

Questions About Biblical Variants Impacting Doctrine

Textual Criticism - doctrinal variants in the Book of Revelation

Are there known doctrinal variants in the ancient manuscripts used by scholars in translating the Book of Revelation into English?

Of the 400,000 variants in ancient manuscripts, the vast majority can be considered as scribal errors but not all. My concern is variants that influence doctrine...are there doctrinal variants that exist in the manuscripts that scholars have used throughout history to produce the Book of Revelation?

My primary source for understanding Textual Criticism is Dr. Daniel Wallace from the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts (CSNTM)

Additionally, when scholars translate Revelation from Greek into English are they in compliance with the Lord's command to not add or take away any of the words contained in Revelation?

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.

Deuteronomy 4:2 KJV

18 For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

Revelation 22:18-19 KJV

Answer:

This is an excellent and deeply important set of questions. You’re asking about one of the most delicate areas of biblical scholarship — **textual criticism** — and how it relates to **the integrity of doctrine** and **faithfulness to God’s command not to add or take away** from Scripture.

Let’s address your concerns step by step, with historical precision and theological care.

1. Are there known doctrinal variants in the ancient manuscripts of Revelation?

In short: **no major doctrinal variants exist in Revelation that alter Christian theology**. However, there **are minor textual differences** among ancient Greek manuscripts — as with all New Testament books — but these do not change core doctrines or prophetic truths.

Why Revelation has more variants than some other books

- The **Book of Revelation** is one of the **least attested** New Testament books in terms of ancient manuscripts. (We have far fewer copies compared to, say, John or Romans.)
- The oldest complete copy of Revelation is from the **4th century (Codex Sinaiticus)**, and partial fragments date back to around **A.D. 200–250 (Papyrus 47)**.
- Because it was less frequently copied and was controversial in some early church regions, **scribal variation** is slightly higher relative to its size.

Yet even with those challenges, **no textual variant in Revelation changes any doctrine** about salvation, judgment, the deity of Christ, the second coming, or the gospel.

2. Examples of Variants in Revelation (and Why They Don’t Affect Doctrine)

Here are a few well-known textual variants, along with explanations:

Verse	Variant	Explanation
Revelation 1:5	Some manuscripts read “washed us from our sins in His own blood” (λούσαντι), while others read “freed us	The difference is one letter in Greek. Both readings affirm Christ’s redemptive work — one emphasizing cleansing,

	from our sins” (λύσαντι).	the other liberation. No doctrinal change.
Revelation 13:18	Some manuscripts list the number of the beast as 616 instead of 666.	This is a well-documented scribal variation in early manuscripts (notably Codex Ephraemi). However, 666 is overwhelmingly supported by the oldest and best manuscripts (P47, Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus). The meaning and warning remain identical.
Revelation 22:14	Some manuscripts say “Blessed are those who do His commandments,” while others read “Blessed are those who wash their robes.”	Both expressions occur elsewhere in Revelation (12:17; 7:14). The doctrinal idea—obedience and cleansing through Christ—remains consistent.

These are the **types of variants** textual critics examine.

As Dr. Daniel Wallace (your source) often emphasizes, **over 99% of all variants are inconsequential** — spelling errors, word order changes, or synonyms that do not affect meaning. Of the remaining 1%, none change Christian doctrine.

3. Do any variants affect prophecy or the theology of Revelation?

Not materially.

While there are textual variants in how phrases are worded (for example, some omit a conjunction, or reverse “God and the Lamb”), no variant alters:

- The identity of Christ as divine and victorious,
- The ultimate defeat of evil,
- The promise of resurrection,

- The warnings and blessings of obedience.

All major textual families (Byzantine, Alexandrian, Western) agree in substance on Revelation's message.

4. How Translators Handle the Warning Against “Adding or Taking Away”

This is an important theological concern — and one that every careful translator reveres deeply.

Revelation 22:18–19 and Deuteronomy 4:2

These passages do not forbid **translation or textual restoration**. They forbid **intentional alteration** — adding one's own ideas or removing inspired content to distort the message.

Faithful translators are not *adding* or *taking away* when they compare manuscripts and choose the most original wording. They are, in fact, doing the opposite: they are **protecting** the purity of the text by identifying and correcting accidental scribal additions or omissions.

In Practice:

- Translators use the **earliest and most reliable manuscripts** available (Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic).
- Every reputable modern translation (ESV, NASB, NKJV, NIV) includes **footnotes** to show where variations occur — a transparency that honors the command not to add or take away.
- The goal of textual criticism is **to restore the original inspired wording**, not to alter it.

So, faithful translation and responsible textual study are acts of **obedience to Revelation 22:18–19**, not violation of it.

5. God's Providence in Preserving the Text

While there are many variants across 5,800+ Greek New Testament manuscripts, the degree of agreement among them is astonishing.

Scholars (including Wallace, Comfort, Metzger, and Aland) consistently note: “The New Testament is 99.5% textually pure.” — Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*

That means the differences do not touch doctrine. God has providentially **preserved His Word** — not necessarily by perfect copyists, but through the vast abundance of manuscripts that allow reconstruction of the original text with near-total confidence.

6. Summary Table: Doctrine and Textual Variants in Revelation

Category	Effect on Doctrine	Example
Scribal spelling / grammar	None	“Jesus Christ” vs. “Christ Jesus”
Synonyms / stylistic shifts	None	“washed” vs. “freed” (1:5)
Numerical differences	None (symbolic prophecy intact)	666 vs. 616
Additions / omissions of short phrases	None on theology	“Lord” or “God” added/omitted in some copies
Major doctrinal alteration	None	No change to Christ’s deity, salvation, or prophecy

7. Theological Reflection

God’s warning in Revelation 22:18–19 is a solemn reminder that Scripture is sacred — not to be twisted for human agenda or corrupted by pride.

But **textual criticism**, rightly practiced, is not rebellion against that warning; it is *submission* to it.

It reflects a desire to hear exactly what the Holy Spirit inspired through John, without later human mistakes clouding the message.

As Dr. Wallace himself puts it: “Textual criticism is not the enemy of Scripture; it’s the servant of Scripture.”

8. Final Thought

Even with thousands of minor variants, the message of Revelation stands unchanged: Jesus Christ is the Alpha and Omega, the Lamb who was slain, and the returning King.

The same Spirit who inspired John to write the book has also preserved it through the centuries — not by preventing every scribal slip, but by ensuring that **no essential truth was ever lost**.

In Summary

- **Yes**, there are textual variants in Revelation, as in all New Testament books.
- **No**, none of them change Christian doctrine or prophecy.
- **Faithful translation** is an act of preservation, not addition or subtraction.
- **God’s warning** in Revelation 22:18–19 applies to deliberate corruption, not to careful restoration.
- **God’s providence** has ensured that what we read today faithfully represents the original inspired text.

“The word of our God shall stand forever.” — *Isaiah 40:8*