

**How Did We Get Our Bibles?  
Why Are There So Many Versions?  
Why Do They Differ?**

Some Definitions:

**Papyrus:** The earliest manuscripts of the New Testament were on papyrus, a plant found along the Nile River. The manuscripts were copied by hand on scrolls (30ft long and 10 inches wide—average). The columns were usually 3 to 4 inches wide. Scribes often wrote on both sides of the roll. Papyrus was used as a writing material in Egypt as early as 3500 B.C. The earliest extant copies of the New Testament were written on papyrus.

**Codex:** A codex is simply what we know today as a book. Leaves of papyrus were sewn together to make a book with columns of text.

**Vellum or Parchment:** goat or lamb skins processed to be written upon with ink. This process was perfected in the second century B.C. and became the dominant means of preserving the New Testament in the fourth century A.D.

**Uncials:** the word “uncial” refers to a style of writing popular until the ninth century. It is characterized by all capital letters, written large enough to be easily read by a reader in public. It had no spaces between words.

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN  
BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN, FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED  
BLESSED ARE THE GENTLE, FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH  
BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEY SHALL BE SATISFIED.

**Miniscules:** miniscules are characterized by small letters, written in a cursive style. This style of writing became popular in the ninth century. Its advantage was that more words could fit into the same amount of space.

**Paper:** Paper was not used in the West until the twelfth century. Of the 5,400 known mss of the New Testament, about 1,300 are written on paper.

Before the invention of the printing press in 1462, all of the copies of the New Testament were done by hand. Some of these copies were done by professional scribes in scriptoriums and others were done by amateurs. The early copies we have show that later hands corrected the original writings on the manuscripts.

- Of all 5,480 mss we have of the NT, no two are identical.

- People are not capable of copying a lengthy piece of written material without introducing some errors or variants.
- **Exercise:** Sit down and copy out the Gospel of John (any translation). After you have finished, read it through and correct it. Then give the manuscript to two or three friends and have each of them correct your corrected manuscript.
- Ancient *scriptorium*s often had trained scribes who specialized in copying and correcting the writings of the time. They took pride in accuracy but still made mistakes.
- The Massorettes from the sixth to the tenth centuries AD took great care in reproducing the Old Testament.
- Some NT manuscripts were hand copied by good men whose scribal skills were undeveloped.
- In the earliest period, NT documents were copied either for personal use, for reading in the churches, or for the use of sister congregations.
- Collections of several NT books took time as people traveled from place to place.

As to the Manuscripts themselves we must leave all palaeo-graphical matters aside (such as have to do with paper, ink, and caligraphy), and confine ourselves to what is material.

1. These Manuscripts consist of two classes: (*a*) Those written in **Uncial** (or capital) letters; and (*b*) those written in "running hand", called **Cursives**.

The former are considered to be the more ancient, although it is obvious and undeniable that some cursives may be transcripts of uncial Manuscripts more ancient than any existing uncial Manuscript.

This will show that we cannot depend altogether upon textual criticism.

2. It is more to our point to note that what are called "breathings" (soft or hard) and accents are not found in any Manuscripts before the seventh century (unless they have been added by a later hand).

3. **Punctuation** also, as we have it to-day, is **entirely absent**. The earliest two Manuscripts (known as B, the Manuscript in the Vatican and ~~✠~~ the Sinaitic Manuscript, now at St. Petersburg) have only an occasional dot, and this on a level with the top of the letters.

The text reads on without any divisions between letters or words until Manuscripts of the ninth century, when (in Cod. Augiensis, now in Cambridge) there is seen for the first time a single point which separates each word. This dot is placed in the middle of the line, but is often omitted.

None of our modern marks of punctuation are found until the ninth century, and then only in Latin versions and some cursives.

From this it will be seen that the punctuation of all modern editions of the Greek text, and of all versions made from it, rests entirely **on human authority**, and has no weight whatever in determining or even influencing the interpretation of a single passage. This refers also to the employment of capital letters, and to all the modern literary refinements of the present day <sup>7</sup>.

4. Chapters also were alike unknown. The Vatican Manuscript ,makes a new section where there is an evident break in the sense. These are called **titloi**, or **kephalaia** <sup>8</sup>.

There are none in ~~✠~~ (Sinaitic), see above. They are not found till the fifth century in Codex A (British Museum), Codex C (Ephraemi, Paris), and in Codex R (Nitriensis, British Museum) of the sixth century.

They are quite foreign to the original texts. For a long time they were attributed to HUGUES DE ST. CHER (Huego de Sancto Caro), Provincial to the Dominicans in France, and afterwards a Cardinal in Spain, who died in 1263. But it is now generally believed that they were made by STEPHEN LANGTON, Archbishop of Canterbury, who died in 1227.

It follows therefore that our modern chapter divisions also are destitute of Manuscript, authority.

5. As to verses. In the Hebrew Old Testament these were fixed and counted for each book by the Massorites; but they are unknown in any Manuscripts of the Greek New Testament. There are none in the first printed text in *The Complutensian Polyglot* (1437 - 1517), or in the first printed Greek text (Erasmus, in 1516), or in R. Stephens's first edition in 1550.

Verses were first introduced in Stephens's smaller (16mo) edition, published in 1551 at Geneva. These also are therefore destitute of any authority.

## The Causes of Error in the Transmission of the Text of the New Testament

### 1 Unintentional Changes

#### 2 Errors arising from faulty eyesight

- 3 scribes with astigmatism
- 4 the free use of abbreviations
- 5 when two lines in an exemplar happened to end with the same word or words a line or passage may be skipped.
- 6 Wrong word division – The earliest Greek copies were written in *scriptio continua* which were manuscripts that did not contain spaces to divide words. In later centuries however, manuscripts were written in minuscule form (similar to our lower case form), which did contain word divisions. While copying from an early manuscript, a scribe would sometimes fail to divide words properly.

(1) For example, GODISNOWHERE could be divided as "God is now here" or "God is no where." ISAWABUNDANCEONTHETABLE could be divided "I saw abundance on the table" or "I saw a bun dance on the table."

(2) **I Cor. 16:22** –  $\mu\alpha\rho\nu\alpha\theta\alpha$ - could be rendered...

$\mu\alpha\rho\nu\_ \alpha\theta\alpha$  - "Our Lord has come"

$\mu\alpha\rho\alpha\_ \nu\alpha\theta\alpha$  - same, or "will come"

$\mu\alpha\rho\nu\alpha\_ \theta\alpha$  - "O Lord come!"

e. If two lines on the same page had a similar ending, the scribe could inadvertently skip from the first "ending" to the second "ending" that had the same letters (**Mt. 25:34-46** contains many of the same words).

(1) Omission of words

(2) Repetition of words (probably **Rom. 8:1**)

#### 7 Errors arising from faulty hearing

- 8 errors arising from words that have the same pronunciation (their, there, they're). In Greek, it could be  $e@xomen$ ,  $e@xwmen$  or  $w\$de$ ,  $o!de$ . (Rom. 5:1; Luke 16:25)

- 9 *itacsim*: the substitution of one vowel or diphthong for another (h]ma?j, u[ma?j)
- 10 I Cor. 13:3 - καθησομαι – "... give my body *to be burned*..." or καυχησομαι – "... give my body *that I may boast*..."
- 11 I Jn. 1:4 - αμων – "*our* joy may be made full" or υμων – "*your* joy may be made full"
- 12 Rev. 1:5 - λουσονται – "unto Him that loved us, and *washed us*..." or λυσονται – "unto Him that loved us, and *freed us*..."
- 13 We can identify with this even in the English language. Has anyone ever mistaken "deer" with "dear" or "hart" with "heart"?
- 14 Errors of the mind
- 15 substitution of synonymns (e]k, a]po< or o!ti, dio<ti or peri<, u[pe<r)
- 16 variations in the sequence of words (pa<vtej kai> e]bapti<zovto, in Mark 1:5 appears as kai> e]bapti<zovto pa<ntej, kai> pa<ntej e]bapti<zonto).
- 17 transposition of letters (e@labon, e@balon in Mark 14:65).
- 18 the assimilation of the wording of one passage to the slightly different wording in a parallel passage, which may have been better known to the scribe. This accounts for many of the alterations in the Synoptic gospels. (cf. Matt. 19:17; Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18.)
- 19 Errors of Judgment
- 20 Scribes were often sleepy or dull-thinking even though well-meaning.
- 21 Glosses: words or notes standing in the margins of older copies were occasionally incorporated into the text of the new manuscript. (John 5:4; Rom. 8:1).
- 22 Codex 109 has Luke's genealogy of Jesus by following the lines across two columns rather than following the columns. Almost everyone is made the son of the wrong father; and God is called the "son of Aram"; "Phares" is the source of the whole race.
- 23 **II Cor. 8:4-5** – inserted "it is found this way in many copies" as though Paul had wrote it!
- 24 Copying marginal "notations" into the actual text may account for **Acts 8:37**, **Rom. 8:1b**, etc.

Remember, these copies, versions, citations, etc. were (until A.D. 1450) *hand written* manuscripts and were therefore subject to human mistakes. Imagine sitting down to copy the entire Bible (or N.T. for that matter) without leaving out a word or possibly duplicating a certain word! Therefore, many different variations are found in the vast array of materials we have. These are sometimes called "Textual Variants." This is why we see "Marginal Notes" in our Bibles today.

## II. Intentional Changes

(Though they were often made by scribes in good faith, they often proved very dangerous. Scribes occasionally made changes thinking they were correcting an earlier error.)

### Changes Involving Spelling and Grammar

- 25 Harmonistic corruptions
  - 26 John 19:20 was introduced into Luke 23:38: "It was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek."
  - 27 The shorter form of the "Lord's Prayer" in Luke 9:2-4 was made to agree with Matt. 6:9-13. The words of Paul in Acts 9:5-6 were made to conform to Acts 26:14,15.
  - 28 At Heb. 12:20 some add the words of Exodus 19:13.
  - 29 **Lk. 11:2-4** – was obviously changed to harmonize with **Mt. 6:9-13**.
  - 30 **Mt. 19:17** was evidently changed purposefully to agree with the form of Jesus' words as found in **Mk. 10:18**.
3. Addition of Natural Complements and Similar Adjuncts
- 31 "unto repentance" found in Luke 5:32 was added to Matt. 9:13. "Scribes" added to the chief priests in Matt. 16:3. Pharisees added to scribes in Matt. 27:41.
  - 32 In Col. 1:23 Paul is a minister. Some later mss. added "preacher and apostle."
  - 33 In Gal. 6:17 "Jesus" becomes "Lord Jesus," "Lord Jesus Christ," and "our Lord Jesus Christ."
- 34 Clearing Up Historical and Geographical Difficulties
- 35 In Mark 1:2 the composite quotation from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 is introduced by the formula, "As it is written in Isaiah the prophet." Later scribes replaced this with the general statement "by the prophets," thinking they mended the error.
  - 36 Some scribes attempted to harmonize John 19:14 (about the sixth hour crucifixion) with Mark 15:25 (third hour crucifixion). John uses Roman time (20:19), while Mark is using Jewish. (Note the footnote in NASB.)
  - 37 "After three days" of Mark 8:31 changed to "on the third day" by later scribes.
- 38 Conflation of Readings
- (What would a conscientious scribe do when he found that the same passage was given differently in two or more manuscripts which he had before him? Many scribes incorporated both readings in the new copy which they were transcribing. This is characteristic of the Byzantine type of text.)
- 39 Mark 13:11 "do not be anxious beforehand" and "do not practice beforehand" (Luke 11:14) became both.
  - 40 Acts 20:28 "church of God" and "church of our Lord" became "the church of the Lord and God."

- 41 Alterations Made Because of Doctrinal Considerations
  - 42 Tatian's Diatessaron contains several textual alterations which lent support to his views.
  - 43 Marcion, the heretic, left out all references to the Jewish background of Jesus.
  - 44 Luke 1:3 an addition of "and to the Holy Spirit" to agree with Acts 15:28.
  - 45 Changes in Luke 2:33, 41,43,48 from "his father" or "his parent" to Joseph so as to support the virgin birth.
  - 46 **Lk. 2:33** – to "preserve" the virgin birth of Christ, scribes changed "His father and mother" to "Joseph and His mother."
  - 47 **Mk. 9:29** – the addition of "fasting" to "prayer." "Fasting" is also added to **Acts 10:30** and **I Cor. 7:5**.
  
- 48 Addition of Miscellaneous Details
  - 49 Codex Bezae adds several O.T. names to Jesus' genealogy, destroying Matthew's intended pattern of fourteen.

While there have been some errors which have crept into the 5,480 MSS of the NT, *we should not be overly concerned*. The significant point is that all uncials and most minuscules have transmitted the NT text with conscientious exactness. All manuscripts of all types completely agree on more than 80 percent of the New Testament text.

**These copyist errors began to be adopted by later copyists.**

## Hypothetical Text Types

### Introduction

New Testament manuscripts can be classified according to certain major types or families. A family is the name given to a group of texts with a common ancestor. These texts are discovered through the deviations common to a group of manuscripts. For example, the errors made in copying the text in Alexandria were perpetuated in later reproductions. Classification according to families is the basic point of departure in the actual work of textual reconstruction. One reading of a text that represents a good family may provide more support for the original text than a dozen readings from a poor family. Caution is required at this point lest a generalization become misleading. Families are not represented by entire manuscripts but often only segments of them. The modern practice of copying an entire manuscript of the New Testament at once was seldom followed in antiquity. Thus, several families of texts may be represented in a single manuscript. Four types of families of texts have been sufficiently defined to merit discussion.

