49; Luke 4:21; 24:25-27,32,45; John 5:39; 7:38; 13:18; 17:12, 17; 19:28). He also viewed his own words to be God's words (John 6:63; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10; Matt 5:22,28,32,34; Luke 21:33). Jesus endorsed the New Testament scriptures by promising to send the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into all truth and bring to their remembrance all things he had said to them (John 14:26; 16:13). See [Why Believe the Bible](#).
5. The languages of scripture are not heavenly languages. The two major languages of scripture, Hebrew (Old Testament) and koine Greek (New Testament), were the human languages of the time and geography in which the scriptures were given. By virtue of the fact that these ordinary words of human languages providentially, faithfully, and truthfully convey God's revelatory message, they are the words of God (Psalm 119:160; Prov 4:4-5; 30:6; Matt 24:35; Jn 6:63; 14:23; 1Thes 2:13; Rev 22:18-19). God has always known and purposed that human language (with all its strengths

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and weaknesses as a form of communication) would be his means of communicating to mankind.

6. God gives Christians “speaking gifts” to speak as the oracles of God (1Peter 4:10,11). These spiritual gifts to communicate his truth through human language include prophesying (προφητεία), word of knowledge (λόγος γνῶσις), speaking in different languages (γένη γλωσσῶν), and interpreting languages (ἐρμηνεῖα γλωσσῶν) (Acts 2; 1Cor 12). See [Speaking with Tongues](#).
7. God has expressed his desire for people to understand him in their own language. If we speak to people in a language that they do not know (i.e., an unknown tongue), they will not understand what we say and therefore they will not be edified. To fulfill the great commission, God uses people to translate his words into different languages so other people can understand God’s words in their own tongue (Acts 2; 1Cor 12-14).
8. Scripture self-attests to the importance of its “words” because words convey meaning. Generally, to change the words of a text is to change the meaning. However, because of God’s reversal of Babel in Acts 2 and his empowering of the speaking gifts to communicate the gospel worldwide, it can be concluded that words in different languages than the original languages can be the words of God also--inasmuch as they have the same meaning as the original words. Therefore, the goal of translating is to convey the meaning from the original languages to the different human languages of the world.
9. The scriptures did not come into existence through the private interpretation of the human author. Rather, the Holy Spirit moved holy men to speak words which were then written down by themselves or a secretary. These canonical writings are referred

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to as scripture and as the word of God (2Peter 1:21 with 3:15-16 and Rom 16:22; 1Cor 2:12-13; 14:37; 1Thes 2:13). The scriptures are a surer word from God than hearing God's voice (2Pet 1:19). 2Peter 1:17-21 affirms that the scriptures originated with the autographs (i.e., the original manuscripts dispatched by the holy author).

10. All scripture is θεόπνευστος (God-breathed, translated "given by inspiration of God") and is essential to the believer's relationship with God and to his fellow man (2Tim 3:16,17). The scriptures are a vital and integral means by which God accomplishes his purposes in the world. See [The Scriptures](#). It is important not to get lost in the mechanics of inspiration and forget that it is the product (i.e., the written words) that are God-breathed.
11. The term "scripture" (γραφή) cannot be confined to the autographs. Jesus and the apostles referred to the apographs (copies) and/or translations to which they had access as "scripture" (2Tim 3:15-16; Matt 21:42; 22:29; Jn 5:39; Acts 8:32; 17:2, 11). (They did not likely have access to the autographs but copies of copies of copies of the Old Testament original manuscripts.) The words of scripture had endured via the copies and/or translations well beyond the perishable material upon which the Old Testament words were written. The *words of scripture* should never be conflated with the physical paper and ink used to record those words. The papyrus manuscripts had a limited life due to factors such as handling, environment, and persecution.
12. A review of the historical data and manuscript evidence indicates that God's means of preserving scripture was meticulous copying (as with the Old Testament Hebrew scriptures), extensive copying (as with the New Testament Greek scriptures), and usage in the

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church through preaching, teaching, and translating the scriptures.

13. The total number of textual variants in the extant manuscripts are statistically proportional to the number of extant manuscripts. (If we only had one manuscript there would be no variants. Naturally, the more manuscripts, the more variants there will be). The Bible has thousands of variants because there are thousands of manuscripts. Most of these textual differences are insignificant to the meaning of the text and the correct reading easily ascertained by comparison (e.g., spelling differences, word order, vav and yodh, moveable nu, etc.). See [Bible Differences](#).
14. The number of viable variants (either reading could be the original) that are also meaningful (the variant makes a significant difference in the meaning) is extremely small (estimated at less than 0.25% of the text). Regarding these relatively few texts, scholars and Christians have not reached a consensus. See [Four Views of the Preservation of Scriptures](#). This lack of agreement does not entail a lack of divine providential preservation--only a lack of human confidence in which reading is correct regarding this very small proportion of scripture. There is no reason to think that the correct reading is not preserved in one of the readings represented in the extant manuscripts. Furthermore, since no major Christian doctrine depends on any of these texts in question, the scriptures continue to effectively fulfill their divine purpose in concert with God's church and the Holy Spirit.