The Bible said it,
I believe it,
that settles it!
Four Questions to Answer

• How **many** textual variants are there?
• What **kinds** of textual variations are there?
• What **theological beliefs** depend on textually suspect passages?
• Is what we have now what they wrote then?
Preliminary Question:
Don’t we have the original New Testament any more?
Number of Variants

What is a textual variant?

Any place among the manuscripts in which there is variation in wording, including word order, omission or addition of words, even spelling differences
The Quantity of Variants

Greek NT: c. 140,000

Textual Variants: c. 400,000
The reason we have a lot of textual variants is that we have a lot of manuscripts.
Richard Bentley,
Remarks upon a Discourse of Free Thinking

“If there had been but one manuscript of the Greek Testament at the restoration of learning about two centuries ago, then we [would have] had no various readings at all. … And would the text be in a better condition then, than now [that] we have 30,000 [variant readings]? 

It is good, therefore… to have more anchors than one; and another MS. to join the first would give more authority, as well as security.”
An Embarrassment of Riches

- Greek manuscripts: 5600+
- Latin manuscripts: 10,000+
- Other ancient versions: 5000–10,000
- Quotations from the New Testament by church fathers: over 1 million
The NT compared to the average classical work

- The average classical Greek writer has less than 20 copies of his works still in existence.
- Stack them up, and they’re 4 feet high.
The NT compared to the average classical work

average classical work    New Testament
The NT compared to the average classical work

average classical work    New Testament
The NT compared to the average classical work

average classical work    New Testament
The NT compared to the average classical work

average	New Testament
class. work
The NT compared to the average classical work
The NT compared to the average classical work
Greco-Roman historians and biographers

- Pliny the Elder: 700 years
- Plutarch: 800 years
- Josephus: 800 years
- Polybius: 1200 years
- Pausanias: 1400 years
- Herodotus: 1500 years
- Xenophon: 1800 years
The Date of NT MSS

The Discovery of P52
An ounce of evidence is worth a pound of presumption!
Earliest NT manuscript?

- P52 was the earliest NT manuscript
- Now, Luke fragment may be just as early
- And a fragment from Mark... probably from first century AD
Has the Bible been translated and retranslated so many times that we don’t know what it originally said?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>number of Greek manuscripts</th>
<th>Earliest manuscripts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1611 (KJV)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>5600+</td>
<td>2nd century; 1st century?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The bottom line

As time goes on, we are getting closer and closer to the original text.
The Quality of variants: What kinds of variants are there?

✦ 99% make virtually no difference at all.
✦ For example:
  ✦ differences in spelling
The smallest group of variants:

- Meaningful and viable (good chance of being authentic)
- Less than 1% of all textual variants fit this group.
Revelation 13.18—“Let the one who has insight calculate the beast’s number, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.”
What theological beliefs depend on textually suspect passages?
“My dear,” Teabing declared, “until that moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet . . . A great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. A mortal.”
An ounce of evidence is worth a pound of presumption.
P66 (c. AD 175)
“Why do you believe these core tenets of Christian orthodoxy to be in jeopardy based on the scribal errors you discovered in the biblical manuscripts?”
Ehrman’s response:

“Essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament.”
Unnatural Segue...

- Polar bear attacks man in Canada and bystanders do nothing.
- The media did not even report this incident!
Is What We Have Now What They Wrote Then?

In all particulars?
Probably not.
But in all essentials?
Absolutely.
No essential Christian belief is jeopardized by any viable variant.