### The Alexandrian Text

This text arose in Egypt and is generally conceded to be the most important one. Westcott and Hort, who named this the Neutral Text, thought that Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus had preserved a pure form of the Alexandrian type of text. It is now evident that these manuscripts had been corrected by later scribes, but they are the most ancient

uncials and preserve the Alexandrian text at an early stage. Some of the important papyrus manuscripts also represent this family.

### **The Byzantine Text**

This family has been designated by many names. It is called Byzantine because it was adopted in Constantinople and used as the common text in the Byzantine world. It was produced in Antioch, Syria, under the direction of Lucian near the beginning of the fourth century and has been called the Syrian or Antiochene text. It was used almost universally after the eighth century. Both Erasmus, who created the first printed Greek text, and the translators of the King James Version of the Bible used this type of text. It was produced by combining earlier texts and has less value than the Alexandrian text. A (Codex Alexandrinus, fifth century) and C (Codex Ephraemi, fifth century) are the oldest representatives of the Byzantine family. A great majority of late uncials and minuscules belong to this group.

### **The Western Text**

This family of texts was closely related to the church in the west, particularly in North Africa. Although it can probably be traced to the second century, its value has been disputed. It was used by the early church fathers. Its age would seem to suggest great importance, but there are clear indications that it was not carefully preserved. It is best represented by the Old Latin translations, by the Syriac versions, and the church fathers. Its most famous representative is **manuscript D** (Codex Bezae) for the book of Acts.

### **The Caesarean Text**

This family of texts was widely used in Caesarea from which it derived its name. It seems to have arisen out of the Alexandrian text but was also mixed with the Western text. Consequently, its value is limited. Metzger suggests that it is necessary to distinguish between two stages in its development, the pre-Caesarean and the Caesarean (Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 215). Some of its more prominent representatives are W (Washington Codex, fifth century), P45, and two groups of minuscules and lectionaries.

This material is based on R. C. Briggs, *Interpreting the New Testament Today: An Introduction to Methods and Issues in the Study of the New Testament*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), pp. 45-47).

### **The Problem of So Many English Versions**

#### **Introduction:**

- 50 The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic;
- 51 the Old Testament mostly in Hebrew, but parts of Daniel in Aramaic
- 52 the New Testament is written in Greek

- 53 Most of the 68 quotes of the Old Testament found in the New Testament come from the LXX (Septuagint) a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.
- 54 The LXX began in the third century B.C. when Demetrius of Phaleron, Ptolemy Philadelphius invited Jewish scholars to Alexandria to prepare a Greek translation for the library there. It is reported that seventy scholars worked on it, thus the name “Septuagint.” The LXX was the Greek Bible of the early church.
- 55 In time, Greek was not the language of most Christians. Consequently, the Bible was translated into Syriac, Ethiopic, Coptic (Egypt), and Latin. Jerome was commissioned to translate the entire Bible into Latin and succeeded amid opposition in 404 A.D.
- 56 The first English translation came at the hands of John Wycliffe in 1382 A.D. Opposition grew quickly to his translation. The Council of Constance in 1415 ruled that Wyclif’s body be disinterred and burned, and the ashes thrown into the river Swift. Only 300 manuscripts survive of this early translation.
- 57 In 1453 Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press, which greatly reduced the cost of books and greatly assured accuracy and agreement of the copies. This invention along with the Reformation played a part in the demand for a Bible in English vernacular.
- 58 William Tyndale completed his New Testament in 1525. He said that if God spared his life before long, he would make the boy who drove the plough to know more Scripture than the cleric (priest) did. His New Testaments were first printed outside of England in Cologne and Worms and smuggled into England. Church officials identified his writings with Lutheranism and vigorously opposed their circulation. Tunstal, Bishop of London, claimed to find 3,000 errors in Tyndale’s New Testament. It is estimated that 92 percent of Tyndale’s translation was carried over into the King James Version. Tyndale was condemned and burned at the stake in 1536.
- 59 Other early English Versions include:
- 60 Coverdale 1535
  - 61 Matthew’s Bible 1537
  - 62 Great Bible 1539 the first Bible to be authorized by the king of England. But in 1553 the public reading of Scripture was condemned. Church Bibles were confiscated, martyrs abounded.
  - 63 Geneva Bible 1560 the first English Bible printed with verses in paragraphs (Calvinism)
  - 64 Bishops’ Bible 1568 (Anglican)
  - 65 Rheims-Douay 1582 (Catholic)

## 66 **The King James Bible 1611**

- 67 The KJV was born out of a need to still the voices of critics who had opposed the Bishops’ Bible and out of a need to bring uniformity into a confused situation. The desire was to make one translation out of many good ones, to which men could not justly take exceptions.” (1604)
- 68 King James himself never contributed any money to its production nor gave us any record of his official authorization of the finished product. In no sense does the word “authorized” refer to Divine authorization.



- 69 There were perhaps twenty-five New Testament manuscripts known in 1611; 1,500 in 1885; and now 5,480 Greek manuscripts and fragments.
- 70 The translators were made up of 54 people, of whom we know only 47 names. The preface makes it clear that the translators of 1611 did not claim they were inspired or made a perfect translation.
- 71 The Council of Trent in 1545 declared the Latin Vulgate to be the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church. The KJV was heavily influenced by Latin.
- 72 The translators of the KJV anticipated much opposition to their efforts from Catholics and from non-conformists.
- 73 Hugh Broughton declared in 1612 after examining the translation that it was so poorly done that it would grieve him as long as he lived. He insisted that he would rather be tied between wild horses and torn apart than to let it go forth among the people. He contended that the translators had put the errors in the text and the correct readings in the margins.
- 74 In 1629 John Lightfoot objected to the Apocrypha's being included between the two Testaments.
- 75 printing errors plagued early editions.
- 76 Printing outside of England of the KJV was not permitted until after America had broken away from British rule. The first English Bible printed in America (1782) was the King James Version.
- 77 In time the KJV came to be loved by English speaking people, much because English law demanded that it be used. Its value, however, was that it was easily understood for two centuries by the common man.
- 78 The current KJV differs in significant details (though not in general content) from the one issued in 1611. Early editions had many printing errors.
- 79 Matt. 26:36 KJV "then cometh Judas" rather than "then cometh Jesus."
- 80 "Wicked Bible" omitted not in the seventh of the ten commandments.
- 81 "Unrighteous Bible" the "unrighteous inherit the Kingdom"
- 82 "Vinegar" Bible has the parable of the "Vinegar"
- 83 "Ears to Ear" Bible (ears to hear)
- 84 by 1613, as many as 413 changes were made in the KJV
- 85 Dr. Anthony Scattergood added 7,250 marginal reference notes in 1683.
- 86 Bishop Ussher's chronology was added to the margin in 1701.
- 87 Benjamin Blayney made extensive revisions in 1769 adding 76 notes and 30,495 new marginal references. Spelling and punctuation were modernized.
- 88 Currently, the KJV is not the most completely intelligible to all readers; it is no longer the most accurate and the most readable English rendering of the Word of God.

## 89 **The Need for Revision**

The Oxford English Dictionary recently completed its supplement to the original edition with more than 75,000 entries of words that have come into use in this present century. No one can tell how many words have gone out of use in that same period.

Note these examples:

- "Jacob sod pottage."
- "Lot was sore vexed by the filthy conversation of the people of Sodom"

- “The people could not get to Jesus because of the press”
- “Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray...”
- “Take no thought saying, What shall we eat, or, What shall we drink, or Wherewithal shall we be clothed?” (Do you obey this command as stated?)
- “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles” (1 Pet. 2:12)

The task of translation is on-going not only in English but also in all the languages of the world. The whole Bible has now been translated into 314 languages, and the New Testament into 715. The KJV, the NIV, or the NASB cannot meet the needs of those who do not speak English. Are there inspired translations in languages other than English?

Though some people have at times tried to claim inspiration for the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and the KJV, translation is not an inspired activity. There are no perfect translations, old or new. Inspiration did not operate in 1611 or 1901 and then leave all other translations to fallible human activity.

Jack P. Lewis said, “I am quite willing for any person to point out any defect he thinks he sees in any translation, old or new. I reserve the right, however, to make up my own mind about whether I think he is right or wrong, and about whether he is being fair. I insist that he not change yardsticks when he measures the new translations from that which he uses with the old ones. In other words, I am not willing to listen to him when he is examining new translations with microscopic lenses but then puts on blinders when any questions about the old ones come up.” (*Questions You’ve Asked About Bible Translations*, p. 28)

When Erasmus first printed the Greek New Testament in March 1516 in his bilingual Greek and Latin text, he used somewhat carelessly about five manuscripts. None were earlier in date than the twelfth century, and adequate textual criticism was not done at that time to establish the best readings for the printed text. In some instances when the Latin and Greek manuscripts differed with each other and the Greek seemed defective, Erasmus made a Greek translation from the Latin and put that into his printed Greek text. The result is that some of his Greek readings are found in no known Greek manuscript. Erasmus’s Testament went through five editions with corrections and changes made in the process.

The translators of the KJV chiefly used Theodore Beza’s editions of 1588-89 and 1598 of the Greek New Testament. These editions were largely in agreement with the text of Erasmus and Estienne (Robert Stephanus). It is estimated that by 1611 not more than twenty-five manuscripts were used. None of these were earlier than the Middle Ages. Beza’s Testament was later published by the Elzevir brothers, who in a publishing blurb called this the “text now received by all” (*Textus Receptus*). The text remained the standard for two hundred years. In about a dozen places it has readings supported by the Latin Bible but by no Greek manuscripts. The *Textus Receptus* is more like the text type called Byzantine than the others; yet it is not identical with it, for it rests on only a few of the many manuscripts in the Byzantine grouping.

## **The State of the Greek New Testament**

Date Available	Collector	Number of MSS	Text Type
1516	Erasmus	6	Byzantine
1550	Robert Stephanus	12-15	Byzantine, Western
1598	Theodore Beza <i>Textus Receptus</i>	25	Byzantine, Western
1707	John Mill 30,000 changes	78	Byzantine, Western Church fathers
1881	Westcott & Hort	1500 1 papyrus 64 uncials	Byzantine, Western, Alexandrian, Caesarean, Neutral
2003	UBS 4 <sup>th</sup> and Nestle-Aland 27 <sup>th</sup>	5,480 116 papyrii 299 uncials	Byzantine, Western, Alexandrian, Caesarean, Neutral

“While recognizing variants in manuscripts, scholars are reasonably well agreed on what the reading of the bulk of the New Testament should be. The major doctrines of the New Testament about God, Christ, and the church are not based on textually disputed passages. The major duties of man toward God and his fellowman are not solely laid out in textually disputed passages. The questions of which we speak are not new in the church; they have been under debate for centuries; they need not be disturbing to faith.” (Jack Lewis, *Questions You’ve Asked About Bible Translations*, p. 113.)

## Evaluating the Versions

### King James Version (KJV)

The King James Bible has with good reason been termed, "the noblest monument of English prose" (RSV preface). Above all its rivals, the King James Version has had the greatest impact in shaping the English language. It is a literary masterpiece. But, lest anyone wishes to revere it because it was "good enough for St. Paul," we must remember that the King James Bible of today is not the King James of 1611. It has undergone three revisions, incorporating more than 100,000 changes! Further, there are over 300 words in the King James that no longer mean what they meant in 1611. If one wishes to use a Bible that follows the same Greek and Hebrew texts as the King James, I recommend the New King James Version. Translated from the original languages by committee. Unexcelled in literary quality, although now archaic. Does not reflect the best text base on recent scholarship (some editions give explanatory notes on the text). Translated in 1611 by 47 scholars using the Byzantine family of manuscripts, *Textus Receptus*. This remains as a good version of the Bible. Its Elizabethan style Old English is difficult for modern readers, especially youth. This is still a good translation for those who can deal with the language.

### Revised Standard Version (RSV)

The RSV was completed in 1952 and was intended to be a revision of the King James. Of course, it used the ancient MSS of the NT, resulting in the omission of several verses and words. But the wording was still archaic. The RSV attempts to be a word-for-word translation where possible. Debatable whether more a revision of KJV or a fresh translation from the original (by committee). Probably more the latter in NT. Preserves some of KJV sound of "Bible English", but is somewhat modernized. Accused by ultra-conservatives of deliberate "liberal" bias (along with TEV and others) but has weathered the storm and is considered by some church leaders as the best all-purpose translation. Adequate, though not the best for deeper study in author's opinion.

### **New American Standard (NASB)**

The NASB is something of an evangelical counterpart to the RSV. There are three major differences between the RSV and the NASB: first, the NASB is less archaic in its wording. Second, its translators were more conservative theologically than the RSV translators. Third, because of the translators' desire to adhere as closely to the wording of the original, often this translation is stilted and wooden. Still, the NASB is the best *word-for-word* translation available today. From the original by interdenominational committee. Patterned after American Standard Version of 1901. Literalness, careful work and good notes make it one of the best study Bibles. Translated in 1971 by 58 scholars of the Lockman Foundation, from Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* and Nestle's Greek New Testament 23rd ed., which include the Alexandrian Family codices. Though academic in tone, it is said to be the most exact English translation available. A very good version.

