

# **New Testament Evidences**

**Transmission, the canon, and translation**

**by Jeff Clarke**

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## New Testament Evidences: Transmission, the canon, and translation

All Christians are responsible for "giving an answer to every man who asketh a reason of the hope" that is in them (1 Pet. 3:15).<sup>1</sup> These notes deal with the questions of transmission and translation of the New Testament, and with the canon.

Why do we restrict ourselves to the NT? First of all, because to the Christian the Old Testament stands on the NT. Once the NT is accepted, we can use it for affirmation of the OT. In many places the NT confirms the inspiration of the OT.

If we focus on the NT, we can be more thorough in our treatment. Rather than stretch space to allow for both Testaments, the material for the NT can be relatively detailed.

In addition, the answers to the questions on the OT are similar to those for the NT. When we study the subjects of transmission and translation of the NT, it gives us a good idea of how these questions relate to the OT.

**"...Give an answer to every man ..." - 1 Pet. 3:15**

Finally, the reader will notice that we have included some material on the OT in the notes, especially in the appendixes, as the circumstances warranted. The student will find that as he learns "where he got his NT," questions about the OT fall into place.

A lot of material is included in the appendixes. Why wasn't it put into the main body of the notes? Most of the more technical information is given in the appendixes, so that it can be referred to later.

"Where did we get our NT?" It's an important question. Let's approach the study with diligence, showing ourselves approved, workmen that need not to be ashamed.

## Introduction: the nature of faith

### Why study evidences?

#### Christianity vs. idolatry

Christianity is a historical religion. It is based on the evidence of history and testimony of eyewitnesses. If a Christian could not prove that Jesus was the Son of God, that He died for our sins and was resurrected from the dead, the Christian would have no right to believe in the Bible. The Christian's acceptance of the Bible depends on being able to prove that Christ was who He said he was. Paul wrote, "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. 15:14).

Most religions, in contrast, are not concerned with history, but only with their teachings. Moslems, for example, aren't worried about documenting the historical existence of Mohammed. Moslems hold the Koran sacred because of its teachings, not its history. Their faith in the book does not depend on proving that Mohammed was a prophet.

The contrast between Christianity and other religions is summed up by a popular Bible apologist:

Buddha did not claim to be God; Moses never said that he was Yahweh; Mohammed did not identify himself as Allah; and nowhere will you find Zoroaster claiming to be Ahura Mazda. Yet Jesus ... said that he who has seen Him (Jesus) has seen the Father (Jn. 14:9).

This fact separates Jesus from the other religious figures. In the major religions of the world, the teachings - not the teacher - are all-important.

Confucianism is a set of teachings; Confucius is not important. Islam is the revelation of Allah, with Mohammed being the prophet, and Buddhism emphasizes the principles of the Buddha and not Buddha himself. This is especially true of Hinduism, where there is no historical founder.

... [in Christianity] what is important is who Jesus was. Was He the Son of God? Is He the only way a person can reach God? This was [His] claim...

Ancient idolatry was no different than today's: both are built on the sand. When men settle for guesses and theories about the universe and the God behind it, they can

**"If Christ is not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" 1 Cor. 15:14**

and do wind up with the most ridiculous religions imaginable.

Paul's experience in Acts 17:16-33 gives a good picture of how misguided this approach is. When studying this passage, notice the contrast between the ignorant, unquestioning worship of the Gentiles and Paul's reasonable appeals to logic.

### Personal conviction

The first stage of the development of godly faith is to get answers to one's questions. 1 Pet. 3:15: "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

Notice that when Christ was asked questions, He did not rebuke those who dared to ask Him: He answered them. His patience encouraged questions, because those who seek truth will find answers (Jn. 7:17; Matt. 7:7).

Christ challenged, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil" (Jn. 18:23). If anyone wants to reject the Word of God, he is free to challenge Christians for answers to his questions. See also Jn. 8:31-32.

No one should accept the Bible as true if they are not convinced by the evidence for it. 1 Jn. 4:1, Phil. 1:10 and other passages teach this. Paul said, "I know Him whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

Each Christian has the same right and responsibility to test and prove the Bible for himself. Phil. 2:12.

#### **Abundant evidence**

Christianity doesn't command faith if you're not convinced. But it does promise that you will be convinced if you're honest! Jn. 8:42-47; 3:19-21; 7:17.

There is more than enough evidence to satisfy the honest man. In Rom. 1:18-23, the Gentiles are condemned because they did not accept evidence concerning God's existence and Lordship - evidence which Paul stated was more than sufficient.

The same challenge stands today: any one who honestly examines the evidence for the Bible will conclude that it is the Word of God.

#### **Why unbelievers?**

Of course, many examine - or claim to examine - the evidence for the Bible and yet remain "unconvinced." Even in Christ's time there were those who refused to accept overwhelming evidence. Matt. 12:22-37.

When one decides on an answer before he looks at the facts, blindness results. Con-

#### **The two stages of faith:**

- Conviction of the intellect
- A relationship with God

sider Matt. 21:23-27. The Jews refused to give Jesus an honest answer because they didn't like the results of the possible answers. The same is true today of people who are afraid of what it would mean to accept the Bible as God's word.

#### **"100%" faith?**

Many times skeptics will ask, "can you prove 100% *beyond the shadow of a doubt* that the Bible is God's word?" The answer is no, at least on the terms they have in mind. No historical event, whether it be the death of Jesus Christ or of Abraham Lincoln, can be

proven to 100% certainty.

100% certain proof can occur in science, if a test is *repeatable*. But historical events present a different problem. History cannot be repeated - it can only be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. So the Christian can prove the DBR of Jesus Christ beyond a reasonable doubt, but he cannot repeat it for the eyes of the skeptic.

This is what God intended - that some room be left for faith. Christianity is a historical religion, but it is also a religion requiring individual faith. See Rom. 8:24-25; 2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:1 - 12:2.

#### **Faith: a two-stage process**

#### **Beyond evidences**

Faith does not end with "Christian evidences." The conversion of the intellect is only the beginning. A second stage must follow if true faith is to be obtained.

When one is baptized and becomes a Christian, he receives a sealing: the Holy Spirit. Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30. At that point, a fantastic relationship begins between the saved individual and God: God dwells in the believer. See Jn. 14:23; 1 Cor. 6:19-20.

James wrote, "Draw nigh unto God, and He will draw nigh unto you" (Jas. 4:8). God draws closer to us the more we walk in His light. Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Eph. 3:17).

When we listen to God as He speaks through His word, when we turn to Him often in prayer, and when we attune ourselves to His presence in our lives, a richer, deeper faith results. We begin with an intellectual belief; later it develops into faith in the New Testament sense of the word.

#### **Summary**

Christianity is based on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The Christian must be prepared to document these as real events of history.

The Bible is the main source of information on these events. Therefore, it is important that we understand where our Bible came from. This is why every Christian must be familiar with Bible evidences.

# 1 Textual evidence

## Introduction

Modern publishers produce and sell millions of copies of the Bible every year. Who tells them how the Bible should read? Do publishers have access to the original letters that Bible authors wrote? If not, what do they use? Who makes sure that they get it right?

Skeptics often put it another way: "hasn't the New Testament been changed as it has been copied and recopied down through the centuries? Haven't overzealous monks altered it to 'clarify' the doctrine in it?" These questions are the subject of this section, "Textual evidence," and the next, "Textual criticism."

In these sections, keep in mind the goal of the study. We are *not* establishing the *inspiration* of the Bible. We are just showing that the versions of the Bible we have today are a faithful, accurate reproduction of the Bible as it was originally written.

In "Textual evidence," we look at the textual "attestation" for the Bible - that is, the many ancient copies of the original Bible which have been handed down through the centuries. In "Textual criticism," we survey the science of textual criticism - the methods used to reconstruct the Bible.

In summary, this section deals with the materials our versions of the Bible are based on. The next section deals with the methods of arriving at those versions from the materials.

## Integrity of the NT

"Integrity of the NT" means: the present Greek text gives the same meaning as the original copies did. The actual precise verbal form of the NT can be changed slightly though translation or transmission without affecting the meaning, as we shall see later. We will show that the NT has 100% integrity today, after 1900 years.

(At this point, the student might want to start by referring to Appendix A. It lists a few definitions of some often-used terms, such as text, version, and transmission.)

## "Autograph" manuscripts?

It is well known that the original writings, or the "autographs", of the authors of the Bible have been lost. We rely on copies of those originals to reconstruct the Bible. We might ask, "Why don't we have original copies any more?" Actually, there are many reasons.

### Papyrus

One problem was that the materials that NT authors used for their letters, papyrus, was not much more durable than heavy paper.

