

April 5, 1963

Miss Lillian Stegbauer
R. R. 3
Bluffton, Indiana

Dear Miss Stegbauer:

Your letter to Dr. McIntire has been passed on to me, and I am glad to discuss with you the questions that you raised in it.

The books of the Bible were written separately, in the original Hebrew and Greek. God's people read and studied them and made copies which were passed on to others. In the course of time the original copies all became worn out, so that the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts that exist today are all copies of copies.

In those days printing had not yet been invented. When an entire book is copied by hand it is practically impossible to avoid making some mistakes. In the providence of God the number of mistakes that were thus made in copying the manuscripts of the Old and New Testaments are far less than those that were made in the copying of any other book that has come down to us from ancient times. Yet there are cases where our manuscripts disagree with one another. No one of these affects any vital doctrine, and in the majority of the cases it is fairly easy to see what was the correct original reading. Yet there are cases where we are not sure exactly what word stood at a certain place in the original writing.

The Jewish rabbis seem~~ed~~ to have taken exceptional care in the copying and preservation of the manuscripts of the Old Testament. Most of our Hebrew manuscripts agree very closely. On the basis of translations into other languages, that were made at a time earlier than our earliest Hebrew manuscripts, scholars sometimes suggest that there are errors of moderate importance at some places in the Hebrew that appears in our present printed Hebrew Bibles. In most cases, however, these guesses seem quite unwarranted. There is no doubt that in the vast majority of cases our present Hebrew Bibles are more like the original than any of the early translations that have been preserved.

In the case of the New Testament the situation is quite different. The Greek manuscripts circulated separately for a number of years before they were combined into one volume. In the course of the many copies that were made by the early Church a number of variants came in. In no case do these affect any vital doctrine, but sometimes they leave us in doubt, whether a certain word, or even a whole verse, has been inserted into the original text through the error of a scribe. Much effort has been expended in comparing the different manuscripts and noting the variations between them. The present tendency of scholars is to think that the few manuscripts that have come down to us from the 4th and 5th centuries after Christ are more accurate than the hundreds that have been preserved from later years, and the newer editions of the Greek