### **New International Version (NIV)**

The NIV was published in 1978. It is more a phrase-for-phrase translation than a word-for-word translation, and the scholars were generally more conservative. It is perhaps the best phrase-for-phrase translation available today. However, its major flaw is in its simplicity of language. The editors wanted to make sure it was easy to read. In achieving this goal, they often sacrificed accuracy. Over 100 translators completed this work in 1978 which was composed from Kittel's, Nestle's and United Bible Society's texts, which include the Alexandrian Family codices. This is considered an "open" style translation. It is a good, easy to read version. From the original, by a large interdenominational but conservative committee. Well balanced - good for study, faster reading, or public reading. Based on reliable Greek text. Somewhat inconsistent in modernizing terminology. Pleasing, very readable format (few footnotes). Many feel it will become the most used Bible of the future, especially for evangelicals. NIV provides a good compromise with being faithful to the original form, but adjusting itself for clear understanding as necessary. It rewords idioms in the original languages to make them clear and also converts ancient measures. It is a very popular version.

### **The New King James Version (NKJV)**

130 translators, commissioned by Thomas Nelson Publishers, produced this version from the Byzantine family (*Textus Receptus*) in 1982. This is a revision of the King James version, updated to modern English with minor translation corrections and retention of traditional phraseology. This is a very good version.

### **Today's English Version (TEV) or Good News Bible (GNB)**

From the original. NT by one man, approved by committee. It is aimed particularly at those for whom English is a second language and those with little formal education. Achieves its goal and is very readable, good format. Translates dynamics well but not dependable for deeper study if used by itself. Can sometimes be offensive.

### **New English Bible (NEB)**

From the original by interdenominational British committee. Exciting literary style, very readable but with distinct British flavor and idiom. Excellent for non-churched. Departures from the original text and too much liberty in certain renderings make it undependable as a study Bible.

### **J.B. Phillips Translation (Phillips)**

From the original but definitely a paraphrase by J.B. Phillips, a competent Greek scholar. More than any other, makes the Bible "live" for educated or literary people, although in British expression. Does not read like a translation. Provokes new insight and understanding which should, however, be checked with more literal translations and by deeper study. Excellent for the educated, unchurched person as well as the thinking Christian.

### **Living Bible (LB)**

LB is a paraphrase done by one man, Kenneth Taylor, by paraphrasing the American Revised Version. It is not a translation as such, but is built on an existing version. Definitely not to be relied on for interpretations or study. It is very easy to read. Kenneth Taylor provides his own warning about the use of paraphrases in the preface. This is not a genuine translation, but is a type of phrase-by-phrase commentary that was originally intended to help the author's own children understand the scriptures. It is useful for inspiration and commentary, but for serious Bible study it should only be used in conjunction with a legitimate translation.

### **New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

A revision of the Revised Standard Version, it is generally literal and very accurate. The NRSV follows the same principle of translation as the RSV, though has now become more "gender-inclusive" in its approach. At times this is very helpful; at other times, it is misleading.

### **God's Word Translation (GW)**

Published in 1995 by the God's Word to the Nations Bible Society as a "closest natural equivalent" translation. Its layout is eye-appealing and helpful for outlining. It uses gender-neutral language. Avoids the use of theological terms, which are difficult to understand. Perhaps the best use of the dynamic equivalent format.

### **New Century Version (NCV)**

The NCV is designed to be easy to read. It includes glossaries explaining specific Biblical terminology. The NCV is linked strongly to the International Children's Version and was

translated by members of the church of Christ. Other versions done by this same group include the Version for the Deaf and the Easy-to-Read Version.

### **Contemporary English Version (CEV)**

The CEV is designed to be easily readable and understandable by modern readers. The language is contemporary English and it follows the dynamic equivalence method. This version was designed to be read aloud to listeners and appeals more to the ear than to the eye.

**The Message (M)** is a paraphrase done by Eugene Peterson. Unlike Kenneth Taylor of the Living Bible, Eugene Peterson knows Biblical languages and translated from them rather than working from another English version. This version is still very free and often misses the meaning of the text.

## **Four Methods of Translation**

### **Highly Literal**

Often these versions, while highly literal, fail to deal with the various shades of meanings within a word. They also fail to deal adequately with idioms, pun, plays on words, structures, acrostics, and alliteration. Because the source language (Greek or Hebrew) is unlike English, they may appear awkward, strain the English language to the breaking point, and be difficult to read. In some cases they make understanding almost impossible.

### **Modified Literal—Formal Equivalence**

This type of translation is best suited for scholarly work and serious study. It takes into account the form and meaning of the words. It uses more than one word if a word has different shades of meaning or if the receptor language requires it. These versions are often difficult to read for the young, because they are more interested in literally translating than in ease of understanding.

### **Idiomatic—Dynamic Equivalent**

This type of translation demands that the original languages be understood by the reader in the receptor languages. It strives for understandability, sometimes at the sacrifice of accuracy. It has a tendency to interpret rather than to translate. Dynamic Equivalent translations strive to give not only the information of the text but also its ideas and impact. It strives to respect both languages and to make whatever adjustments are necessary to say in the receptor language what has been said in the original. It asks what is the point, the meaning of the text. Occasionally to reach its goals, forms must be changed in the receptor language, which provides a free expression.

### **Unduly Free—Paraphrase**

These loose versions often give information not in the text. They substitute meanings and do not respect the form in the original. A paraphrase is not actually a translation; it is an interpretation. It is the meaning an author assigns to his understanding of the Bible.

Highly Literal	Modified Literal Formal Equivalence	Idiomatic Dynamic Equivalence	Unduly Free Paraphrase
Revised 1881 ASV 1901 Young's Literal Interlinears	KJV, NKJV RSV, NRSV NASB McCord	NEB, NIV TEV GW Contemporary EV New Living	Phillips Living Bible The Message

### How We Got The Bible (in Greek)

by Clint Brown

Objective: To concentrate on strengthening our faith in the reliability of the Bible by showing how it has been passed down to us through the centuries. God's providential hand can be seen in various areas through the transmission process. I hope to bring these points out in an effort to undergird our faith in the present text of our Bibles (specifically the New Testament text).

I. By around A.D. 100, God had given all the information to man that He was going to give (**Jude 3; Rev. 22:18-19; II Pet. 1:3**).

A. Immediately upon completion of these writings, copies were necessary (**cf. Col. 4:16; I Thess. 5:27**).

B. The only means of duplication until the fifteenth century (in A.D. 1454 Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press) was by manual handwriting.

C. It is by these handwritten copies, handed down through the centuries, that we have the text of the Bible today.

D. The "autographs" (the very documents that were penned by the inspired authors, Paul, Peter, John, Matthew, Luke, etc.) have not been preserved for us today. We have *copies* of the autographs. (We will discuss the importance of this fact later.)

II. The autographs were written in the "Koine" Greek language; the universal language of the Roman world in the first century. The earliest copies of these autographs are, therefore, in this original language.

III. We have noticed that Greek copies are the primary source of our Bibles. However, there are other sources worthy of consideration...

A. *Ancient Versions* – There was not only a need for copies of the Scriptures in the Greek language, but in various other languages as well. (E.g. Syriac, Coptic, Latin, etc.) The ancient *versions* serve as a valuable witness to the New Testament text.

- B. *Church "Fathers"* – Several writings by early Christians have survived the centuries. In personal letters and correspondences these Christians often quoted New Testament passages. These quotations are also an important contribution to our biblical text.
- C. *Ostraca* – Pieces of pottery used by the poor on which to write the Scriptures.

IV. With all these different sources, how well attested is the Bible? Do we have an adequate amount of these sources to know if we now have the original words of the apostles and prophets of the first century?

A. Let's first consider some other writings of ancient history and their witnesses...

1. The History of Thucydides (400 B.C.) – *8 manuscripts*
2. Tacitus, a Roman Historian (A.D. 100) – *2 manuscripts*
3. Gallic Wars – *10 manuscripts*
4. Homer's "Iliad" – *643 manuscripts*

B. How does the New Testament compare to these other books of antiquity.

1. There are over *5,000 Greek manuscripts* of the New Testament available to us today.
2. Over *2,200 Lectionaries* (Books used in worship that cite the Bible).
3. Ancient Versions – *9,000 manuscripts* (largely due to the advance of the Roman religion that spread the Latin Vulgate throughout Europe).
4. Church "Fathers" – *ca. 36,000 citations* – scholars say that all but four verses of the entire New Testament text could be reconstructed from the citations of the early Church Fathers alone!
5. *The New Testament is the best attested book of antiquity by far! - (Mt. 24:35)*

VII. We have mentioned that the only means of copying the Scriptures in the early church was by manual handwriting. By this means we have the many manuscript witnesses to the Bible. *But, probably the most significant date in the history of our Bible is A.D. 1454, when the German, Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press.*

A. This date should serve as a "benchmark" of sorts whenever studying the history of our Bible.

B. Remember two very important dates: These events brought a desire to have the Scriptures translated into the many extant languages. Until this time the Scriptures (at least in Europe) were primarily in Latin, a language that was not the common language of anyone.

1. *1454 – Printing press invented* – This ushered in a new era of duplication. All dates in Bible History should be viewed in relation to this date. Interestingly, the very first production from the printing press was The Bible (Jerome's Latin Vulgate) in 1456. [This brought a desire to compile a single Greek text]
2. *1517 – Protestant Reformation begins* – On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed 95 theses to the church door in Wittenburg, Germany challenging Eck to debate the errors of Catholicism, thus ushering in a new era in the history of Christendom.

VIII. With the invention of the printing press in A.D. 1454, men decided to compile a single Greek New Testament.

A. Since mass quantities of identical copies of the New Testament could be easily produced, it became necessary to have a single Greek text.



B. One could either (1) choose a single manuscript from the more than 5,000 extant manuscripts and make that the standard text, or (2) compare *all* of the available manuscript evidence and compile a single text. The latter option would surely be more accurate!

C. Needless to say the method of tedious manual handwriting was soon to pass away as the printing press made its way across the world.

IX. Let's look now at the history of the Printed Greek New Testament. [see Greenlee, *Scribes, Scrolls, and Scriptures*, pp. 44-47] [*This period covers roughly A.D. 1500-1633*]

A. **Ximenes** – The first Greek text to be printed was actually done by a Catholic Cardinal named Ximenes in 1514. However, Pope Leo X didn't give it the "go ahead" to be made available to the public until 1520. So while this was actually the first edition of the Gk. N.T. to be printed, it was not the first to be put on the market.

B. **Erasmus** – In somewhat of a "race" to be first, a Dutch scholar named Erasmus published his first edition in 1516 (notice that in the very next year the Reformation Movement began). Four more editions followed (1516-1527).

1. Erasmus acquired only about a *half dozen Gk. manuscripts* from a library in Switzerland. He made comparisons between these manuscripts to determine the final wording of his text. For most of the text Erasmus made use of but two rather inferior manuscripts, one of the Gospels, and one of the Acts and Epistles. Both primary manuscripts date about the twelfth century. He had only one manuscript of the Book of Revelation that did not contain the last six verses. So he simply translated these verse from the Latin *into* the Greek. Needless to say, these verses contain Greek words that are not found in *any* available Gk. witness!

c. Since **I John 5:7** (the "heavenly witnesses") was not in any extant Gk. manuscript at the time (even the ones unavailable to Erasmus) his text did not include the passage. Since this reading had been in the Latin Bible for centuries, this caused extreme criticism. Erasmus rashly promised to include the passage if it could be shown in any Greek witness. It is now known that a Franciscan Friar at Oxford actually prepared a Greek manuscript for the sole purpose of showing to Erasmus. Erasmus, unwillingly kept his promise and included the spurious reading in his 3rd edition of 1522. [However, for an interesting point that may falsify the "ready made manuscript" story, see *Metzger*, p. 291.] By a strange quirk of circumstances this 3rd edition became the most popular and was the only one that contained the spurious passage! [And from there it found its way into the KJV.] It is worthy of mention that when later editors began producing other Greek texts, they relied heavily upon Erasmus' 3rd and subsequent editions. His 4th and 5th editions contained numerous improvements in light of further textual evidences but never received the popularity that the 3rd enjoyed.

C. **Stephanus** – Another publisher named Robert Estienne, a.k.a. Stephanus, published four Greek editions from 1546-1551. As mentioned, he relied heavily upon Erasmus. Stephanus' 3rd edition of 1550 became the most popular and is another contributor to the KJV. Interestingly, it was Stephanus who supplied us with the verse divisions that we have today. Stephen Langston, Archbishop of Canterbury, supplied us with chapter divisions back in 1205.

D. **Beza** – Theodore Beza was the successor of John Calvin at Geneva. He is responsible for publishing 9 editions (plus one after his death) [1564-1611]. He relied heavily upon Stephanus'

1550 and 1551 editions (which, in turn, relied heavily on Erasmus). Beza's 1588-89 and 1598 editions were used extensively by the translators of the KJV. The *King James Version* of 1611 was ultimately based on these previous editions.

E. **Elzevir bros.** – Two brothers [actually an uncle and nephew team] of Holland produced seven editions of the Greek text from 1624-1678. Their first edition was drawn basically from Beza's 1565 edition. The most interesting fact concerning the Elzevir brothers is their 2nd edition of 1633 which contained a preface reading stating: "you have therefore the text now received by all, in which we give nothing altered or corrupted." This was written, of course, in Latin, and that phrase "Textus Receptus" (Received Text) became the catchword of this text.

Knowing that this text was originally *based on only a few, very late manuscripts* (compiled hastily by Erasmus) it was not a production in which was "nothing altered or corrupted." Some of the more notable "alterations" or "corruptions" being the translations of certain passages in Revelation from Latin *into* Greek. And the spurious reading of **I John 5:7-8**, etc. Having said all of that, we should not think for a moment that this text did not contain the whole Word of God that is able to teach us what to do to be saved and what to do to stay saved. We must remember, however, that due to more manuscript witnesses that have come to light in years subsequent to this time have shown that the readings of this text is faulty in many details.