The manufacture of papyrus dates from 2500 B.C. in Egypt. Egypt and Syria became the major producers of papyrus, because they had access to the swampy areas where the papyrus plant grew.

The stem of the papyrus plant was cut into strips, soaked, crosshatched as in basket-weaving, dried, and scraped. When finished, sheets usually measured 6 to 9 inches wide by 9 to 11 inches long. They could be joined together through a process similar to the one used to make individual sheets. The rolls measured up to 140 ft. Luke's gospel, as an example, would fill one side of a roll 30 ft. long.

Papyrus was designed to last for years, but not for centuries. It was perishable, so not many are left.

### Idolatry

Even if original copies did exist, we can imagine what the situation would be! When someone "finds" an artifact supposedly related to Christ, such as the Shroud of Turin, notice how the religious world reacts. Man has always been ready to worship the creature rather than the Creator. Glory that is rightfully God's would be misdirected to these letters if any originals actually had been preserved.



### Power

Another problem would arise if the autographs were still in existence: a power struggle could prevent Christians from having access to them.

If any one man privately possessed such a copy, he could keep it private, withholding it from others. He could then release fraudulent copies of the book, changing its doctrine to suit his purpose. Since no one else had access to it, it would be difficult to contradict him.

Imagine the situation if this were the case for all the books of the Bible. This imbalance of power would create confusion, uncertainty, and havoc. It is a blessing that no single individual controls original books of the Bible.

### Autographs unnecessary

The Jews used to destroy copies of the Scriptures because of these types of concerns. Happily, it turns out that we do not need the autographs anyway. As we will see, the Bible can be reproduced correctly from the excellent copies that we have.

Since the present system works so well, doing without the autographs is no problem. And since having the originals would pose so many dangers, the conclusion is: we are much better off without them.

### Copies of the autographs

#### Why copied

When the NT authors circulated their original letters, they were to be read not only in one congregation, but by others. This idea is

seen in Col. 4:16, where Paul commands the church at Colosse to exchange his epistles with the Laodiceans.

When the apostles gave a general command to one Christian or congregation, it applied to all. For example, see 1 Cor. 16:1, where Paul repeats a command to the Corinthians that he had earlier given to the Galatians.

Everyone needed to have access to the Scriptures. Copies had to be made. The early church produced these copies as they had need. The copies multiplied themselves until many thousands existed all over the world.

#### An objection

As soon as copies are made of originals, skeptics object: "If every word of the Bible is inspired, and a mistake is made in copying, isn't the inspiration destroyed? The copy is a work of man and not of God. After all, the copy is no longer perfect, as the Bible is supposed to be."

Do you see the question? We count on the Bible to be perfect. What happens then when man introduces small errors? The answer to this is to be found in two parts: in an understanding of accuracy, and in the testimony of the Bible itself.

#### Perfect accuracy: crucial?

First, we must realize that the Bible is a book which is hard to misunderstand! God actually designed the Bible to resist these types of problems. Small imperfections in transmission and translation do not distort its thoughts.

At this point, the skeptic is probably wagging his head and even the Christian may be confused. Does the Bible really have



A page from Codex Vaticanus, dated 350 A.D.

"protections" against problems of distortion? Consider the design of the Bible.

One safeguard built into the Bible is the fact that the important themes of the Bible are taught not in one, but in many places in the Bible. We do not depend solely on Jn. 3:16 for teaching on redemption; we can turn to many other passages. Baptism is taught to be for remission of sins, to put us into the church, in over a dozen passages. The result is that even if one passage were to be distorted or lost, the overall message would remain intact.

Another safeguard is found in the simplicity of the Bible's language. Few, if any,

### Reasons that autographs no longer exist today

- Perishability of papyrus
- Danger of idolatry
- Danger of power imbalance
- Lack of need for autographs

words are used which are difficult to translate into other languages. Think about Mk. 16:16: if you were fluent in a language other than English, would you find it difficult to translate the passage?

Context is yet another protection. When we understand an author's overall point, it is easy to spot errors which create a contradiction in doctrine. An example was found in the famous "Immoral Bible". It accidentally translated Ex. 20:14 as "thou shalt commit adultery." Of course, the error was quickly found and corrected. When mistakes of transmission cause doctrinal errors, they stand out like a coal pile in a ballroom.

Also, notice the "compartment"-style design of the Bible. Large passages do not hinge on small matters like the spelling of a single word. The Scriptures are built in a unique "verse-by-verse" style which separates one thought from others. Take one verse out of your Bible and all the other verses are unaffected.

These qualities of the Bible, and others, NT Evidences • 6

give it an amazing resiliency. You can be confident that despite minor errors of transmission, you still hold in your hand the Bible as God gave it to man.

### The ultimate argument

In Lk. 4:16-21, Christ read from Isa. 61:1-2 and told the audience: "This day has this Scripture been fulfilled in your ears." In doing this, Christ was reading from a copy of Isaiah in the same way that we read from copies today. Over 750 years after the original of Isaiah had been penned, Christ read from a distant copy of the book - and He proclaimed it "Scripture." He treated it as Scripture and He called it Scripture.

This episode clearly settles all arguments as to whether copies of original books of the Bible are legitimate. God considers the Bibles we have today "Scripture" and will hold us accountable for them.

### The impact of errors

If men make an error in restoring a word here or there in the NT text, it does not corrupt doctrine. Are we saying then that minor errors of men in the copying of the Bible do not matter?

Yes, they do matter, but for a different reason. Even minor errors detract slightly from the beauty of God's inspired Word. Exactness is desirable because it allows us to fully appreciate the beauty of God's word, inspired by His infinite wisdom.

But the point is: the Bible is not "destroyed" by insignificant errors in copying. Copies of Scripture, if reverently made, are themselves Scripture.

### The Greek MS network

#### Papyrus

In the early church, Christians wrote copies on papyrus, which was the only affordable material of the time. Unfortunately, they had little idea that the copies might have to last thousands of years. Papyrus was good for a few generations, but not much good over centuries. As a result, only a few papyrus manuscripts from 120-350 A.D. still exist.



Another problem with papyri is that they are fragmentary. In other words, papyri generally do not contain large portions of the NT, but only a few chapters or even a few verses.

Despite their great age, papyri are not the most important source of materials for textual criticism.

#### Value of papyri

Although there are not generally enough papyrus fragments to use them as the main source for criticism, they do have great value. Papyri serve many purposes. Those which exist are an important source for criticism where they apply. In other words, if a 2nd-century fragment contains Jn. 18, then it doesn't help with Romans or Ephesians, but it *is* important in reconstructing Jn. 18.

Even more important, papyri substantiate the most important source of evidence, the network of vellum MSS. A papyrus fragment dating 200 A.D., containing Titus ch. 1, can be used to check the general accuracy of a fourth-century vellum MSS of the entire Bible. If the later vellum MS matches the papyrus MS perfectly in Titus 1, this is evidence in favor of its overall fidelity.

Finally, very early papyri tell us a lot about the early circulation of the gospel. For example, skeptics who charged that the gospel of John was written about 200 A.D. were quite embarrassed when a fragment of John dating 120 A.D. turned up in a provincial town in Egypt!

#### Examples

There are dozens of important papyri. The earliest fragment dates about 120 AD. It is kept in the John Rylands Library. It contains Jn. 18:31-33, 37-38.

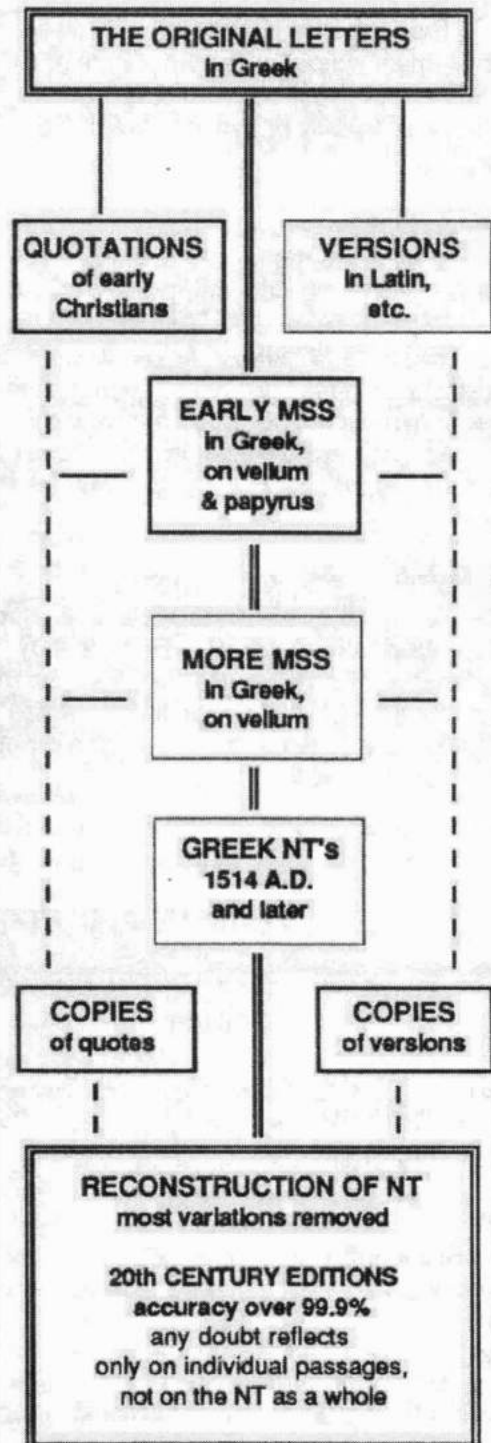
Several fragments date around 200 AD. One in Manchester has Tit. 1:11-15 and 2:4-8. Another in Oxford records parts of Matt. 26.

