

**REVISITING A DEFENSE OF THE BIBLE'S CREDIBILITY**  
**Part II - Answering Challenges From "Lower Criticism"**  
**A. Answering The Challenge Of The Bible's Manuscript Variations**  
**(Revelation 3:8-10; 1 John 2:20, 27)**

**I. Introduction**

- A. Though we learned in our last lesson that the 66-book Protestant canon is God's Word, challenges face us *within* the ***Bible's 66 books themselves*** that must be addressed, what involves "lower" or "textual" criticism.
- B. The Greek and Hebrew manuscripts from which our English versions have been translated contain different readings at various places, so we need to answer this challenge of the Bible's manuscript variations:

**II. Answering The Challenge Of The Bible's Manuscript Variations, Revelation 3:8-10; 1 John 2:20, 27.**

- A. The autograph manuscripts (mss) by Scripture's authors wore out long ago, so they have been copied many times over by hand by men who did *not* write under God's inspiration. In time, variant readings crept into the copies so that the mss now *differ* from each other in places (Rene Pache, The Insp. & Auth. of Script., p. 186).
- B. However, Jesus said that not the smallest letter or part of a letter in Scripture would pass away until all of it was fulfilled (Matthew 5:18), so *critics* charge that *because* of the *variations* in the mss, it is *pointless* to *USE* the Bible *if* one *cannot prove what GOD wrote there for him and thus live in accordance with God's will!*
- C. Nevertheless, viewing the **facts** of *textual criticism* reveals that ***we TODAY HAVE and KNOW God's Word:***
  - 1. Textual critical studies of the Old Testament reveal we ***have GOD'S accurate Old Testament WORD:***
    - a. Since the Babylonian Captivity, Hebrew Masoretic rabbis carefully copied Bible mss to avoid errors:
      - i. If they made one error in copying a ms, they started copying the initial ms anew, *Ibid.*, p. 187.
      - ii. If the *initial* text *seemed* to have an *error* in it, the Masoretes *left* it in *their copy* (called a *kethib*), but made a note in its margin (called a *kere*) of their view of what the right reading should be, *Ibid.*
      - iii. They added vowel points to preserve pronunciations as only consonants were initially written, *Ibid.*
    - b. Archaeological finds reveal that their *workmanship* had been of *great quality:*
      - i. Until the find of the Dead Sea Isaiah scroll, the *earliest* O. T. ms was dated A. D. 900, *Ibid.*, p. 188.
      - ii. That Isaiah scroll was dated 150 B. C., predating the A. D. 900 Masorete scroll by 1,050 years, but it showed *almost 100% conformity* between it and the A. D. 900 scroll (*Ibid.*, p. 189).
      - iii. Such copying accuracy implies the same accuracy level dating from the first ms, *Ibid.*, p. 191.
  - 2. Textual critical studies of the New Testament reveal ***we have GOD'S accurate New Testament WORD:***
    - a. Though the Church era copyists were much *less* precise than were the Hebrew Masoretes, in contrast to the O. T. mss, we have far more N. T. mss written much closer to our era and thus far better evidence to use in evaluating the variants to determine the initial readings of the autograph mss of the N. T. (*Ibid.*, p. 191):
      - i. Some N. T. mss are close to the autograph mss, like the A. D. 135 Rylands fragment we've noted.
      - ii. With the 2,400 cursives, 1,600 lectionaries, 1,000 ms translations of the N. T., 8,000 translations of the Latin Vulgate and quotes from Church fathers, we have 45,175 ms portions of the N. T., *Ibid.*
    - b. Comparing this evidence with that of ancient *secular* works, next to the N. T., Homer's *Iliad* has the most ms testimony. However, Homer lived in 900 B. C., and the earliest copy of his work we have is **500 years after his death**. We have only **643** ms copies of the *Iliad* compared to over **24,000 complete N. T.** ms copies (McDowell, A Ready Defense, p. 45). The N. T. thus far surpasses Homer's *Iliad* in ms testimony!
  - 3. Textual critical studies and Scripture's claims reveal ***we KNOW GOD'S accurate WORD:***
    - a. Only 1/1000<sup>th</sup> of the N. T. has *substantive* variants out of *many insignificant* ones (*Ibid.*, Pache, p. 192f).
    - b. In addition, "not one [variant] touches on any article of faith or any moral commandment not forcibly supported by other entirely clear passages, or by the teaching of the Bible as a whole," *Ibid.*, p. 193.
    - c. In addition, Jesus prophetically commended 20<sup>th</sup> century fundamentalists of the Philadelphia Church era for keeping His Word in Revelation 3:8-10, implying that we today possess and know God's Word!
    - d. 1 John 2:20, 27 promises that the indwelling Holy Spirit clarifies what is God's truth so that the Holy Spirit leads even immature ("little children" = *paidia*, 1 John 2:18) believers to discern that truth!

***Lesson:*** *Though the Bible's manuscripts contain some variations, God has preserved His truth in the manuscripts behind the translations so that no article of faith or moral commandment is left unsettled by any textual variation.*

***Application:*** *May we trust the Bible we have and pay heed to reputable textual critics on its variant readings while relying ultimately on the indwelling Holy Spirit for discerning the truths of God in Scripture.*