F. With the completion of this period of history, there began a massive search for any N.T. witness that would shed further light on the Greek text. From the libraries of Great Britain, Europe, and the Middle East many manuscripts were retrieved that had since lain neglected in the past.

*[The following period will cover roughly A.D. 1648-1830]*

X. New Testament Witnesses and their contribution to textual studies.

Since handwritten copies have been made since the original Bible authors penned their inspired works, a sound assumption would be to consider the earliest manuscripts to be the most reliable, since they are nearer the autographs. Though this is not an absolute, "hard and fast" rule it serves as a basic starting point in determining correct readings. The closer a manuscript is to the first century, the less likely it is that errors have crept into the text. Likewise, the later the manuscript the greater the likelihood of variants, all things being equal (though they're usually not!).

1. **Codex Alexandrinus (A)** – Brought to light in 1627, this is an early 5th century copy of the Bible (with some mutilations). This MS is in the National Library of the British Museum. Many scholars consider it to be 3rd of importance only to the next two...

2. **Codex Vaticanus (B)** – A mid-4th century MS that had lain in the Vatican library for many years until it became known to textual scholars in 1475. However, no one was permitted to study it for about 400 years! From 1843-1866, leading scholars Constantin von Tischendorf and S.P. Tregelles were allowed to look at it for a few hours, but not allowed to copy the MS. It wasn't until 1889-1890 that a complete facsimile was made. Many consider this to be the greatest of Codex ("book-form" instead of earlier "scroll-form") witnesses to the N.T. It remains in Vatican City to this day.

3. **Codex Sinaiticus (a)** – This codex (also mid-4th century) was discovered by Tischendorf at St. Catharine's Monastery at the foot of Mt. Sinai on his third visit there in 1859. This very valuable witness to the N.T. is housed in the National British Library.

[The previous manuscripts are sometimes called "*The Big Three*"]

4. **Codex Ephraemi (C)** – Probably originated in Alexandria, Egypt. Came to light in ca. 1533 and currently resides in the National Library at Paris. This is a mid-4th century manuscript (ca. A.D. 345).

5. **Codex Bezae (D)** – The oldest known bilingual manuscript of the N.T. This is a 5th or 6th century MS written in Greek and Latin. It was found in 1562 by Theodore De Beza at St. Iranaeus Monastery, Lyons, France. Now in the Cambridge University Library where it has been since 1581. Though this MS was known during the time Beza compiled his Greek editions, he didn't make much use of it due to its seemingly spurious readings when compared to the other extant MSS of his day. However, if more light had been available to Beza, he would not have considered this MS to be as spurious as he first suspected.

6. **Codex Laudianus (E<sup>2</sup>)** – A late 6th or early 7th century MS. The earliest known MS containing Acts 8:37. Tischendorf edited it in 1870.

7. **Codex Regius (L)** – This is an 8th century codex containing the Gospels. Of interest is that it contains two endings to the Book of Mark. The first is a shorter ending at 16:8 that reads:

"But they [the women] reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this, Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation."

The second ending is the popular vv. 9-20 of most available MSS.

For a more thorough consideration of many N.T. MSS, see Geisler & Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, pp. 267-285.

XI. These discoveries gave rise to a whole new era in our Bible's history — an organized science known as "**Textual Criticism**" came into practice. Biblical Textual Criticism is the practice of determining the exact wording of the original text written by the apostles and prophets in the first century. Simply put, these critics consider all the available materials and, by applying principles, determine the original wording. This science has evolved over the past several hundred years with various scholars contributing different principles of procedure. We will not discuss in detail these sophisticated text-critical procedures, but will mention only a few of the predominant names throughout this period of history and some of their contributions. [*This discussion follows Geisler & Nix, pp. 386-393 and Greenlee, pp. 48-54.*]

A. **John Mill** – In 1707, John Mill produced what was basically a reprint of Stephenus' 1550 text. However, of interest is Mill's addition of some 30,000 variants from ca. 78 MSS. His edition had a "critical apparatus" containing notes from MSS (as well as other versions and quotations from church "fathers") not known prior to this time. This bulwark event provided future scholars with a broad basis of established textual evidence. Still, Mill was harshly criticized for "tampering" with the "Received Text."

B. **J. A. Bengel** – The German, Bengel published his edition in 1734, where he made a few changes in the TR. Fearful of castigation, he relegated these changes to the apparatus. He gave two helpful contributions to the science of textual criticism:

He arranged the increasingly available MSS into two groups according to similar variations in different witnesses. (We will notice that these "text-types" will be further elaborated upon by later scholars.) And he formulated a commonly approved canon of criticism that says, "*The difficult reading is to be preferred.*" This is so, Bengel believed, because a scribe would

be more likely to simplify a "difficult" reading in a text, rather than to make a reading more difficult.

**C. J. J. Wettstein** – This textual scholar published forty years of study in a 1751-52 edition that contained the first apparatus to designate the uncial MSS (the earlier, all-capital lettered copies) with capital Roman letters (A,B,C,D), and the minuscule MSS (the lower-case copies of later centuries) with Arabic numerals (e.g., 22, 128, 1058). He also provided a principle of criticism that says, "*manuscripts must be evaluated by their weight, not by their number.*"

**D. J. S. Semler** – In 1764 Semler reprinted Wettstein's work. Of interest is the fact that Semler followed Bengel's manuscript classification system, but carried it farther naming three classes: Alexandrian, Eastern, Western, reflecting somewhat the geographical region from where these manuscripts are believed to have originated.

**E. J. J. Griesbach** – One of the most important names in this period of history is that of Griesbach who laid the foundation for all subsequent work on the Greek N.T. He identified three "text-types" as Alexandrian, Western, and Byzantine. He is also responsible for developing about 15 canons of criticism. He first published his findings in 1775. It is commonly conceded that Griesbach's approach to textual criticism was characterized by caution and candor.

XII. The previous period evinced a definite effort to "replace" the Textus Receptus with a more reliable Greek text. However, the roots ran deep (as they still do today) with the adherents of the TR which slowed the acceptance of a revised text based on more reliable evidence. Hostility toward anyone who published a Greek text which in any way abandoned the TR ran high. This is seen in the fact that most editors relegated the preferred readings, when they differed from the TR, to the apparatus. Of course, those who dared to incorporate their new findings into the text itself were usually denounced and largely ignored. Indeed, the TR still held sway in public opinion.

**A. Karl Lachmann** – The first real break from the passionately accepted Textus Receptus came when the German, Karl Lachmann published his Greek New Testament in 1831. This was the first edition completely independent of the TR and based solely upon the application of textual criticism. A few earlier editors incorporated text critical variants into the TR, and were castigated (e.g., Edward Wells from 1709-1719). However, after Lachmann published a thorough explanation of the principles used in his work, this first "critical text" enjoyed a popularity its forerunners never did.

**B. Constantin von Tischendorf** – One of the most noted scholars in the science of textual criticism is Constantin von Tischendorf. He is responsible for making available to the world more than 40 manuscripts of the New Testament. His most important discovery was **Codex Sinaiticus (א)** which he found in the Monastery of St. Catherine at the foot of Mount Sinai in 1859. Tischendorf produced eight editions of the Greek Testament from 1841-1872 based on all previous discoveries. His 8th edition was most popular although it is believed that he relied too heavily on the newly discovered Sinaiticus. It is difficult to overstate Tischendorf's contributions to the world of textual criticism. History reveals that his efforts further strengthened the acceptance of the "critical text" in place of the TR.

**C. S. P. Tregelles** – Worthy of mention is the name of Samuel Prideaux Tregelles. While Lachmann and Tischendorf were converting the continent to the critical text, Tregelles was busy in England establishing the superiority of the "textual critical method." He published one edition in six parts from 1857-1872.

**D. B.F. Westcott & F.J.A. Hort** – By far the most popular edition of the so-called "critical text" was produced by a team of British scholars, Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort. They published 28 years of detailed scholarship in two monumental volumes in 1881. One volume contained the New Testament text; the other described, in minute detail, the methodology employed in their work. This work served to crystalize the superiority of the "critical text" because of their deliberate thoroughness and the tedium incorporated in their procedures.

Westcott and Hort were consulted heavily during the production of the *English Revised Version* of 1881 which was the cousin and forerunner to the later *American Standard Version* of 1901. This marked the first of the English versions to use the "critical text" as the basis for their translations. All subsequent English versions (except the New King James Version) are based on Greek texts other than the Textus Receptus. It is generally conceded that Westcott and Hort relied too heavily on "the Big Three" manuscripts (Codex Sinaiticus (א), Codex Vaticanus (B), and Codex Alexandrinus (A)), Vaticanus being relied on most. The critics of the textual critical method, though few, have argued against the Westcott & Hort tradition – and with notable success – because of their illicit dependence upon these few manuscripts. [See *Metzger*, pp. 135ff, pp. 290ff.]

**E. Eberhard Nestle** – Textual criticism into the twentieth century produced several editions of the Greek New Testament. Among the most popular are 27 editions of Eberhard Nestle's *Novum Testamentum Graece* printed from 1898-1993. This preserves the text of the Westcott & Hort era while taking into consideration newly discovered New Testament manuscripts and papyri of the twentieth century. **Kurt Aland** converged on the work in 1952 (21st ed.). Aland also produced four of his own editions called *The Greek New Testament* from 1966-1994. Both works are available through the United Bible Society.

XIII. The history of the transmission of the Greek New Testament through the past twenty centuries has resulted in primarily two prominent printed Greek Texts: The time-honored "Textus Receptus" and the "Critical Text" of the enlightenment era. While these two separate texts differ from each other in several places, we must remember that either text will teach us God's will for our lives. We can learn what to do to be saved, and how to stay saved through a study of either. Since no major doctrine is based upon a single passage of Scripture, the variants that are extant are of relatively minor importance.

A. As further proof of the obvious providential hand of God in the preservation of the sacred Scriptures, more recent discoveries of Greek witnesses have solidified the reliability of the Biblical text. Let's notice some of the recent papyri discoveries of the past 100 years.

**B. P52 – John Rylands Fragment** – the earliest known copy of any portion of the New Testament was discovered in 1920, but remained unnoticed until 1932. This fragment of John's gospel measures just 2 ½ by 3 ½ inches but constitutes a huge discovery. Dating ca. A.D. 117-38, this witness contains only portions of John 18:31-33 on one side, and 18:37-38 on the other, but forever falsifies the once popular liberal view that John's gospel wasn't penned until ca. A.D. 160.

**C. P45, P46, P47 – Chester Beatty Papyri** – These important witnesses date from ca. 200, and contain most of the New Testament. Their discovery was announced in 1931 by Frederic Kenyon, Director of the British Museum. The papyri were said to have come from jars taken out of an Egyptian graveyard and were acquired by Chester Beatty.

One manuscript (P45) contains portions of thirty leaves of the Gospels and Acts. Another (P46) contains the vast majority of the Pauline epistles. Interestingly, Hebrews is situated

immediately following Romans. The last (P47) is a significant portion of the Book of Revelation (9:10-17:2).

D. **P66, P72, P75 – Bodmer Papyri** – Published in 1956, these early documents contain, among many other pieces of literature (Biblical and non-Biblical), the earliest known copy of Jude, I Peter and II Peter (in P66) and the earliest known copy of Luke (in P75). These papyri date from ca. 175-225.

E. Altogether there are approximately **116 known papyri witnesses** to the New Testament, all testifying in unison that God has preserved for us his eternal word (Mt. 24:35)! We can be assured and reassured that we have available to us the sacred Scriptures that are able to make us wise unto salvation. May God help us to study them in view of eternity, and as the words that will judge us in the last day.

### Some Archaic and Misleading Words Found in the King James Version

*(Jack P. Lewis, Questions You Have Asked About Bible Translations, pp. 280-304)*

KJV	Modern Meaning	Location
Bruit	noise; sound; report	Jer. 10:22; Nahum 3:19
Concourse	assembly	Prov. 1:21; Acts 19:40
Leasing	lies; deceit	Ps. 4:2; 5:6
Straitened	restricted; distressed	2 Cor. 6:12
Bowels	affections	2 Cor. 6:12
Abjects	outcasts	Ps. 35:15
Daysman	arbitrator	Job 9:33
Simple	credulous; apt to believe on slight evidence	Prov. 14:15; 21:11; etc.
Noisome	evil	Ps. 91:3; Ezek. 14:15,21; Rev. 16:2
Savourest not	do not set their minds on	Mt. 16:23; Mk. 8:33
Emulations	envy or jealousy	Gal. 5:20
Astonied	astonished	Ezra 9:3,4; Job 18:20; Jer. 14:9
Wot	know	Gen. 21:26; 39:8; 44:15; Ex. 32:1,23
Approve	test; discern	Phil. 1:10
Upward	forward	Hag. 2:15,18
Study	be diligent	1 Thess. 4:11; 2 Tim. 2:15
Gainsayers	those who speak against	Tit. 1:9
Implead	indict	Acts 19:38
Reins	kidneys—used figuratively as the heart is now used	Job 19:27; Rev. 2:23
Convince	convict	Jn. 8:46; 1 Cor. 14:24; Tit. 1:9; Jas. 2:9; Jude 15
Suborned	instigated secretly	Acts 6:11
Honest	excellent	Rom. 12:17; 2 Cor. 8:21; 13:7; Phil. 4:8; 1 Pet. 2:12
Offend	to cause to stumble	1 Cor. 8:13; 2 Cor. 11:29; etc.