About 50 fragments date between 225 and 275 AD. A well-known example is the Papyrus Bodmer II in Egypt. It preserves all of Jn. 1:1 - 14:26, and parts of the rest of the book.<sup>3</sup>

#### Vellum MSS

Fortunately, around 300 A.D. Christians began using vellum for their copies. Vellum, made from animal skin or byproducts, is

## Sources for the reconstruction of the New Testament



much more durable than papyrus. There are plenty of vellum MSS preserved for us after 300 A.D.

Vellum remained the primary material for copies until the 14th century, when printing on paper began. Because they survived the years so well, vellum MSS form the backbone of the network we use to reconstruct the NT.

(The term "manuscript" usually refers to Greek manuscripts *on vellum*. "Papyri" refers to Greek manuscripts on papyrus, although technically papyri also are manuscripts.)

#### Value of MSS

Vellum MSS are the best materials textual critics have in reproducing the text of the NT. This is true for many reasons, but especially because of their completeness. MSS exist which contain not just a few chapters or one or two books, but all 27 books of the NT. An early example of this is the Codex Sinaiticus, dated 350 A.D., which contains the entire NT.

#### Reliability of MSS: three factors

The big question is: do the MSS give us an accurate picture of the NT? Or have they suffered from copying and recopying so that they don't? There are three factors which scholars use to determine whether a group of MSS are reliable.

*Independent substantiation.* The most important factor in weighing the MSS' reliability is whether they substantiate each other. If one MS from the fourth century in Egypt reads exactly like an Armenian MS from the same period, and it is known that they were copied from different sources, their reliability is proven.

Another way of saying this is: independent origin plus agreement equals accuracy.

So it is a simple matter of taking MSS which developed independently and checking to see whether they all vary from each other or all say the same thing.

*Age.* Another consideration is age. If the NT was written in the 1st century, how old are the earliest copies we still possess?

*Number.* A final criterion is the number of the MSS. In other words, do we have enough MSS to compare them carefully with one another, or do we have to go on just a few?

These are the questions experts ask. The answers are found in the next section, "Textual criticism."

#### Examples

There are thousands of vellum MSS, many of which are very old and important. *Codex Sinaiticus*, ca. 350 A.D., was discovered by Dr. Constantin Von Tischendorf in the Mt.

#### PATRISTIC QUOTATIONS OF THE NT BEFORE 350 A.D.

Writer	Gospels	Acts	Paul's Epistles	General Epistles	Revelation	Totals
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

From the book, *New Testament Evidences* by Wallace Wartick. College Press, 1980

Sinai Monastery in 1859. It was presented by the monastery to the Russian Czar and bought by the British Government and people from the Soviet Union on "Christmas Day," 1933. It contains the entire NT and about half of the OT.

*Codex Vaticanus* (325-350 A.D.), located in the Vatican Library in Rome, contains the NT from Matt. 1:1 to Heb. 9:13. *Codex Alexandrinus* (400 A.D.) is kept in the British Museum. It is believed to have been written in Egypt. It too contains almost the entire Bible.

Other very important MSS include the *Codexes Ephraemi* (5th century, with all the NT except 2 Thess. and 2 Jn.), *Bezae* (5th century, with the Gospels and Acts), *Washingtonensis* (ca. 450, having the Gospels), and *Claromontanus* (6th century, composed of the Pauline epistles).<sup>4</sup>

### Versions

After Greek MSS, the second-most important support for the text of the NT are the translations of the Greek NT which were made in the early centuries. These translations are called *versions*.

#### Latin

The NT was translated into Latin about 150 A.D. A complete network of copies exist in Latin similar to that of the Greek MSS. Fragmentary copies in Latin date as far back as the second century; complete copies of the NT in Latin to the fourth century.<sup>5</sup>

About 382-405 a noted scholar, Jerome, retired to a cave in Bethlehem and produced the famous "Vulgate," meaning "popular," version of the Latin Bible. He translated the OT from the Hebrew, referring also to the Septuagint, and the NT from the Greek. The Douay version, and some other old English versions, were translated from the Vulgate.<sup>6</sup>

#### Syriac

The NT was translated into Syriac around 150 A.D. Copies of this translation date from the fourth to seventh centuries. Next to Latin, the copies of the NT in Syriac are the

most valuable, being the oldest and most common.<sup>7</sup>

#### Other major versions

Other major versions, with the centuries of the oldest copies of each given afterwards: Coptic, III-IV; Gothic, IV; Ethiopic, VI; Georgian, V; Nubian, VIII.<sup>8</sup>

#### Value of the versions

Versions are not as crucial as Greek MSS because of the slight accuracy lost in translating. Translations from Greek to another language are fine; but we cannot use transla-

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### Versions and quotations help support the main source for textual criticism: Greek MSS

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tions to reconstruct the Greek again with enough precision.

However, the versions do have value. They are used for textual criticism when a given copy is known to be a careful and accurate translation. Also, some copies of versions are older than many Greek MSS, so they help to bridge the gap between fourth-century vellum MSS and the first century.

In addition, early copies of the versions have value similar to papyri: they document the early spread of the gospel. Finally, they help to determine the canon of the Bible.

### Patristic quotations

#### The third source

The last major sources of material for textual criticism are called "patristic quotations." Encyclopedia Britannica says, "When the textual scholar has examined the MSS and the versions, he still has not exhausted the evidence for the NT text. The writings of the early Christian fathers . . . especially as it corroborates the readings that come from other sources, belongs to the testimony that textual critics must consult before forming their conclusions."<sup>9</sup>

Whether writing personal letters, commentaries, or whatever, early members of the church often quoted Scripture. When these writings are found, the references in them can be used as part of the NT evidence.

#### Early Christians

One well-known author was *Clement of Rome* (A.D. 95). Origen calls him a direct disciple of the apostles. Tertullian writes that Clement was appointed by Peter. Irenaeus writes that Clement "had the preaching of the apostles still echoing in his ears and their doctrine in front of his eyes." Clement quotes from eight different NT books.

*Ignatius* (70-110 A.D.), an associate of the apostles and a martyr, wrote seven "epistles." In them he quotes from 15 different NT books.

*Clement of Alexandria* (150-212) gave us 2400 quotes from 24 books of the NT. *Tertullian* (160-220) quotes the NT more than 7000 times, over half of which are from the Gospels.<sup>10</sup>

There are too many individuals from the first, second, and third centuries to list. The *Greek New Testament* lists well over 100 different individuals and sources from various dates through history. A few: *Polycarp* (70-156), a disciple of John; *Barnabas* (70); *Irenaeus* (170); *Justin Martyr* (133); *Origen* (185-254); and many others.<sup>11</sup>

#### Abundant quotations

It might seem that very few quotations would be preserved to our time. This is not the case! Early Christians sprinkled their writing liberally with Scripture. J. Harold Greenlee says that the quotations "are so extensive that the NT could virtually be reconstructed from them without the use of the NT MSS."<sup>12</sup>

Here are a few more statements of experts on this subject.

Indeed, so extensive are these citations that if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the NT were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire NT. 13

A brief inventory at this point will reveal that there were some 32,000 citations of the NT prior to the time of the Council of Nicea (325). These 32,000 quotations are by no means exhaustive, and they do not even include the fourth century writers. 14

Of the considerable volumes of unpublished material that Dean Burgon left when he died, of special note is his index of NT citations by the church fathers of antiquity. It consists of sixteen thick volumes to be found in the British Museum, and contains 86,489 quotations.<sup>15</sup>

Sir David Dalrymple wondered about these quotations, and began cataloging them. After much work he wrote, "I possessed all the existing works of the Fathers of the second and third centuries. I commenced to search, and up to this time I have found the entire New Testament, except eleven verses."<sup>16</sup>

In other words, the quotations are a major source for textual criticism.

