

time of Christ they have been preserved with remarkable care, though occasionally mistakes have crept in.

God has prevented the continued copying of any mistake that would be harmful to His people or would cause real misunderstanding. Most of the few mistakes in Old Testament manuscripts either produce a sentence that is impossible to understand with certainty or involve a variation with regard to some point of history or geography that is of little significance. Thus a king of Syria called Hadadezer is mentioned seven times in 2 Samuel 8. In the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 18 some of these verses are almost identical, except that in that chapter his name is spelled Hadarezer. Since Hadad is a common part of Syrian names and Hadar is not, it must have been obvious to those who copied the Old Testament that Hadarezer was a mistake for Hadadezer, particularly since in ancient times the Hebrew letters "d" and "r" were sometimes written in such a way that they were easily confused. Yet the Hebrew scribes copied the text of the Old Testament exactly as they received it, thus showing that they considered themselves as copyists, not as revisers. The degree of dependability of the preservation of the Old Testament books is quite unique.

The New Testament books, which Jesus Christ had authenticated in advance, were written in various parts of the Roman world and copies of them were distributed to the scattered groups of Christians. As these copies wore out new ones were laboriously written by hand. Aside from a few pieces of papyrus that have been recently discovered, every New Testament manuscript that is now known to exist was copied several centuries after the time of Christ. Only a few of these manuscripts date from the 4th or 5th century A.D., but Christians now possess more than two thousand New Testament manuscripts that were made in later centuries.

On the whole there is very close agreement among the New Testament manuscripts that were made between the 6th and 16th centuries (though no two of them agree in every detail).

Far more manuscript material is available for determining the correct text of the New Testament than of any other ancient Greek book. No difference in text that is supported by any sizable number of manuscripts would change any important biblical teachings.