Do you to wit	make known to you	2 Cor. 8:1
Minished	diminished	Ex. 5:19; Ps. 107:39
Declined from	turned from	Deut. 17:11; 2 Chron. 34:2; Ps. 119:51, 157
Compass... round about	surround	Gen. 19:4; Job 16:13; Luke 19:43
Suffer	permit	Mt. 24:43; Luke 4:41; 22:51; Acts 14:16; 16:7; 19:30; etc.
Dayspring	daylight; dawn	Job 38:12; Luke 1:78
Espy	examine; search; spy	Gen. 42:27; Josh. 14:7; Jer. 48:19
Forward	to desire	2 Cor. 8:10
Outwent	go there ahead of	Mk. 6:33
Chief estates	leading men	Mk. 6:21
Descry	reconnoiter	Judges 1:23
Coasts	borders; area	Mt. 2:16; 16:13; etc.
Uppermost rooms	chief places	Mt. 23:6; Mk. 12:39; cf. 1 Chron. 4:41; Luke 14:7
By and by	immediately	Mt. 13:21; Mk. 6:25; Luke 17:7; 21:9
Furlong	1/8 mile or 220 yds.	Luke 24:13; Jn. 6:19; 11:18; Rev. 14:20; 21:16
Let	hindered	Rom. 1:13; 2 Th. 2:7
Fell not out by the way	did not quarrel	Gen. 45:24
Neesings	sneezings	Job 41:8
Quick	alive	Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:5
Hap	chance; fortune; luck	Ruth 2:3
Tired	attired; adorned	2 Kings 9:30
Crisping pin	pin for curling hair; handbag (RSV)	Isa. 3:22
Sup up	gulp down; consume	Hab. 1:9
Stomacher	clothing	Isa. 3:24
Caul	network cap	Isa. 3:18
Wimple	shawl; turban	Isa. 3:22
Galleries	locks of hair	Song 7:5
Mounts	mounds	Jer. 32:24; 33:4; Ezek. 17:17
Head stone or headstone	chief cornerstone	Ps. 118:22; Zech. 4:7
Cunning	skilled	Ex. 38:23; Song 7:1; Is. 3:3; 40:20
Passengers	passers-by	Prov. 9:15; Ezek. 39:11, 14-15
Imagine	plot evil	Ps. 62:3; 140:2; Prov. 12:20; etc.
Brigadine	coat of mail	Jer. 46:4; 51:3
Habergeon	coat of mail	2 Chron. 26:14; Neh. 4:16
Mad	insane	Acts 12:15; 26:24-25; 1 Cor. 14:23

Deceitfully	negligently	Jer. 48:10
Idol	worthless	Zech. 11:17
Swellings	conceit; arrogance	2 Cor. 12:20
Conversation	behavior	1 Pet. 2:12; 2 Pet. 2:7; 3:11; etc.
Ensample	example	Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:9; 2 Pet. 2:6
Conversant	to be with; live among	Josh. 8:35; 1 Sam. 25:15
Escheweth	avoids	Job 1:1,8; 2:3; 1 Pet. 3:11
Provoked	stimulated	2 Cor. 9:2
Charity	love	1 Corinthians 13; etc.
Fined	refined	Job 28:1; cf. Prov. 25:4
Shamefacedness	modesty	1 Tim. 2:9
Supple	cleanse	Ezek. 16:4
Evil communications	bad company	1 Cor. 15:33
Chambering	sexual excess	Rom. 13:13
Sottish	foolish	Jer. 4:22
Howbeit	nevertheless	1 Tim. 1:16; Heb. 3:16
Taber upon	beat upon	Nahum 2:7
Sick of love	lovesick; sick from love	Song 2:5; 5:8
Ensue	pursue	1 Pet. 3:11
Emulation	commendable desire of superiority	Rom. 11:14
Pitiful	full of pity	Lam. 4:10; Jas. 5:11; 1 Pet. 3:8
Communicate	share; give	Gal. 6:6; Phil. 4:14
Simplicity	liberality; generosity	Rom. 12:8
Meetest	the most suitable; fittest	2 Kings 10:3
Grudges	grumbles	Ps. 59:15
Occupiers	traders	Ezek. 27:27
Avouches	acknowledges	Deut. 26:17,18
Hast holpen	has helped	Ps. 86:17
Bewray	expose	Prov. 27:16; 29:24
Careful	anxious; concerned	Lk. 10:41; Phil. 4:6, 10
Be Attent	be attentive	2 Chron. 6:40; 7:15
Bethink thyself	have a change of heart	1 Kings 8:47; 2 Chron. 6:37
High day	much day left	Gen. 29:7
Advised	considered	2 Sam. 24:13; 1 Chron. 21:12
Thoroughly	completely	2 Cor. 11:6; 2 Tim. 3:17
Apt	able, skilled	2 Kings 24:16; 2 Tim. 2:24
Approve	put to the test; examine	Phil. 1:10
Know nothing by ourselves	know nothing against ourselves	1 Cor. 4:4
Unwittingly	without intent	Lev. 22:14; Josh. 20:3,5
An hungered	hungry	Mt. 25:35,37,44; Lk. 6:3
Ought	anything	Jn. 4:33; Acts 4:32; 24:19; 28:19
Hungerbitten	starved; famished	Job 18:12



Suffer	permit	Mt. 19:14; Acts 21:39; 2 Cor. 11:19-20; etc.
Purtenance	inner parts	Ex. 12:9
Bakemeats	baked goods	Gen. 40:17
Liquor	grape juice; wine	Ex. 22:29; Num. 6:3; Song 7:2
Flagons	pitchers with lids	2 Sam. 6:19; 1 Chron. 16:3
Seemly	suitable	Prov. 19:10; 26:1
Hasty fruit	first ripe fruit	Isa. 28:4
Pilled	peeled	Gen. 30:37,38
Brasen	bronze	Ex. 27:4; 35:16; etc.
Collops	bulges; slices	Job 15:27
Bunches of camel	camel humps	Is. 30:6
Bray them	grind them (in a mortar)	Prov. 27:22
Cracknels	cakes	1 Kings 14:3
Cab	about two quarts	2 Kings 6:25
Nitre	soda	Prov. 25:20; Jer. 2:22
Want	lack	Ps. 23:1
Sup	drink	Lk. 17:8; 1 Cor. 11:25; Rev. 3:20
Surfeiting	dissipation (moral looseness)	Lk. 21:34
Satiated	satisfied	Jer. 31:14, 25; 46:10
Broken meat	broken food, fragments	Mt. 15:37; Mk. 8:8
Sufficed	satisfied	Ruth 2:14,18
The press	the crowd	Mk. 2:4; 5:27, 30; Lk. 8:19; 19:3
Cumbrance	problems (NIV); the weight (RSV)	Deut. 1:12
Old cast clouts	old rags	Jer. 38:11-12
Cogitations	thoughts	Dan. 7:28
Mansion	dwelling place	Jn. 14:2
Purged	cleaned	Mt. 3:12; Lk. 3:17; 1 Cor. 5:7
Besom	broom	Is. 14:23
Quarternions	group of four	Acts 12:4
Translate	transfer	2 Sam. 3:10; Col. 1:13; Heb. 11:5
Carriage	luggage	Judg. 18:21; 1 Sam. 17:22; Is. 10:28; 46:1; Acts 21:15
Several	separate	2 Kings 15:5; 2 Chr. 26:21
Cote	pen	2 Chr. 32:28
Joined hard to	next door to	Acts 18:7
Strawed	scattered	Ex. 32:20; 2 Chr. 34:4; Mt. 21:8; 25:24, 26; Mk. 11:8
Gins	snares	Job 18:9; Ps. 140:5; 141:9; Isa. 8:14; Amos 3:5
Flags	water plants	Ex. 2:3
Middlemost	center	Ezek. 42:5,6
Casement	window	Prov. 7:6
Report	good reputation	3 John 12; etc.

Goodman of his house	head of his house	Mt. 24:43; Lk. 12:39
Addicted himself	devoted himself	1 Cor. 16:15
Rereward	rear; rearguard	Num. 10:25; Josh. 6:9,13; Is. 52:12
Much set by	highly esteemed	1 Sam. 18:30; 26:24
Lothe	loathe, be reluctant	Ex. 7:18; Ezek. 6:9; 20:43
Singular	special	Lev. 27:2
Unlades	unloads	Acts 21:3
Fuller	laundryman	2 Kgs 18:17; Is. 7:3; 36:2; Mk. 9:3
Spoil	rob	Mt. 12:29; Mk. 3:27; Col. 2:8
Vesture	clothing	Gen. 41:42; Dt. 22:12; Ps. 22:18; Mt. 27:35; Jn. 19:24
Hosen	trousers	Dan. 3:21
Road	raid	1 Sam. 27:10
Malefactors	criminals	Lk. 23:32-33, 39; Jn. 18:30
Concision	mutilators of the flesh	Phil. 3:2
Earing time	plowing time	Ex. 34:21; cf. Gen. 45:6
Fetch a compass	go around	Acts 28:13
Nave	hub of a vehicle	1 Kings 7:33
Scrip	bag	1 Sam. 17:40; Mt. 10:10; Mk. 6:8
Haled	dragged	Lk. 12:58; Acts 8:3
Untoward	corrupted, perverse	Acts 2:40

### Readings that Provide Misinformation

- 90 Acts 12:3. The use of the word *Easter* to translate **to; pavzca** rather than “Passover.” Although Passover and Easter occur at the same time of year, the use of a pagan holiday to refer to a Jewish event is unfortunate and misleading.
- 91 1 Corinthians 14 uses the phrase “*unknown tongue*” six times. The use of the italicized word “unknown” has led many to believe that this gift was an ecstatic utterance rather than a foreign language of the day (cf. Acts 2:4, 11). Translators inserted this word into the text, thinking they would bring about understanding, but it led to a false doctrine.
- 92 The KJV incorrectly translates the word “hades” (%!dhj) ten times in the New Testament as “hell.” Hades is the netherworld where the departed spirits of dead people go. The word itself means “unseen” and should not be confused with (**ge<enna**), which properly refers to hell, the eternal lake of fire. Acts 2:27 in the KJV has Jesus in hell rather than in Hades, the unseen realm. If the reading “hell” were to stand in Acts 2:27, this would contradict Jesus’ own statement in Luke 23:43 where He said He would be in Paradise. While “hell” cannot include “Paradise,” the unseen place “Hades” can and does include both a place of comfort and a place of torment.
- 93 The Anglican translators of the KJV did not translate the Greek terms **bapti<zw** or **ba<ptisma**. Instead, they transliterated the words into “baptize” and “baptism.”

These words, of course, refer specifically to immersing and immersion in water. By transliterating these words rather than translating them, the translators of the KJV avoided the controversy over sprinkling. The KJV translators opened the door for misunderstanding and disobedience to the gospel. It is an unfortunate thing that some modern versions have joined in the deception. It is interesting to note that the *Living Oracles* of Alexander Campbell and Hugo McCord's *The Everlasting Gospel* translate these words rather than transliterate them.

## **FACTS on the TEXTUS RECEPTUS and the KING JAMES VERSION**

**Allan A. MacRae and Robert C. Newman**

### **How did the term "textus receptus" originate?**

It originated through a highly exaggerated statement -- actually a publisher's blurb -- in the preface to the second edition of the Greek New Testament that was published in Holland in 1633 by the Elzevir brothers. In this Latin preface they called their book "the text which is now received by all, in which we give nothing changed or corrupted." This is how this Latin term *textus receptus* (text received) came to be applied to a particular text of the Greek New Testament. On the European continent, aside from Great Britain, the first Elzevir edition (pub. 1624) was for a long time the standard edition of the Greek New Testament.

### **Did the King James translators use this "textus receptus" as the basis for their translation?**

No. Even the first Elzevir edition was not published until 13 years after the date of the KJV.

### **What was the Greek text on which the KJV New Testament was based?**

It was based on the third edition of the Greek New Testament issued by the Parisian publisher Stephanus (Latinized form of Estienne) in 1550.

### **Was the text of Stephanus on which the King James Version was based identical with the later "textus receptus"?**

No. The two differed in 287 places.

### **How many Greek manuscripts agree exactly with the edition published by Stephanus, and how many agree exactly with the edition published by Elzevir?**

There is **no** Greek manuscript that agrees exactly with either of these. Both of them are conflate texts.

### **Were the scholars who prepared the King James Version convinced that their text was absolutely correct?**

No. They recognized the possibility of copyists' errors, and showed this by making marginal notes to variant readings at 13 places. For instance, in Luke 17:36 their marginal note reads: "This 36th verse is wanting in most of the Greek copies." In Acts 25:6, where their text reads: "When he had tarried among them more than ten days," they inserted the following marginal note: "Or, as some copies read, *no more than eight or ten days.*"

### **What was the source of most of the readings found both in the edition of Stephanus and in that of Elzevir?**

Most of the readings in both of these follow the edition of the Greek New Testament prepared by Erasmus, the great enemy of Luther, and published in 1516, the year before the Reformation began.

**How many manuscripts agree exactly with Erasmus' edition of the Greek New Testament?**

There is no Greek manuscript that agrees exactly with it. Erasmus made it by combining the readings of several manuscripts, none of them earlier than the tenth century A.D., and most of them still later. In some parts of the New Testament he had no manuscript at all, but simply retranslated from the Latin Bible.

**To whom was the Greek New Testament prepared by Erasmus dedicated?**

It was dedicated to Pope Leo X, the pope who later condemned Luther and the Reformation. It is believed that this pope gave Erasmus' publisher the exclusive right to publish the Greek New Testament for a period of time.

**Have better manuscripts been discovered than those on which the textus receptus was based?**

During the three and one-half centuries since the King James Version was made dozens of manuscripts have been found that were copied many centuries earlier than any manuscript used by Erasmus. The manuscripts he used were copies of copies of copies of copies of copies. When material is copied a number of times by hand, extra words and phrases generally find their way into the text in the course of copying and occasionally the eye of a copyist may jump from one word of a phrase to a similar one, and thus omit something or perhaps copy it twice.