#### Value of the quotations

The problem with these quotes is that the authors often wrote from memory, without checking the MSS. In spite of this, the quotations are a valued and legitimate source of textual criticism. United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament* includes these quotations as source material in documenting variations of the NT.



## 2 Textual criticism

### Introduction

#### Term

One definition of textual criticism is: "the science that undertakes to compare and classify the existing manuscripts of an ancient writing, arrange them in families or groups, and trace their interrelations."<sup>17</sup>

Textual criticism is the science which reproduces the original NT from copies.

#### Existence of variants

If all MSS matched each other exactly, there would be no problem. We could copy any one MSS and declare that copy the NT.

However, men are not perfect, and neither were the copies of the NT. Small errors were made, with the result that the copies differed very slightly from the originals. Copies of copies had their own slight errors. The

### The tests of MSS' reliability

- Consistency
- Number
- Age

result is that MSS differ somewhat from one another.

When two MSS differ from each other, it is the experts' job to decide which variants reflect errors and which reflect the original text.

#### Can it be done?

These facts lead us to ask two questions.

The first is: can the NT be accurately reproduced from the available evidence? The answer is yes, and is treated in two subsections below: "Comparison" and "Variants." If you have wondered about how well textual critics can reconstruct the Bible, pay special attention to these two subsections.

#### How is it done?

The second question is: how is the NT reconstructed by textual critics? This is discussed briefly in the sections "Textual criticism" and "Texts and versions." For further research, there is also some material given in appendixes B, C1, and C2.

### Comparison

#### Consistency

The first and most important test of the accuracy of MSS evidence is *consistency*. By this, we mean: do different MSS - manuscripts which developed independently, not being copied from each other or from the same copy - agree with one another?

Let's imagine a mother arriving home and finding a broken lamp. Her four children all deny guilt, but she suspects that one of them did it. If she were to take them all aside one by one, and ask each separately what had happened, she would be curious how well their stories matched. If three children tell the same story, that the fourth was playing baseball in the house and bashed it with a bat, she knows only two things are possible. Either the children agreed to lie together or they are telling the truth and she has found the culprit.

Now returning to the Greek MSS, we know that they were written in such diverse times and places that it is impossible for them to have "lied together." Either they will tell the truth or they will disagree with one another. Do they agree?

The answer is that they agree with each other to an extent that is truly amazing.

Dr. F. J. A. Hort was the co-editor of the monumental Westcott-Hort version of the New Testament. After spending 30 years analyzing the manuscripts, he said, "the amount of what can in any sense be called substantial variation . . . can hardly form more than a thousandth part of the entire text."<sup>18</sup>

#### Number

Another important area to evaluate textual evidence is *number*. The agreement of a



few copies might be attributed to chance; but the agreement of many copies is a clear proof that the MSS are faithful to the originals.

There are over 5,500 known Greek MSS of the NT. In addition, there are at least 18,000 copies of versions, to say nothing of 86,000-plus patristic quotations.

Bruce Metzger, professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Princeton, wrote, "the textual critic of the New Testament is embarrassed by the wealth of his material."<sup>19</sup>

Hort adds, "in the variety and fullness of the evidence on which it rests the text of the

**A decisive argument  
is the NT use of:**

- The Massoretic Text (copied)
- The Septuagint (translated)

NT stands absolutely and unapproachably alone among ancient prose writings."<sup>20</sup>

**Age**

Obviously, the older the MSS are, the better. The closer the *date* of a copy is to its original, the smaller the chance of its corruption. The situation for the Bible is just as rosy here as it is for consistency and number.

Fragments are known which date a mere one or two generations after the death of the last apostle. Larger fragments date to 200 A.D., and complete texts of the NT to 325-350 A.D. This is a very small time gap.

Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, who was the director of the British Museum and a great authority on MSS, said:

The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the

general integrity of the books of the NT may be regarded as finally established.  
21

**Comparison to other works**

F. F. Bruce gives a clear picture of the comparison between the New Testament and other ancient historical writings:

Perhaps we can appreciate how wealthy the NT is in MS attestation if we compare the textual material for other ancient historical works.

For Caesar's Gallic Wars (composed between 58 and 50 B.C.) there are several extant MSS, but only nine or ten are good, and the oldest is some 900 years later than Caesar's day.

Of the 142 books of the Roman history of Livy (59 B.C. - A.D. 17) only 35 survive; these are known to us from not more than 20 MSS of any consequence, only one of which, and that containing fragments . . . is as old as the fourth centuries.

After analyzing the skimpy MSS of Herodotus and Thucydides, he concludes:

Yet no classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Herodotus or Thucydides is in doubt because the earliest MSS of their works which are of any use to us are over 1,300 years later than the originals. <sup>22</sup>

The accompanying chart on page 13 also compares the Bible to other ancient works.

**Conclusion**

The Greek MSS, copies of versions, and quotations document the NT extremely well. Scholars are agreed that there is no problem with the evidence. Kenyon said:

No fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading . . . It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain: especially is this the case with the NT. The number of MSS of the NT, of early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every

doubtful passage is preserved in some on or other of these ancient authorities.  
23

The evidence for the text of the NT is so overwhelming that even the toughest critic must cave in and admit its sufficiency.

Burrows summarizes: "The excessive skepticism of many liberal theologians stems not from a careful evaluation of the available data, but from an enormous predisposition against the supernatural."<sup>24</sup>

#### Conclusion

The conclusion is clear: the NT we have today is the same one used in the first century. Scholars are not the ones who question the reliability of the Greek MSS.

Kenyon wraps it up: "Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the NT may be regarded as finally established."<sup>25</sup>

#### Variants

Skeptics enjoy pointing out that there are thousands of variations between the manuscripts. However, they seldom mention the fact that merely counting variations means nothing. The large number of variations tells us only this: that we have a large number of MSS.

These skeptics who deny the integrity of the NT generally have one thing in common: they are not experts in the field. The real experts have a somewhat different opinion on the matter.

#### The number in perspective

It has been claimed that there are over 200,000 variations between the MSS of the NT. However, it must be pointed out that these are distributed over more than 25,000 copies!

Geisler and Nix say, "There is an ambiguity in saying there are some 200,000 variants ... since these represent only 10,000 places in the New Testament. If one single word is misspelled in 3,000 different MSS, this is counted as 3,000 variants or readings."<sup>26</sup>

The important question regarding number is the number of variations *per chapter per manuscript*. This number is extremely low.

As an example, the text of the book of Philippians has only 16 variations in its four chapters. None are important. However, the skeptic would attribute hundreds or even thousands of variants to the book. This is very misleading. (For further reference, see appendix B.)

#### Easily resolved variations

The majority of variations are unimportant to the TC because they are so easily resolved. In court, if 12 witnesses agreed together in

#### TEXTUAL COMPARISON OF ANCIENT LITERATURE TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

Author	Date Written (approx.)	Earliest Copy Existing	Time Gap (years)	Number of Copies
Homer ( <i>Iliad</i> )	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	1,300	643
Caesar	50 B.C.	900 A.D.	950	10
Plato ( <i>Tetralogies</i> )	350 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,250	7
Tacitus ( <i>Annals</i> )	100 A.D.	1100 A.D.	1,000	20
Aristotle (Any one work)	325 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1,425	49
Lucretius	50 B.C.	1000 A.D.	1,050	2
New Testament	50-100 A.D.	125 A.D.	50 to 150	25,000+

From the book, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell. Here's Life Pub. Inc., 1979

their testimony in a case, the testimony of a single witness against them would not matter unless he were a more important witness than the other 12 for some reason.

Applying this to textual criticism, let us suppose that of the 20 best MSS of the NT, one MSS - the 16th most important, let us say - contains a different reading than the other 19. Is this an important variation? Of course not - the TC just throws it out and takes the reading of the majority.

Obviously, only those variations which appear in a reasonable number of MSS, or in very important ones, need be considered. Those which do not are not even included in scholarly works on textual criticism.

Hort said, "with regard to the bulk of the words of the NT . . . there is no variation, or other ground of doubt, and therefore no room for textual criticism . . . here, therefore, an editor is only a transcriber."<sup>27</sup>

After throwing out variants which are easily resolved, we are left with only a small

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### **The book of Philippians has only 16 variations in all. None are significant.**

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number of variants which put the text in doubt. Philip Schaff, a great authority, concluded that only 400 of the 150,000 variant readings available in the 19th century caused doubt about the textual meaning.<sup>28</sup>

#### **Insignificant variations**

The minority of variants which do cause doubt about the text virtually always involve rather insignificant changes in the text.