**Does this mean that the textus receptus is a harmful text?**

The additions in the textus receptus do not contain any idea that is not taught elsewhere in the New Testament in parts that agree with the earlier manuscripts. The differences consist mainly of repetition of ideas already contained elsewhere in the Scripture.

**Then why bother to hunt for early manuscripts? Why not simply follow the textus receptus?**

God inspired the manuscripts that came from the hands of the original writers. It is impossible to copy a book of any length without making some mistakes. In the case of the New Testament we have more evidence for determining the text of the original writers than for any other book from ancient times. While there is rarely anything harmful in the later manuscripts, it is desirable, if we truly wish to know God's Word, to base our text, as far as possible, on early manuscripts.

**What is meant by the Byzantine Text?**

Shortly before A.D. 400 the Roman empire was divided into two parts, the western Roman empire and the eastern or Byzantine empire. Within a century after this division the western empire came to an end, and western Europe sank into a state of near barbarism. The Byzantine empire continued, though often in a greatly weakened state, until A.D. 1453.

For about a thousand years, the Greek language was completely unknown in western Europe, but remained the official language of the Byzantine empire. During this time both portions of the former Roman empire contained many monasteries in which the monks were required to do a certain amount of work each day. One way to fulfill this work requirement was to copy manuscripts. In the western monasteries Latin manuscripts, including the Latin Bible, were copied and recopied by the monks. In the Byzantine monasteries Greek manuscripts were copied, including copies of the Greek Bible. Some of these scribes were greatly interested in what they were copying, but for others the copying was merely an assigned task. In the course of copying, little mistakes invariably come in, so that no two manuscripts of the Latin Bible or of the Greek Bible are exactly the same. During this period, as visitors passed from one Byzantine monastery to another, and manuscripts were interchanged from time to time, the tendency naturally developed to bring the manuscripts into harmony with one another. Where early manuscripts differed slightly there was a tendency to combine the readings. Thus there developed a text which

is found, with many variations, in the manuscripts copied in the Byzantine empire in the later middle ages.

**Sometimes a whole verse is said to be missing from the best manuscripts. Would not such an omission be obvious because of the verse number being skipped?**

Our system of numbering verses is not found in Greek manuscripts. The first publication in which the New Testament was divided into numbered verses was the 4th edition by Stephanus, which he published in Geneva in 1551, after fleeing from Paris.

**Some say that the last twelve verses of the Gospel of Mark were not part of the original. What do you think of this?**

There is a strong possibility that the end of the Gospel of Mark was lost from certain important manuscripts at a very early time. Some early manuscripts stop abruptly at the end of v.8 of the last chapter. Yet there was doubtless an ending, for it is extremely unlikely that the Gospel of Mark stopped with the words "and they were afraid." It may have been the short ending that is found in some ancient manuscripts, or it may have been the longer ending that occurs in the later manuscripts. Practically everything in this longer ending is also clearly stated in the Gospel of Luke. The question whether it was also stated at the end of the original Gospel of Mark is interesting, but not of any great importance for Christian life or thought. There is only one statement of importance in Mark that is not in Luke: "They shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them." Whether this was part of the original Gospel of Mark or not, it is certainly true that God can protect His people in this way whenever He chooses to do so, as is shown by the experience of Paul described in Acts 28:3-6.

**Do early manuscripts omit the word "Christ" at many places where it is included in the *textus receptus* and thereby show themselves to be unchristian?**

The Gospels always speak of our Lord as Jesus. The book of Acts uses the word "Jesus" alone 35 times, "Jesus Christ" 10 times, and "the Lord Jesus Christ" 6 times in the KJV. It would be quite erroneous to conclude from this that the author of Acts does not like the word "Christ." Different writers show different preferences in this regard. As scribes copied manuscripts in century after century it was easy for a scribe unintentionally to write a longer form even where a shorter one occurred, so the word Christ occurs more frequently in later manuscripts than in earlier ones. Yet even in the latest manuscripts we find that Jesus is often called by shorter terms. The use of longer phrases in referring to the Lord does not necessarily show greater piety or greater loyalty to Christ.

**It is sometimes said that since God gave an inerrant Bible in the original we can be sure that He would cause that it be preserved without error. What do you think of this statement?**

This is the sort of argument that rests on human ideas and not on God's revelation. One might as well say that if God gave His Son to die for the sins of all who will believe on His Name we can then be sure that every person who has lived since that time would be fully informed about Him. We know that this is not true. Millions of people have died without ever hearing about Christ. There are people in this country who have attended church faithfully all their lives, but have only heard the social Gospel and have never been told how they could be saved through Christ. We know that whatever God does is best, but we do not have the wisdom to say that He must have done things in a certain way.

God has caused that the books of the Bible should be marvelously preserved. We can get extremely near to the precise text as it came from the hands of the authors, but there are many minor points on which we cannot be sure. None of these points affect any important fact of Christian doctrine or life.

God could have caused His Word to have been written on tables of stone and preserved in a room kept at exactly the same temperature, protected from any change, like the authoritative standards

kept by the U.S. government. He did not choose to do so. This is a simple fact. No two manuscripts of the New Testament exactly agree. No manuscript agrees exactly with the *textus receptus*.

There is more material available to see how the Bible has been translated and to try to get near to the exact words of the original authors than of any other book from ancient times. We can be very sure that we are very near to the original text. We cannot say that we have it exactly. Maybe some of us would have done it differently, but this is the way God did it.

**What about such statements as: "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled," (Matt. 5:18) and "the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35)?**

Jesus did not say that not a jot or tittle would pass from the law till every tiniest part had been copied perfectly. What He said was that no tiny part of the meaning of the Word of God as given to the original writers would fail to be fulfilled in exactly the way that God intended. Man cannot break what God has ordained. These verses refer to fulfillment, not to precise copying.

**Should a denomination or association of churches oppose a version solely on the ground that it is not based on the *textus receptus*?**

The important thing about a version is its accuracy in translating the text of the Bible. The KJV was greatly used of God for 300 years until much of its language became quite archaic, as the English language changed.

It is foolish to ask young people to learn the language of 300 years ago in order to read the Bible. Even mature Christians do not know what is meant by such phrases as "we do you to wit" (2 Cor. 8:1). and "thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing" (Ps. 5:6). God's people need an accurate translation in the language of today. This is extremely vital. It is wrong to ask Christians to oppose a translation because it tries to follow the ancient manuscripts rather than a text based largely on Erasmus' edition. To do so is to make an idol of the *textus receptus*. or of the King James Version. God does not want His people to be idolaters!\*

**I have heard that the King James Version and the *textus receptus* are based on the majority of Greek NT manuscripts. Is this true?**

Yes and no. As Dr. MacRae has pointed out, the King James Version does not exactly follow the majority of Greek NT manuscripts. For instance, I John 5:7. found in the KJV and TR, occurs in only four (out of nearly 5000) Greek manuscripts. The reading "book of life" in Rev. 22:19 is found in no Greek manuscript.

**Even though no Greek manuscript is exactly like the *Textus Receptus* or Erasmus' Greek NT, isn't it true that 95% of the known manuscripts of the Greek NT are closer to these than to the Greek text behind most modern English translations?**

Yes. But 95% of the known Greek NT manuscripts were copied after A.D. 700, more than six centuries after the NT was written.

**What is the situation among early NT manuscripts then?**

Among manuscripts copied before A.D. 400 (three centuries after the NT was completed) there are none of the *Textus Receptus* type (Byzantine family), even though we have over seventy manuscripts from this period. From A.D. 400 to 700, Byzantine manuscripts are still in the minority.

**What sort of evidence is there that the Byzantine family is not the oldest text?**

We have three basic sources of information about the text of the NT: (1) Greek NT manuscripts,

(2) quotations of the NT by early Christian writers, and (3) ancient translations of the NT into other languages. I have already mentioned the Greek NT manuscript situation above.

### **What about quotations by early Christian writers?**

Many Christians quote from the NT in the letters, sermons and commentaries preserved from the early centuries of our era. Although we see about 100 writers using the so-called Alexandrian, Western and Caesarean text families in quotations from before A.D. 400, the first person known to have used the Byzantine type of text is John Chrysostom, who died in A.D. 407.

### **What about early translations?**

We have translations of the NT made into Latin, Syriac and Coptic (Egyptian) by A.D. 300. None of these use a Byzantine sort of text but rather the Alexandrian or Western text. The earliest Byzantine type translation is the Syriac Peshitta, but there is no evidence for its existence before the 5th century A.D.

### **But if the Byzantine family and the Textus Receptus are not the original text of Scripture, doesn't this mean that the Church has been without the true text for nearly 1400 years?**

Again, yes and no. If you mean that there has been uncertainty on the exact wording of Scripture, this has been so ever since the autographs were lost, probably in the second century. This is why we speak of the inerrancy of Scripture in the autographs. But even those who believe the Textus Receptus is correct must choose among the many printed editions of the Greek NT or among the thousands of late Greek manuscripts, so they cannot be sure of the exact wording either. But if you mean uncertainty regarding doctrine, none of the teachings of Scripture rest on only one passage (unless you are a snake-handler!). In fact, none of the various families of text: Alexandrian, Western, Caesarean or Byzantine, give us a Bible which teaches different doctrines from the others.\*\*

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\*The preceding material was compiled by the late Allan A. MacRae, President and Professor of Old Testament at Biblical Theological Seminary, Hatfield, PA. Copyright 1975.

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## **Brief History of Textual Criticism**

The method of textual criticism which has been generally practised by editors of classical Greek and Latin texts involves two main processes, recension and emendation. Recension is the selection, after examination of all available material, of the most trustworthy evidence on which to base a text. Emendation is the attempt to eliminate the errors which are found even in the best manuscripts.

The application of critical methods in the editing of classical texts was developed principally by three German scholars, Friedrich Wolf (1759-1824), one of the founders of classical philology, Immanuel Bekker (1785-1871), and Karl Lachmann (1793-1851). Bekker devoted his long life to the preparation of critical editions of Greek texts. Bekker collated some 400 manuscripts, grouped existing manuscripts of an author into families where one was derived from another, and published sixty volumes of improved editions of Greek authors. Lachmann went further than Bekker, showing how, by comparison of

manuscripts, it is possible to draw inferences as to their lost ancestors or archetypes, their condition, and even their pagination.

The basic principle which underlies the process of constructing a stemma, or family tree, of manuscripts is that, *apart from accident, identity of reading implies identity of origin*. Often, however, difficulties hinder the construction of a stemma of manuscripts. A disturbing element enters when mixture has occurred, that is, when a copyist has had two or more manuscripts before him and has followed sometimes one, sometimes the other; or, as sometimes happened, when a scribe copied a manuscript from one exemplar and corrected it against another. To the extent that manuscripts have a "mixed" ancestry, the genealogical relations among them become progressively more complex and obscure to the investigator. (Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, pp. 156-159.)

## **Principles of Textual Criticism**

### **Canons of Tischendorf**

Lobegott Friedrich Constantin von Tischendorf (1815-1874)

The text is to be sought from the most ancient evidence, meaning especially the oldest Greek manuscripts; (2) a reading peculiar to a single document is to be considered suspect; (3) an obvious scribal error is to be rejected even though well supported in the manuscripts; (4) in parallel passages the tendency of copyists would be to make the readings agree, and therefore, in such passages, testimonies are to be preferred which are not in precise accordance; (5) that reading is to be preferred which could have given occasion to the others, or which appears to comprise the elements of the others; and (6) that reading is to be preferred which accords with NT Greek or with the style of the individual writer.

(Summarized by Finegan, *Encountering NT Manuscripts*, p. 63)

### **Metzger Criteria**

- I. EXTERNAL EVIDENCE, involving considerations bearing upon:
  1. The date of the witness or, rather, of the type of text.
  2. The geographical distribution of the witnesses that agree in supporting a variant.
  3. The genealogical relationship of texts and families of witnesses: Witnesses are weighed rather than counted.
- II. INTERNAL EVIDENCE, involving two kinds of probabilities:
  - i. Transcriptional Probabilities depend upon considerations of palaeographical details and the habits of scribes. Thus:
    1. In general the more difficult reading is to be preferred.
    2. In general the shorter reading is to be preferred.
    3. That reading is to be preferred which stands in verbal dissidence with the other.
  - ii. Intrinsic Probabilities depend upon considerations of what the author was more likely to have written, taking into account:
    1. the style and vocabulary of the author throughout the book,



2. the immediate context,
3. harmony with the usage of the author elsewhere, and, in the Gospels,
4. the Aramaic background of the teaching of Jesus,
5. the priority of the Gospel according to Mark, and
6. the influence of the Christian community upon the formulation and transmission of the passage in question.

Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, pp. 209-210.

### **Twelve Basic Rules of Aland/Aland**

1. Only one reading can be original, however many variant readings there may be.
2. Only the readings which best satisfies the requirements of both external and internal criteria can be original.
3. Criticism of the text must always begin from the evidence of the manuscript tradition and only afterward turn to a consideration of internal criteria.
4. Internal criteria (the context of the passage, its style and vocabulary, the theological environment of the author, etc.) can never be the sole basis for a critical decision, especially when they stand in opposition to the external evidence.
5. The primary authority for a critical textual decision lies with the Greek manuscript tradition, with the version and Fathers serving no more than a supplementary and corroborative function, particularly in passages where their underlying Greek text cannot be reconstructed with absolute certainty.
6. Furthermore, manuscripts should be weighed, not counted, and the peculiar traits of each manuscript should be duly considered. However important the early papyri, or a particular uncial, or a minuscule may be, there is no single manuscript or group of manuscripts that can be followed mechanically, even though certain combinations of witnesses may deserve a greater degree of confidence than others. Rather, decisions in textual criticism must be worked out afresh, passage by passage (the local principle).
7. The principle that the original reading may be found in any single manuscript or version when it stands alone or nearly alone is only a theoretical possibility. Any form of eclecticism which accepts this principle will hardly succeed in establishing the original text of the New Testament; it will only confirm the view of the text which it presupposes.
8. The reconstruction of a stemma of readings for each variant (the genealogical principle) is an extremely important device, because the reading which can most easily explain the derivation of the other forms is itself most likely the original.
9. Variants must never be treated in isolation, but always considered in the context of the tradition. Otherwise there is too great a danger of reconstructing a "test tube text" which never existed at any time or place.
10. There is truth in the maxim: *lectio difficilior lectio potior* ("the more difficult reading is the more probable reading"). But this principle must not be taken too mechanically, with the most difficult reading (*lectio difficilima*) adopted as original simply because of its degree of difficulty.

11. The venerable maxim *lectio brevior lectio potior* ("the shorter reading is the more probable reading") is certainly right in many instances. But here again the principle cannot be applied mechanically.
12. A constantly maintained familiarity with New Testament manuscripts themselves is the best training for textual criticism. In textual criticism the pure theoretician has often done more harm than good.

Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, pp. 275-276.

### The Canon of the New Testament

Date	Event
c. 45-95 A.D.	Books of the New Testament written
2nd century	Codex (modern form factor) of books developed
c. 110 A.D.	Papias refers to the Gospels of Mark & Matthew
c. 125 A.D.	Earliest extant fragment of any part of the New Testament copied (John 18:38) p52
c. 140 A.D.	Gnostic Marcion attempts first canonical list
144 A.D.	Marcion excommunicated
c. 150 A.D.	Justin Martyr refers to Christians gathering together and "the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as time permits"
c. 160 A.D.	Tatian compiles a "harmony" of the four gospels, called the "Diatessaron"
c. 180 A.D.	Christian prisoners in Scilla, Libya, refer to "the books, and letters of a just man, one Paul" as their defense
c. 180 A.D.	Ireneus confirms four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John
c. 200 A.D.	Muratorian Canon compiled
324 A.D.	Constantine becomes undisputed emperor of the Roman Empire
325 A.D.	Council of Nicea; Eusebius writes his Church History
c. 332 A.D.	Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea is ordered by Constantine to create 50 volumes "on prepared parchment" of the Holy Scriptures
325 - 350 A.D.	Codex Vaticanus created; contains the complete New Testament as we have it today
c. 350 A.D.	Codex Sinaiticus (now in the British Museum) written; contains most of modern day New Testament, plus the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Letter of Barnabas
367 A.D.	Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, writes his Paschal letter, listing the modern day New Testament canon
393 A.D.	Council of Hippo affirms modern day canon
397 A.D.	Council of Carthage affirms modern day canon
c. 400 A.D.	Jerome (A.D. 346-420) translates Bible into common Latin (the "Vulgate"), using the list of Athanasius

## The Early Church Fathers

While (as we shall see) it was the fourth century church fathers who created the official New Testament canon (Eusebius, Athanasius, Jerome, etc.), it was the Early Church Fathers of the first, second, and third centuries that laid the groundwork for the fourth century canon. By reading the works of the early (i.e. pre-Nicene Council) fathers, one can get a pretty good picture of which works they considered authoritative by the number of times they quoted from them. And, conversely, which works they did not consider authoritative, because they either did not reference them, or specifically called them into question (Gospel of Truth, Gospel of Thomas, etc.)

It has been estimated by several Biblical scholars (Bruce Metzger and Sir David Dalrymple among them) that the whole New Testament can be reconstructed from references from the Early Church Fathers in the second and third centuries. The following astonishing table, from Josh McDowell's "Evidence That Demands a Verdict" (p. 52), shows 36,289 New Testament references from just seven Early Church Fathers:

Writer	Gospels	Acts	Pauline Epistles	General Epistles	Revelation	Total
Justin Martyr	268	10	43	6	3	330
Irenaeus	1,038	194	499	23	65	1,819
Clement Alex.	1,017	44	1,127	207	11	2,406
Origen	9,231	349	7,778	399	165	17,922
Tertullian	3,822	502	2,609	120	205	7,258
Hippolytus	734	42	387	27	188	1,378
Eusebius	3,258	211	1,592	88	27	5,176
Totals	19,368	1,352	14,035	870	664	36,289

Another valuable clue passed down from the early church was which works were read in worship services. For example, Justin Martyr (c. 150 A.D.) refers to the reading of the "memoirs of the Apostles" (assumedly, the Gospels) during Sunday worship services:

"And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things."  
(Justin Martyr, "First Apology", Chapter 67)

## Forming The Canon

### *Marcion - the first attempt at a canon*

While the books that now comprise the New Testament were in widespread use from the first century, it actually took quite a while to turn them into an official "canon". The first attempt at creating an official list of books for inclusion in the New Testament was by a gnostic shipowner named Marcion (c. 85 - c. 160 A.D.). As a gnostic, Marcion believed that there were two Gods in

the universe - the God depicted in the Old Testament, and the God represented by Jesus in the New Testament. To accommodate these (and other) gnostic beliefs, Marcion created a list of books that he considered authoritative, based on his theological views. These included a condensed version of the Gospel of Luke (lacking the Nativity and Resurrection scenes), and 10 of Paul's letters. While the gnostic theology of Marcion was roundly condemned by the Early Church Fathers, his list was the first known attempt at defining a New Testament canon, and it prodded the Early Church Fathers to give greater consideration to those books that should be considered authoritative.

***Muratorian Canon (c. 200 A.D.)***

One of the first known attempts by the Early Church Fathers to define a canon (and to refute the list postulated by Marcion) was in a fragmentary list (85 lines) dated to c. 200 A.D., named (after its 18th century discoverer, Lodovico Muratori) the Muratorian Canon. The Muratorian Canon is remarkably similar to our modern day New Testament, lacking only Philemon, Hebrews, James, I Peter, II Peter, and III John. The Muratorian Canon also adds (curiously) the Old Testament Apocryphal book "Wisdom of Solomon", as well as the "Revelation of Peter" (see chapter entitled "Books that almost made the New Testament").

Marcion (c.140)	Irenaeus (c. 180)	Muratorian Canon (c. 200)	Eusebius (c. 325)	Athanasius (367 A.D.)
	Matthew	(Matthew)	Matthew	Matthew
	Mark	(Mark)	Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke	Luke	Luke	Luke
	John	John	John	John
	Acts	Acts	Acts	Acts
Romans	Romans	Romans	Romans	Romans
I Cor.	I Cor.	I Cor.	I Cor.	I Cor.
II Cor.	II Cor.	II Cor.	II Cor.	II Cor.
Galatians	Galatians	Galatians	Galatians	Galatians
Ephesians (Laodiceans)	Ephesians	Ephesians	Ephesians	Ephesians
Philippians	Philippians	Philippians	Philippians	Philippians
Colossians	Colossians	Colossians	Colossians	Colossians
I Thess.	I Thess.	I Thess.	I Thess.	I Thess.
II Thess.	II Thess.	II Thess.	II Thess.	II Thess.
	I Timothy	I Timothy	I Timothy	I Timothy
	II Timothy	II Timothy	II Timothy	II Timothy
	Titus	Titus	Titus	Titus
Philemon			Philemon [?]	Philemon
			Hebrews [?]	Hebrews
	James [?]		James [?]	James
	I Peter		I Peter	I Peter
			II Peter [?]	II Peter
	I John	I John	I John	I John
		II John	II John [?]	II John
			III John [?]	III John
		Jude	Jude [?]	Jude
	Revelation of John	Revelation of John	Revelation of John [?]	Revelation of John

	Shepherd of Hermas	Wisdom of Solomon (Apocrypha)		
		Revelation of Peter		

Roy W. Hoover, "How the Books of the New Testament Were Chosen," (*Bible Review*, April 1993).

### ***Eusebius (c. 260 - c. 340 A.D.) and his Ecclesiastical History***

Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, at the request of Emperor Constantine, wrote a church history around the time of the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.). In the preface, he identifies that this is the first Church history ever attempted:

"It is my purpose to write an account of the successions of the holy apostles, as well as of the times which have elapsed from the days of our Savior to our own; and to relate the many important events which are said to have occurred in the history of the Church; and to mention those who have governed and presided over the Church in the most prominent parishes, and those who in each generation have proclaimed the divine word either orally or in writing...This work seems to me of especial importance because I know of no ecclesiastical writer who has devoted himself to this subject; and I hope that it will appear most useful to those who are fond of historical research." (Eusebius, Book 1, Chapter 1)

In the course of his 400 page work, Eusebius grants the reader several glimpses as to which writings of the New Testament are "accepted", "disputed", and "rejected" at the time of the Council of Nicea. (Note that Eusebius lists the Revelation of John under both the "accepted" and "rejected" columns!)

Eusebius also includes a final category, reserved for the writings of heretics - "absurd and impious". It is important to note that Eusebius goes to great pains to draw a distinction between "rejected" books that "although not canonical but disputed, are yet at the same time known to most ecclesiastical writers" (Shepherd of Hermas, Epistle of Barnabas, Revelation of Peter), and heretical books in the "absurd and impious" category (Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Peter, etc.)

### **Accepted**

"SINCE we are dealing with this subject it is proper to sum up the writings of the New Testament which have been already mentioned. First then must be put the holy quaternion of the Gospels; following them the Acts of the Apostles. After this must be reckoned the epistles of Paul; next in order the extant former epistle of John, and likewise the epistle of Peter, must be maintained. After them is to be placed, if it really seem proper, the Apocalypse of John, concerning which we shall give the different opinions at the proper time. These then belong among the accepted writings." (Eusebius, Book 3, Chapter 25)

### **Disputed/Rejected**

"But of the writings of John, not only his Gospel, but also the former of his epistles, has been accepted without dispute both now and in ancient times. But the other two are disputed. In regard to the Apocalypse, the opinions of most men are still divided. But at the proper time this question likewise shall be decided from the testimony of the ancients." (Eusebius, Book 3, Chapter 24)

"Among the disputed writings, which are nevertheless recognized by many, are extant the so-called epistle of James and that of Jude, also the second epistle of Peter, and those that are called

the second and third of John, whether they belong to the evangelist or to another person of the same name. Among the rejected writings must be reckoned also the Acts of Paul, and the so-called Shepherd, and the Apocalypse of Peter, and in addition to these the extant epistle of Barnabas, and the so-called Teachings of the Apostles [the Didache]; and besides, as I said, the Apocalypse of John, if it seem proper, which some, as I said, reject, but which others class with the accepted books. And among these some have placed also the Gospel according to the Hebrews, with which those of the Hebrews that have accepted Christ are especially delighted. And all these may be reckoned among the disputed books. But we have nevertheless felt compelled to give a catalogue of these also, distinguishing those works which according to ecclesiastical tradition are true and genuine and commonly accepted, from those others which, although not canonical but disputed, are yet at the same time known to most ecclesiastical writers." (Eusebius, Book 3, Chapter 25)

"These things are recorded in regard to James, who is said to be the author of the first of the so-called catholic epistles. But it is to be observed that it is disputed; at least, not many of the ancients have mentioned it, as is the case likewise with the epistle that bears the name of Jude, which is also one of the seven so-called catholic epistles. Nevertheless we know that these also, with the rest, have been read publicly in very many churches." (Eusebius, Book 2, Chapter 23)

### **Absurd and Impious**

"...we have felt compelled to give this catalogue in order that we might be able to know both these works and those that are cited by the heretics under the name of the apostles, including, for instance, such books as the Gospels of Peter, of Thomas, of Matthias, or of any others besides them, and the Acts of Andrew and John and the other apostles, which no one belonging to the succession of ecclesiastical writers has deemed worthy of mention in his writings. And further, the character of the style is at variance with apostolic usage, and both the thoughts and the purpose of the things that are related in them are so completely out of accord with true orthodoxy that they clearly show themselves to be the fictions of heretics. Wherefore they are not to be placed even among the rejected writings, but are all of them to be cast aside as absurd and impious." (Eusebius, Book 3, Chapter 25)

### ***Athanasius (c. 296-373 A.D.)***

Athanasius served as the Bishop of Alexandria for 45 years. In 367 A.D. "the thirty-ninth Letter of Holy Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, on the Paschal festival" was written. It contains the New Testament canon as we know it today, in both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches:

"...it seemed good to me also, having been urged thereto by true brethren, and having learned from the beginning, to set before you the books included in the Canon, and handed down, and accredited as Divine; to the end that any one who has fallen into error may condemn those who have led him astray; and that he who has continued steadfast in purity may again rejoice, having these things brought to his remembrance."