Geisler and Nix say, "[few of] the variants had any weight, as most of them are merely mechanical matters such as spelling or style. Of the whole, then, only about one-sixtieth rise above trivialities."<sup>29</sup>

One example of this can be seen in the last variant of Philippians. Some MSS close with an "amen" following "you all", but the most important MSS end the book without the "amen". Therefore, the NASV leaves out the "amen."

If the student wishes to judge for himself on this subject, a complete list of all the

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variants of Philippians, as listed in the American Bible Societies' version of the Greek NT, can be found in appendix B.

Schaff said that of the 400 variants which caused doubt about the text, only 50 were significant regarding the changes.<sup>30</sup>

Gleason L. Archer said:

... [textual criticism] yields an amazingly limited range of variation in actual wording. In fact, it has long been recognized by the foremost specialists in textual criticism that if any decently attested variant were taken up from the apparatus at the bottom of the page and were substituted for the accepted reading of the standard text, there would in no case be a single, significant alteration in doctrine or message.

This can only be explained as the result of a special measure of control exercised by the God who inspired the original manuscripts of Scripture so as to insure their preservation for the benefit of His people. <sup>31</sup>

#### **Interpolations**

A handful of variants remain which leave the text in doubt, and which involve significant changes in the text. For example, some verses which were included are now known to have been inserted by copyists. An example of this is Acts 8:37. These are called *interpolations*, and are left out of the NASV.

#### **An important note on interpolations**

If the student is concerned about interpolations in his Bible, he should consult the NASV. It does a thorough job of documenting interpolations, following a philosophy of, "if in doubt, leave it out." If the NASV does not specifically mention a problem, you can be sure that the text is certain.

Don't get caught up in "wondering about your Bible." Very few passages are in doubt. Passages which aren't specifically mentioned in the NASV as in doubt - in other words, practically the whole Bible - are above reproach.

#### **Conclusion**

Objective scholars are completely satisfied that the NT that we have today is the same NT that early Christians used.

Schaff's verdict: of the 50 "significant" variants he listed in 1883, he said, not one altered "an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of Scripture teaching."<sup>32</sup>

Again, we conclude by appealing to the testimony of Christ in Lk. 4:16-21. Christ dealt with a copy of Isaiah which was subject to the same variations that our NT is today. He affirmed that it was Scripture. We find the same type of proof in many places in the NT.

Your Bible is the same one that Christians have used since it was first written!

### Textual criticism

Some are interested in the question of how the textual critic sifts through the thousands of manuscripts to reconstruct the NT.

The science of textual criticism is a profession in itself. A Christian who does not specialize in this field will not be a true "textual critic" until he obtains the education that will qualify him as such.

Children start riding bicycles with training wheels, and the layman must be satisfied to start by referring to the works of competent scholars.

As he develops some proficiency, he is justified to begin checking some of the scholars' decisions against his own. It is important that the church have a few individuals capable of this, and a need exists for more.

The process of developing skill in textual criticism as a "hobby" is similar to the process for developing skill in Greek. The student begins with basic studies, continues to practice, gains proficiency and judgment, and may eventually be qualified to place his judgment against experts in the field, at least in a limited way.

Below we give a very brief survey of the principles used in this science. Those more interested in the field can check the bibliography for further reading.

#### Materials

The top-flight textual critic starts with direct access to the best MSS of the NT.

## Texts and Versions of the New Testament

### History

When a team of critics compile their research into one published edition of the NT, the result is called a *text* of the NT.

Various scholars in the field of textual criticism have compiled their works for the public. A few of the most important of these are listed below.

### The Vulgate (405)

The Vulgate was completed by Jerome in 405, who translated from the original languages into Latin. From this text came the Douay version and the Wycliffe Bible.

Since the Vulgate was accepted by the Catholic authorities as an adequate basis for the Bible, and since they discouraged popular use of Bibles anyway, little progress was made in the area of textual criticism until the Protestant Reformation.

The Vulgate was the basis of most translations and versions for nearly a thousand years. Today, it is only of minor importance. <sup>33</sup>

### The Textus Receptus (1550)

This work was published in Paris in 1550 by Estienne. FW vol. 3 p. 402. It was based on the Byzantine or Ecclesiastical text, which represented the "state of the art" in textual criticism at the time. It remained the most important text of the New Testament into the 19th century, and is the basis of the translations of the King James Version, William Tyndale's Bible, Luther's German Bible, Olivetan's French Bible, the Geneva Bible, and many other versions from the time of the Reformation.

It is also called the *Majority Text*, since it emphasizes *number* of MSS in its criticism versus *age* of MSS, and the *Textus Receptus* (Received Text) because of its popularity, especially in the 16th through 18th centuries. <sup>34</sup>

(Continued in sidebar on next page)



## Versions cont.

### Westcott-Hort Text (1881)

In 1881, Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901) and Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828-92), two British scholars, updated the text of the NT to emphasize the older MSS such as the Codexes Vaticanus and Sinaiticus. These precious MSS, and others, were not available during the sixteenth century. 35

This emphasis on age and importance of MSS over number agrees with the consensus of experts today. Many of today's versions are based on the Westcott-Hort edition.

### The Nestle Greek NT (modern)

The widely used edition (first published in 1889) of Eberhard Nestle has been updated several times since, and is the most widely accepted modern text.

Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia says, "It combined the readings of Tschendorf, Westcott-Hort, and the German Protestant theologian Bernhard Weiss (1827-1918) and added a selection of important variant readings of manuscripts, versions, and Church Fathers." 36

The New American Standard Version is based on the Nestle NT.

### The state of the art

Today independent texts can be found which actually list and annotate the variations for the reader. What was formerly an occupation restricted to a few is available to the general public. As with Greek, the amateur has become the "professional" within the realm of his private home study. Anyone who likes can jump in with both hands and write his own Greek text if he likes. (We would hasten to add that this kind of a "text" would not be of much use to anyone but the author.)

One such publication is the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament. It is probably the most authoritative edition available today.

If he does not have direct access to these, he must depend on published copies of these MSS. However, this drastically reduces the value of his work. Only those who have personally checked the actual MSS can produce works of the highest value.

Fortunately, enough of these published works have been done that the layman can be satisfied with published copies. Christians don't have direct access to the Codex Vaticanus, but references to it are available. This type of reference will not qualify anyone as a world-class textual critic, but is good enough for the Christian's purposes.

### The principles used

Once a critic has access to the right materials, he applies the accepted principles of textual criticism to the various copies. Using these principles, he tries to determine which copies contain the original reading for a given passage and which are corruptions.

Examples of the accepted principles are: readings from older MSS are better than those from recent; readings which are cross-referenced by MSS from a different geographical location are better than a set of readings from a limited area; simpler readings are better than complex, because poor copyists tended to embellish rather than edit; and others.

Christians can also study these principles and learn from the experts in their application. For a more complete listing, see appendix C1.

### Chapter & verse divisions

The first divisions were made in 586 B.C. when the Pentateuch was divided into 150 groupings, or *sedarim*.

Fifty years later it was further divided into 669 small segments, grouped in 54 divisions called *parashiyoth*. Their purpose was the same as ours: it helped in locating references. The segments were used in a year-long reading cycle.

The Greeks made divisions around 250 A.D.

The Vulgate incorporated chapter and verse divisions in the OT and NT, although not the same divisions as we use today.

The Codex Vaticanus (350 A.D.) contains chapter divisions in the margins. Geisler and Nix write that "it was not until the 13th



century that these sections were changed." Geisler and Nix also state that Stephen Langton, a professor at the University of Paris, and later the Archbishop of Canterbury, divided the Bible into the modern chapter divisions (ca. 1227). 37

#### **Summary**

Serious scholars, whether Christian or not, accept the fact of the integrity of the NT. Skeptics who want to reject Christianity will have to find some other excuse or lose face in the eyes of reasonable textual critics.

Benjamin Warfield said,

If we compare the present state of the NT text with that of any other ancient writing, we must . . . declare it to be marvelously correct. Such has been the care with which the NT has been copied - a care which has doubtless grown out of true reverence for its holy words - such has been the providence of God in preserving for His church in each and every age a competently exact text of the Scriptures, that . . . the NT [is] unrivalled among ancient writings in the purity of its text as actually transmitted and kept in use. 38

### 3 The canon

#### Introduction

##### Term

The word canon comes from the Greek word *kanon*, meaning "reed." From this word comes the English word "cane." The "reed" was used as a measuring rod. Eventually it came to signify a "standard."

The "canon" of the Bible is the standard listing of 66 books. It excludes the apocrypha.

##### The task

A confused student might ask, "How did they decide which books they wanted?"

Determining the proper canon was not a matter of *selecting* the books which would be exalted to inspired status, like we might select a pair of jeans for a summer vacation. It is a question of *discovering* which books were from God and which were not.

This was not as difficult as it might have sounded. The apocrypha, books written by men, are as different from inspired books as tea is from milk.

If we believe that the Bible is inspired, we would expect that it would be easy to differentiate between works of God and works of men. This turns out to be the case.

#### Methods used

When the early church discriminated between inspired works and the works of men, they did not resort to guesswork. They followed scientific principles.

**Prophetic test.** The first and most important test was: was it sanctioned by God? Was it written by an apostle, or prepared under his guidance?

**Test of authority.** Another important criterion was: was it written with authority? Did it come with a divine "thus saith the Lord?"

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Many apocrypha are interesting books, but make no claim to this type of authority.

**Accuracy test.** Obviously, if a book contains errors, it is not inspired by God. Many apocryphal books contain blatant doctrinal and historical errors.

Examples: *the Wisdom of Solomon* includes the idea that the world was created from pre-existing matter; and *Baruch* gives the Jews' time of exile as "seven generations" rather than 70 years as in Jeremiah. Many others can be found.

**Dynamics test.** The Bible is the utterance of the Holy Spirit. It changes lives. 2 Pet. 1:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:15-17. The Apocrypha, being works of men, lack this life-giving power.

The Bible also has another subjective characteristic: honest men can sense the truth in it like bees directed by the smell of

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**The Bible is the power of God.  
Works of men are not.  
Christians can tell the difference.**

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pollen. Christ said, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." Jn. 7:17.

Christians can tell inspired books from apocryphal works on these subjective grounds. 39

##### Summary

Since the Bible is God's work, it is easy to tell it apart from men's imitations. This is exactly what the early church did when they established the canon of the 27 NT books.

Of course, we can use the same measures today that they used in the early church. When we do, we arrive at the same result.

Anyone suffering from "Apocry-phobia" has a simple cure: he can read the Apocry-

pha and see for himself. It will not be long before the student stops wondering why the early church rejected them!

### History

In addition to the objective methods listed above, there is the testimony of history to the canon.

There is evidence that the NT authors themselves were aware of the need to develop a canon. (See the subsection, "The witness of the NT," for the evidences.)

Obviously, if the apostles were aware that their writings were Scriptures, they would teach the church to accept the authentic Word of God and reject the pretenders. This they did. See 1 Thess. 4:1; 1 Jn. 4:1; and many others.

The church of the first century must have been taught a proper canon! If this is true, all we need to do is document which books the early church considered Scripture and which it didn't. History does indeed teach us the correct list of NT books.

### The gradual collection

In the first century, congregations did not have collections of all 27 books for

two reasons: there were not enough copies available, and some books were not written until fairly late in the century.

Toward the end of the first century A.D. the Pauline letters were collected and others, including Hebrews, were added to them. The four Gospels, already in wide use, were combined to form the "Four-fold Gospel" about 140-150 A.D. Acts was located at the head of the Epistles at this time. About this time Revelation was accepted as inspired.

Thus the completion of the canon was achieved by the middle of the second century, when Marcion and others began claiming authority for false works.<sup>40</sup>

### Early Christians

The early church testified in their writings as to which books were legitimate Scripture. In the case of the OT, a few have claimed that the OT Apocrypha should be included in the Bible. (See appendixes E1, E2, and E3.) But in the case of the NT, history records almost no doubt as to the fact our 27 books are the correct ones.

### The age of Clement

From 95 to 118 A.D. three great writers flourished: *Clement of Rome*, *Ignatius*, and *Polycarp*. Their quotations include all the books of the NT except Luke, Revelation, Colossians, Philemon, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude. Clement gives clear acknowledgment of Paul's inspiration.<sup>41</sup>

The omissions are not significant since the date is so early. Several of these books of the NT had been written in the same generation in which these three wrote.

### The age of Justin Martyr

*Justin Martyr* (ca. 140 A.D.) supplements the writers of Cle-

ment's time by affirming Luke, Hebrews, and other books. Other works of the time also confirm the canon, including Revelation and the General Epistles.<sup>42</sup>

It wasn't until this time that a need began to arise for an "official canon." The heretic Marcion began propagating false works, and the church needed a list of inspired books. Therefore, from 140-180 B.C. the finalization of the canon took place.

### The Muratorian Canon

About 170 A.D. the *Muratorian Canon* listed 23 books of canon and warns against forgeries. It leaves out Hebrews, James, and 1 and 2 Peter, which are not mentioned at all.

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### Scholars' verdict on the Canon

Contrary to popular belief, the case for including spurious books in the Bible is not strong: in fact, it isn't a case at all. *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* says,

There has been no question among the Christian churches since early times as to which books belong in the NT. All branches of Christendom have accepted as authoritative and inspired the current 27 books. They are accepted as authoritative because they are held to be true and immediately inspired of God.<sup>43</sup>

Westcott thinks that this was due to a break in the MS, because all of these four books had been accepted earlier. 44

### Show the Apocrypha to be false works with:

- Testimony of the NT
- Testimony of history
- Their own characteristics

#### Council of Synod

In 385 A.D. a council was held at Synod to produce an "official" canon of the NT. This does not mean that the books were selected at this time! Their job was to acknowledge which books the church had accepted as Scripture. This they did, and the last sparks of arguments ended.

For further reference on this subject, see appendixes E1, E2, and E3.

#### Manuscripts

MSS and versions are another source of information about the canon. If a papyrus dating 200 A.D. contains 1 & 2 Pet and Jude along with the Psalms, as one Bodmer papyrus does, this helps establish which books were considered canonical at that time.

For a complete history, a widely acclaimed reference work is Zahn's *Introduction to the NT*.

#### The witness of the NT

We shouldn't overlook the testimony of the NT itself on this subject. The apostles, and the men they worked with, testified concerning the canon.

#### The apostles

Of course, the NT authors stated that their works were the words of God. 1 Cor. 2:7-13; 1 Thess. 2:13; Rev. 1:2. Paul claimed the authority of an apostle (1 Cor. 9:1; 2 Cor. 12:11-12, etc.), and Peter called Paul's writings Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

Paul intended that his epistles be read in the churches. Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; 2 Thess. 2:15. He stated that they were to be accepted (1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Thess. 3:14.) John does the same thing (Rev. 1:3; 22:18-19). Peter stated that his writings were to remain in the churches after his death (2 Pet. 1:15; 3:1-2).

Jude quotes Peter as an apostle (Jude :18). In 1 Tim. 5:18, Paul quotes Lk. 10:7 as Scripture.

The apostles knew that they were inspired (Jn. 14:26; 16:13). The early church was taught this, and it was proven through signs granted to the apostles (Heb. 2:4; 2 Cor. 12:12, etc.).

#### Helpers of the apostles

1 Pet. 5:12, 1 Cor. 16:21, and Rom. 16:22 make it clear that the apostles used assistants. The author of Hebrews, Mark, and Luke wrote under the guidance of the apostles. For this reason these books are also accepted. They too were inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

### The Apocrypha

The "NT Apocrypha" were so blatantly fraudulent that they never gained a large following. One authority says, "There has been no question among the Christian churches since early times as to which books belong in the NT. All branches of Christendom have accepted as authoritative and inspired the current 27 books. They are accepted as authoritative because they are held to be true and immediately inspired of God." 43

Today, when authorities discuss "the Apocrypha," they refer to the OT Apocrypha. This is because the NT Apocrypha were never taken seriously.

The Apocrypha contain such obvious characteristics of men's writings that it is easy to tell them from Scripture. Unger lists the following problems typical of the Apocrypha.<sup>45</sup>

*Inaccuracy:* "They abound in historical and geographical inaccuracies and anachronisms."



*Doctrine:* "They teach doctrines which are false and foster practices which are at variance with inspired Scripture."

Tobit, for example, teaches that almsgiving atones for sin. Of course, only the blood of Christ does that. Acts 20:28; Col. 1:20; 1 Pet. 1:19; 1 Jn. 1:7.

*Style:* "They resort to literary types and display an artificiality of subject matter and styling out of keeping with inspired Scripture."

A Christian who is familiar with his Bible will be shocked at the artificial and clumsy style of the Apocrypha.