"Again it is not tedious to speak of the [books] of the New Testament. These are, the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Afterwards, the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles (called Catholic), seven, viz. of James, one; of Peter, two; of John, three; after these, one of Jude. In addition, there are fourteen Epistles of Paul, written in this order. The first, to the Romans; then two to the Corinthians; after these, to the Galatians; next, to the Ephesians; then to the Philippians; then to the Colossians; after these, two to the Thessalonians, and that to the

Hebrews; and again, two to Timothy; one to Titus; and lastly, that to Philemon. And besides, the Revelation of John." (Athanasius, "Festal Letter 39")

"These are fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no man add to these, neither let him take ought from these." (Athanasius, "Festal Letter 39")

Athanasius goes on to describe several other books which, while not canonical, should be read by those "who wish for instruction in the word of godliness". These books include parts of the Old Testament Apocrypha, the second century Didache ("The Teaching of the Apostles"), and the Shephard of Hermas:

"...that there are other books besides these not indeed included in the Canon, but appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness. The Wisdom of Solomon, and the Wisdom of Sirach, and Esther, and Judith, and Tobit, and that which is called the Teaching of the Apostles, and the Shepherd..." (Athanasius, "Festal Letter 39")

### ***The Councils of Hippo and Carthage***

The list of the canonical books of the New Testament, published by Athanasius in 367 A.D., was officially adopted by three later councils, including the Council of Hippo in 393 A.D., and the Councils of Carthage in 397 A.D. and 419 A.D.

### ***Other voices***

While the New Testament canon as we know it was set by the end of the fourth century, not everyone since then has totally agreed with its contents. Among the dissenters:

- St. Jerome (c. 342-420 A.D.) translated the Bible into common Latin (the "Vulgate"), a translation used by the Roman Catholic Church for the next 1500 years. In a letter from 414 A.D., Jerome suggested that the Epistle of Barnabas should be included in the canon, since Barnabas was a companion of Paul, and an apostle.
- The modern Syrian Church's canon (called the Peshitta) dates from the 5th century, and lacks II Peter, II & III John, Jude, and Revelation

A number of the Protestant Reformers, including Calvin, Luther, and Zwingli questioned the validity of some of the books of the New Testament canon. Martin Luther, in his preface to the German New Testament in 1522, established a criterion for the canon based on books that "revealed Christ." He referred to the Book of James as "a right strawy epistle", and he wasn't too enamoured with Revelation, Hebrews or Jude, either!

### **Concerning the Authority and the Canonization of the New Testament:**

#### **R. Laird Harris:**

"Before the close of the first thirty years after the death of the apostle John, there are three quotations of different New Testament books (including a Gospel) as Scripture, and by twenty years after John's death, three other Epistles of Paul are referred to by name in a manner implying the fullest authority--there is no contradictory voice."<sup>1</sup>

"With this we conclude the survey of the scanty but precious literature of the first thirty years after the death of the last apostle. And what is the conclusion? Simply that, in a casual but

revealing manner, the bulk of the writings of the New Testament were already, in this early age, known and used, as profitable... leaving only the two small Epistles of John and the single chapter of Jude without attestation.”<sup>2</sup>

It is quite striking that the formation of the canon of the New Testament did not consist in the selection by chance or purpose of a few books out of a welter that had early gained recognition. Quite the opposite. There was no large number that gained recognition only to lose it.”<sup>3</sup>

**FF. Bruce:**

“These quotations (passages of the New Testament by Clement, Ignatius, Barnabas, Polycarp, Basilides, Dinysius, and Hegesippus) do not amount to evidence for a New Testament canon; they do show that the authority of the Lord and his apostles was reckoned to be not inferior to that of the law and the prophets. Authority precedes canonicity; had the words of the Lord and his apostles not been accorded supreme authority, the written record of their words would never have been canonized.”<sup>4</sup>

“What has always been believed (or practiced) is the most potent factor in the maintenance of tradition. Suggested innovations have regularly been resisted with the argument ‘But this is what we have always been taught’ or ‘what we have always done.’ It was so in the early centuries with the recognition of certain books as holy scripture, and it is still so (whether this is consciously realized or not... if any church leader came along in the third or fourth century with a previously unknown book, recommending it as genuinely apostolic, he would have found great difficulty in gaining acceptance for it: his fellow-Christians would simply have said, ‘But no one has ever heard of it!’ (We may think for example of the widespread hesitation in accepting 2 Peter.) Or, even if the book had been known for some generations, but had never been treated as Holy Scripture, it would have been very difficult to win recognition for it as such.”<sup>5</sup>

“For many centuries inspiration and canonicity have been closely bound up together in Christian thinking: books were included in the canon, it is believed, because they were inspired; a book is known to be inspired because it is in the canon.”<sup>6</sup>

“The letter to the Hebrews needs no apostle’s name to certify its credentials as an original first-century presentation of significance of the work of Christ as his people’s sacrifice and high priest. ‘Whether then it was I or they,’ says Paul, referring to others to whom the Lord appeared in the resurrection, ‘so we preach and so you believed’ (1 Cor. 15:11)--and his ‘they’ can properly be extended to include all the New Testament writers. With all the diversity of their witness, it is witness to one Lord and one gospel.”<sup>7</sup>

“The New Testament writings provide incontrovertibly our earliest witness to Christ, presenting him as the one in whom the history of the salvation, recorded in the Old Testament, reached its climax. What Hans Lietzmann said of the four gospels in the early church may be said of the New Testament writings in general: ‘the reference to their apostolic authority, which can only appear to us as a reminder of sound historical bases, had the deeper meaning that this particular tradition of Jesus--and this alone--had been established and guaranteed by the Holy Spirit working authoritatively in the Church.’ Within ‘this particular tradition’ different strands of tradition may be recognized, but the church, in earlier and in more recent days, has been more conscious of the overall unity than of the underlying diversity, and has maintained ‘this particular tradition’ over against others which conflict with the New Testament witness but cannot establish a comparable title to apostolic authority.”<sup>8</sup>

“In the canon of scripture we have the foundation documents of Christianity, the charter of the church, the title-deeds of faith. For no other literature can such a claim be made. And when the



claim is made, it is made not merely for a collection of ancient writings. In the words of scripture the voice of the Spirit of God continues to be heard.”<sup>9</sup>

**“One thing must be emphatically stated.** The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing

their innate worth and generally apostolic authority, direct or indirect. The first ecclesiastical councils to classify the canonical books were both held in North Africa--at Hippo Regius in 393 and at Carthage in 397--but what these councils did was not to impose something new upon the Christian communities but to codify what was already the general practice of those communities.”<sup>10</sup>

**B.B. Warfield:**

“The Canon of the New Testament was completed when the last authoritative book was given to any church by the apostles, and that was when John wrote the Apocalypse, about A.D. 98... .Certainly the whole Canon was not universally received by the churches till somewhat later. The Latin church of the second and third centuries did not quite know what to do with the Epistle to the Hebrews. The Syrian churches for some centuries may have lacked the lesser of the Catholic Epistles and Revelation. But from the time of Irenaeus down, the church at large had the whole Canon as we now possess it. And though a section of the church may not yet have been satisfied of the apostolicity of a certain book or of certain books; and though afterwards doubts may have arisen in sections of the church as to the apostolicity of certain books (as e.g. of Revelation): yet in no case was it more than a respectable minority of the church which was slow in receiving, or which came afterward to doubt, the credentials of any of the books that then as now constituted the Canon of the New Testament accepted by the church at large. And in every case the principle on which a book was accepted, or doubts against it laid aside, was the historical tradition of apostolicity.”<sup>11</sup>

**Rene Pache:**

“The fact is that, right from the start, the writings incontestably apostolic were considered as being themselves the Scriptures, and then were added to the already existing sacred books. The first Christians, therefore, did not first of all make a canon of ‘new books,’ of which they only gradually recognized the same divine character and the same authority which the ‘old books’ had.

“They received the new books one after another in the apostolic circle as being just as much the Scriptures as were the older writings. They simply joined them to the already existing collection, until finally the new books thus affixed became numerous enough to be considered as a section of the Scriptures.”<sup>12</sup>

**Eric Sauer:**

“The Church itself had in no way to ‘complete’ or even to create the biblical Canon, but simply to acknowledge it. . . .The Canon of Holy Scripture... .was finished and complete from the very first moment when the last New Testament book had come into existence... .The decisive factor was the Spirit-wrought authority of the Bible itself... as the result of the divine inspiration.”<sup>13</sup>

**Philip Schaff:**

“The principal books of the New Testament, the four Gospels, the Acts, the thirteen Epistles of Paul, the first Epistle of Peter, and the first of John, which are designated by Eusebius as ‘Homologumena,’ were in general use in the church after the middle of the second century, and acknowledged to be apostolic, inspired by the Spirit of Christ, and therefore authoritative and canonical....

“Concerning the other seven books, the ‘Antilegomena’ of Eusebius, viz. the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apocalypse, the second Epistle of Peter, the second and third Epistles of John, the Epistle of James, and the Epistle of Jude,—the tradition of the church in the time of Eusebius, the beginning of the fourth century, still wavered between acceptance and rejection.”<sup>14</sup>

**Kenneth Scott Latourette**

“Only gradually was universal assent given to the twenty-seven books which now comprise the New Testament. Some books were later than others in winning inclusion.... “The first list which has come down to us of the twenty seven books which embraces only those which appear in our New Testament is in a letter written by Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, in the year 367. While it was not until long after that date that uniform agreement on the list was found among all teachers in the Catholic Church, by at least the end of the second century a body of writings embracing a majority of the present twenty-seven was being regarded in the Catholic Church as the New Testament and was being placed alongside the Jewish scriptures.”<sup>15</sup>

**R.M. Grant:**

"We have tried to show that while there was considerable dispute in early Christianity over some of the New Testament books, the major writings were accepted by almost all Christians by the middle of the second century. Indeed, soon after the end of the first century we find the Pauline epistles and most of our four gospels well established, not only among the more 'orthodox' but in such Gnostic schools as those of Basilides and Valentinus. ...Historians love novelties and exceptional cases and they do not always pay enough attention to elements of traditional continuity in history. On balance, it would appear that the early history of the Canon, though certainly marked by diversity of judgment, was essentially a slow and gradual process of sifting, ratification, and rejection. In the course of this process, which went on in the continuing life of the Church as a whole, Christians came to recognize that the twenty-seven books now accepted represented classical responses to God's revelation in Christ."<sup>16</sup>

**B.F. Westcott:**

"From the close of the second century the history of the Canon is simple, and its proof clear. It is allowed even by those who have reduced the genuine Apostolic works to the narrowest limits, and from the time of Irenaeus the New Testament was composed essentially of the same books which we receive at present, and that they were regarded with the same reverence as is now shewn to them." <sup>17</sup>

"Thus it is that it is impossible to point to any period as marking the date at which our present Canon was determined. When it first appears, it is present not as a novelty but as an ancient tradition. Its limits were fixed in the earliest times by use rather than by criticism; and this use itself was based on immediate knowledge."<sup>18</sup>

**Jeremy C. Jackson:**

"The sometimes confusing and torturous establishing of the twenty-seven-book New Testament canon does not satisfy our desire for a clear-cut selection. It is nevertheless striking that the very books which were regarded as Scripture from early on and were later accepted definitively in 367 in the East and at the Council of Carthage in 397 in the West--these books turn out after centuries of minute scholarly investigation to be the best and earliest and most authentic records of Christ's life and work."<sup>19</sup>

**Don Shakelford:**

"Although not all the books were known in one place, all the New Testament books were accepted as divine and authoritative by Christians somewhere. No writing known as apostolic was rejected anywhere. Within one generation after John completed his writings, all twenty-seven books of the New Testament were cited as Scripture by some church leaders. Within two

centuries, all but less than a dozen verses of the New Testament were quoted in from three to four thousand citations that are now preserved."<sup>20</sup>

**W.G. Kummel:**

"The attitude of Christians toward norms of Christian doctrine and Christian life that we found at the end of the apostolic age (i.e., toward the end of the first century A.D.) may be found at the beginning of the postapostolic age as well, especially in the earliest of the apostolic fathers. Side by side and of equal value are the 'Scripture' and the *logoi tou kuriou* or the 'words of the holy prophets' and 'the *evtolh tou kuriou* which has been handed down from the apostles' (1 Clem. 13: Iff., 46:2f, 7f, 2 Pet. 3:2)."<sup>21</sup>

**Geoffrey W. Bromiley:**

"The authors of the New Testament undoubtedly belonged to the church and to that extent the church undoubtedly created the fact of the canon. Yet inasmuch as these authors played a unique role in composing their writings, the church at large found itself confronted by a quasi-extraneous fact in its encounter with these writings. It gave evidence of this in its awareness that the definition of the canon was not just a matter of giving some of its own productions the preference over others, but rather of the recognition of an authoritative status that some works enjoyed by objective and inherent right. The church had no authority to make its own canon. It had to recognize, endorse, and proclaim a canon that was already there."<sup>22</sup>

"The Fathers believed without hesitation that God had caused the Bible to be written. They accepted without cavil both its inspiration and its reliability. Where they encountered individual difficulties, they either suspended judgment or sought explanation in a way that would preserve biblical infallibility. Believing that Scripture came from God, they construed it as a coherent and consistent divine message, not abstractly, but in relation to the work of God that had begun in the Old Testament and in accordance with prophetic intimation had reached its climax in the New."<sup>23</sup>

**Endnotes:**

- 1 R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Zondervan, 1969), p. 209.
- 2 *ibid.*, pp. 208,209.
- 3 Hanis, *Inspiration and Canonicity*, p. 217.
- 4 F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Lntersity Press, 1988), P. 123.
- 5 Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, pp. 262,263.
- 6 *ibid.*, p. 263.
- 7 *ibid.*, p. 277.
- 8 *ibid.*, p. 278.
- 9 *ibid.*, p.283.
- 10 F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* fifth ed. (Eerdmans, 1960), p. 27.
- 11 B.B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Baker, 1970), p. 415.
- 12 Rene Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, trans. Helen I. Needliam (Moody, 1969), pp. 179,180 citing B.B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, pp. 412,413.
- 13 Eric Sauer, *From Eternity to Eternity*, p. 133, cited in Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, p. 181.
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