*Dynamics:* "They lack the distinctive elements which give genuine Scripture their divine character, such as prophetic power and poetic and religious feeling."

#### **Historical nonacceptance**

In addition to the above, we would add that the early church testified as to the spurious nature of these books. See appendix E2.

## **Conclusions**

Using sound principles, we can decide for ourselves which books God wrote. However, this is unnecessary, since the apostles clearly taught the first-century church a proper canon. This knowledge was handed down by "word of mouth" until it was formalized at the Council of Synod.

#### **Providence**

All of the above aside, we should ask ourselves: would God allow His message to be lost because no one could find out which books He inspired?

If we believe God spoke to man, it is logical to believe that He will preserve His word for man until the end of the world. Christ said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35).



## 4 Translation

### Introduction

Can the Bible be translated accurately? Scholars themselves are unanimous that it can. There is no question among experts on this matter.

Some skeptics, though, refuse to accept the Bible on the "grounds" that they believe that it cannot be accurately translated. "So much is lost in translation," they claim, "that what is left cannot truly be called the Bible."

It all sounds very impressive, and very convincing ... as long as you know absolutely nothing about translation. In this section we'll try to illustrate why experts do not raise this question that amateur "skeptics" like to emphasize.

#### Testimony of scholars

Actually it is very difficult to find commentary on whether the Bible can be translated well. This is because texts on translation *assume* that it *can* be, and go on to the question of *how* it *should* be. Most comments to this effect are only indirect.

John Beekman and John Callow are virtually unsurpassed in their experience in translating the Bible into various primitive languages among Indians in Mexico and African tribes in Ghana. Their work, "Translating the Word of God," is an authoritative work on translation. On this subject, Beekman writes,

A translation which transfers the meaning and the dynamics of the original text is to be regarded as a faithful translation. 46

Notice that Beekman was giving a *definition of accuracy*, not *proving that it is possible*. Scholars are so agreed that good, accurate translation is possible, that they do not even raise the question.

### The meaning of translation

#### The process of translation

"Can the Bible be accurately translated from Greek or Hebrew to other languages?" The answer, of course, is yes. To understand why this is so, it is first necessary to have an understanding of the concepts of language and translation.

A bit of a warning: the following material is somewhat technical. If the reader is not overly interested in the subject, he can skip the section with our best regards.

#### Different languages, same ideas

A language is nothing more than a system of symbolizing ideas and thoughts. If a person is fluent in a language, then he can express his ideas in that language.

Of course, he can also understand the expressed ideas of others. If this were not true, God's gift of speech and writing would be useless.

The same basic ideas of "sleep," of "love," and of "open" or "closed" exist in the minds of virtually all people, regardless of their mother language.

Different languages symbolize these ideas in different ways, with their own vocab-

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**Scholars are so agreed that accurate translation is possible that they do not even raise the question.**

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ulary. However, the ideas are the same across languages.

Two languages will have different words for "sleep," but they both will have words which mean "sleep." The words will not look the same, but they will have equivalent meaning.

When a person in France spreads marmalade on toast, he will use a different "symbol" (or word) when thinking of his toast than someone in Peru. But both persons will have the same thoughts in their minds. *The same fact that makes speech possible makes translation possible.*

#### **Expressing ideas: a mystery uncloaked**

Proceeding from there, we can ask: if a bilingual scholar can express himself in his "mother tongue", why couldn't he express himself in another language, if he knew it as well as his first language? If he can understand others in one language, why not in two or more?

If a bilingual person can express the thought, "Too much marmalade," in French, why couldn't he express the same thought in Spanish? The answer is that he can, as long as he knows both languages well.

Translation is simply the process of transferring ideas from one system (language) to another. When we look at it this way, it loses a lot of its mystery.

#### **Fidelity in translation**

On the subject of faithfulness in translation, Beekman continues,

[A proper] translation conveys to the reader or hearer the information that the original conveyed to its readers or hearers . . .

(1) the translation makes a natural use of the linguistic structures of the receptor language and . . .

(2) the recipients of the translation understand the message with ease. 47

In other words, a translator must be able to do two things: first, he must be able to accurately understand ideas expressed in a given language; and second, he must be able to accurately express these ideas in another language.

Beekman also says,

The question of fidelity thus comes down to the two questions:

(1) Does the translation communicate the same meaning as the original?

(2) Does it communicate it as clearly and as idiomatically as the original did?

If the answer to these questions is

## **Brief answers to commonly-asked questions**

**Q: Hasn't the Bible been changed as it has been copied and recopied down through the generations?**

**A:** No, because the copies which have been preserved are excellent, passing the 3 tests of criticism: consistency, age, and number.

**Q: Don't we lose the original meaning of the Bible when it is translated?**

**A:** No. The thoughts in the Bible can be understood perfectly in its original languages of Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic.

For this reason the Bible can be communicated well in any language, because languages were designed by God to communicate thoughts.

**Q: What should I do when someone says a verse in my Bible shouldn't be in there?**

**A:** Refer to the NASV. The NASV includes only those verses which modern scholars accept unanimously. If it's in your NASV, it belongs there.

**Q: How do the Dead Sea Scrolls relate to the Bible?**

**A:** They prove that the OT, and the Bible in general, has been accurately recopied through the centuries.

**Q: Why aren't the Apocrypha in the Bible?**

**A:** Because they fail commonly-accepted tests for inspiration (such as accuracy), because of the witness of history, and because of the witness of the NT.

"yes," then it has every right to be called a faithful translation. 48

So we see that if a translator does these things, the translation itself is accurate.

When a skeptic claims that the Bible cannot be translated, he must claim either that the Bible can't be understood, or that the Bible can't be expressed in any language other than the original. Neither position is reasonable.

#### **Understanding the Bible**

There are those who will try to trivialize the argument by claiming that the Bible cannot be understood in its original languages, even by scholars in those languages.

The Bible disagrees. The Scriptures teach that God gave us an understandable Bible: Eph. 3:4; 2 Tim. 3:15-17.

But think: why would God give us a

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**Christ commanded that the word of God be taken into all the world. He knew that the world spoke diverse languages.**

**Therefore His command was that the word of God be preached in all languages. This means that it is possible to do so.**

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Bible if He knew we wouldn't be able to understand it? If God intended to give His will to man, certainly He was capable of making it clear. He did!

#### **Communicating Scripture**

Once a translator understands the Bible, all that is left is to express it in the "receptor" language, the one it will be translated into.

Skeptics might again object, "but men can't express themselves accurately." This is not true. The ideas of the Bible were expressed accurately in Greek and Hebrew! Greek and Hebrew were not "magic" languages. If they could accommodate the Bible, then so can other languages.

This type of critic is the same kind who will argue that they don't know what you mean when you say, "It's raining today," or "look out behind you."

He might argue with you all day, but when the right time comes, he will contradict himself ... when he asks you to pass the butter. When he does, feel free to tell him you don't know what he means.

#### **Examples**

Consider Jn. 11:35. Do you understand this passage? If you were fluent in another language, could you translate it? Of course you could.

This is a simple example, but the point is the same for any passage. Thumb through your Bible and imagine translating different verses. You will see that the ideas in it can be expressed in any language.

These hypothetical arguments of the critics may sound good in theory. However, in the harsh winds of practical application, they collapse like a house of cards.

#### **See for yourself**

Finally, we remind the student that even if he decides that he cannot trust competent scholars to translate the Bible for him, he is free to do it for himself. The Greek New Testaments and Hebrew Old Testaments are available for anyone who is ambitious enough to take up the languages and translate the Bible on his own.

As with anything, we would have to advise the beginner not to bite off more than he can chew ...

#### **Conclusion**

We have tried to help remove the mystery from translation. Languages are nothing more than different systems for expressing the same thoughts.

A person fluent in two languages can easily transfer the information of one language to another. Armchair skeptics might claim the Bible cannot be translated, but experts certainly do not!

God meant for everyone to have His word (Matt. 28:18-20). He also gave us diverse languages (Gen. 11). Therefore, we know that the Bible was meant to be translated.

## Translation styles

### Two approaches

Beekman again is our authority on translation. On translation styles, he writes:

Some believe that the meaning of the original is best communicated by translating into a linguistic form which closely parallels that of the original language. Others believe that by translating into the natural form of the receptor language . . . the meaning of the original is best communicated.

The choice which the translator makes between these two approaches will determine whether his translation will be classed as literal or idiomatic.

In either case, he says, the meaning that it communicates "in a faithful translation should always represent the literal meaning of the original text. 49

In other words, translations can be too literal, making them hard to read, or too free, distorting the content. If a translation goes too far in either extreme, problems result. The accompanying chart illustrates this.

### Overly literal translations

This type of translation is undesirable because it "does not adequately communicate the message to a reader who does not

know the original language or who does not have access to commentaries or other reference works to explain it to him." 50

An interlinear translation, for example, is not used by many Christians as an everyday study Bible. This type of translation can be valuable as a reference work, but it is not suitable for general purpose use.

### "Unduly free" translations

These translations, going to the opposite extreme of style, are totally unacceptable. Beekman writes that they include

"distortions of content, with the translation clearly saying what the original neither says nor implies." 51

This results in a situation that is much worse than with a too-literal approach. Whereas a very literal translation may be difficult to understand, a liberal translation distorts the content.

He concludes, "Although the highly literal and the unduly free translations are at opposite extremes, they share the same unacceptable characteristic of failing to communicate what the original communicated." 52

### Paraphrases

Paraphrases go beyond "unduly free" translations, inserting the author's interpretations of the text so that the message is lost. These works, such as today's "The Way" and "Good News Bible," are not even to be considered translations, according to Beekman:

The word "paraphrase" is not used to designate any of the types of translation . . . [in a paraphrase] an attempt has been made to render the text in a form that is clearer to us than it was to the original readers with the result that extraneous information and unnecessary interpretations are found . . . a translation which deviates from the meaning is not a translation but a paraphrase. 53

Unacceptable translations			
Acceptable translations			
Highly literal	Modified literal	Idiomatic	Unduly free

**Correct style**  
When a translation shows proper respect for the original content and form of the languages, and

communicates these ideas in a natural way in the receptor language, it is done in the correct style.

When tension exists between accuracy and naturalness, the translator should leave the content alone and translate the Bible literally, even if this makes for awkward reading.

For example, Paul refers to anchors on three occasions in Acts 27:29-40. Some tribal cultures do not have a word for anchors because they tie their canoes to trees. Should the translator substitute for the text and write that the ship "was tied to a tree"?



Beekman says, "even though the speakers of the RL (*the receptor language, the language the Greek will be translated into - JC*) are unfamiliar with anchors, the translator is not permitted to substitute some local equivalent."<sup>54</sup>

In America, we are unfamiliar with some Palestinian metaphors such as the idea of "old wine in new bottles." But the only thing for the translator to do is to leave the Bible alone, and leave the readers to research the original idea.

#### **Excellent translations today**

What can the Christian do in the face of all these problems? In the author's opinion, most popular translations of the Bible would rank somewhere between "worthless" and "offensive" if an accurate grading scale could be found.

A few good versions are around, though. One local scholar lists four choices as "excellent." The comments below are based on his analysis.<sup>55</sup>

The *American Standard Version* is "the most faithful" to the original, emphasizing a literal style. It is quite free of doctrinal prejudices. It is not to be confused with the RSV, a revision which was much worse than the original.

Unfortunately, it is out of print and hard to come by. There isn't much demand for conservative works like the ASV.

The *New American Standard Version* is also faithful to the text, in his opinion. The major drawbacks of these two versions would be their use of large, obscure words. However, this is not a major concern.

The *King James Version* is also a faithful, literal-style translation. Its major drawback, of course, is the archaic language. (The author would point out the advantage that many reference works, like Strong's Concordance, are keyed to the KJV.)

The *New King James Version* is essentially the KJV with modernized language. It is also an excellent translation, and may be preferable to the KJV.

These four translations, the ASV, NASV, KJV, and NKJV, stand head and shoulders above all other translations for members of the Lord's church.

#### **A translation to avoid**

The New International Version (NIV) is, along with the NASV, one of the two most popular versions sold today.

Unfortunately, it is doctrinally biased. The translators went to such extremes to promote their Calvinistic beliefs that the book breaks down into a paraphrase at points.

Of course, most people are completely unaware of what is paraphrase and what is translation in the book. False beliefs can result. Christians would do well to stay away from the NIV.



# Appendixes

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## Appendix A: Definitions and abbreviations

### Definitions

**Apocrypha** - non-inspired books which were wrongly claimed to be Scripture by some. Examples would be *1 & 2 Maccabees* in OT times and *The Gospel of Peter* in NT times.

**Autograph letters** - original books of the Bible written by the apostles or other inspired men who were supervised by the apostles.

**Canon** - the list of books in the Bible, accepted as inspired. The canon of the NT includes 27 books.

**Fidelity** (in translation) - faithfulness and accuracy. Faithful translations must do two things: 1. Accurately communicate the exact meaning of the original languages of the Bible. 2. Express the meaning in a clear and natural way in the "receptor" language.

**Interpolation** - a verse added to the books of the Bible by copyists. Many interpolations "got by" the KJV scholars, but virtually all were eliminated by the NASV scholars.

**Massoretic Text** - the accepted version of the text of the Old Testament during the first century, compiled by scholars known as the Masoretes. The Bible of the Jews. The best Hebrew MSS, dating the tenth century A.D., were copied using the Massoretic Text.

**Original languages** - the languages in which the books of the Bible were written by the inspired authors. The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew and partially in Aramaic; the New Testament was written in Greek. Translations of the Bible into English, Spanish or other languages must always be translated from the original languages.

**Patristic quotations** - excerpts of Scripture recorded and preserved through the writings of Christians, usually dating from 75 to 325 A.D.

**Papyri** - Greek manuscripts written on papyrus. Many papyri are older than other types of manuscripts.

**Septuagint** - a Greek translation of the Old Testament, dated around 250 B.C. Translated by a committee of 70 scholars, which is why it is abbreviated as the LXX.

**Text** (of the Bible) - The words which make up our Bible. The actual specific words are reconstructed from many different manuscripts and other sources. When a critic or team of critics compile their research of MSS into one published edition of the Bible, the result is called a text. Various scholars in the field of textual criticism have compiled their works for the public. An example would be the Westcott-Hort text of the Bible.

**Textual evidence** (also textual attestation) - the manuscripts, versions, and quotations which form the body of evidence for the reproduction of the Bible.

**Textual criticism** - The science that undertakes to compare and classify the existing manuscripts of an ancient writing, arrange them in families or groups, and trace their interrelations. Good textual criticism gives us accurate reproductions of the original books of the Bible.

**Textual variant** (also textual variation) - a word, phrase or other small section of text which reads differently in one manuscript than another. Textual critics must determine which manuscript holds the correct reading and which one contains a mistake.

**Transmission** - the handing down of the Bible through copies (manuscripts) from generation to generation.

**Versions** - 1. Early translations of the Bible. For example, Latin and Syriac versions of the NT were first produced in the second century. 2. Modern translations of the Bible, such as the King James version of the Bible.

### Abbreviations

ASV: American Standard Version.  
 KJV: King James Version.  
 LXX: Septuagint.  
 MS: Manuscript.  
 MSS: Manuscripts.  
 MT: Massoretic Text.  
 NASV: New American Standard Version.  
 NIV: New International Version.  
 NKJV: New King James Version.  
 NT: New Testament.  
 OT: Old Testament.  
 RL: Receptor language (the one the NT is translated into from Greek.)  
 TC: Textual critic.

### Appendix B: The textual variants of the Book of Philippians

Below are listed all 16 variants of Philippians as given in *The Greek New Testament*, published by United Bible Societies.

Philippians was selected for two reasons: it is a book of the desired length for this study; and it is typical in every way of the 27 books of the New Testament. This seems to be true regarding the nature, frequency, and degree of doubt of the variations.

The translations given are based on the KJV unless otherwise stated. When the comments suggest a comparison between the NASV and the KJV, the accepted text always corresponds to the NASV and the variant to the KJV. Literal translations are the author's . . . use at your own risk!

Normally only the primary variant is given here. Occasionally secondary variants, which are much less important, are given in the apparatus of technical manuals. Students interested in further study can consult these reference works.

The judgments on the relative likelihood of the variants are those of the editors of *The Greek New Testament*. The use of the terms "low," "moderate," and "considerable" is the author's interpretation of their classification system.

Verse	Accepted Text (in boldface type) Variant (in plain type)	Relative likelihood of variant (always less than the text)
1:11	... <b>to the glory and praise of God.</b> ... to the glory and praise of <i>Christ</i> .	Low
1:14	... <b>speak the word without fear.</b> ... speak the word of <i>God</i> without fear. ... speak the word of <i>the Lord</i> without fear.	Considerable Low
2:2	... <b>the one thing minding.</b> ... the <i>same</i> thing minding. [Translations based on literal Greek]	Low
2:4	<b>Let not each one (pl.) consider his own . . .</b> Let not each <i>one (s.)</i> consider his own . . . [difference: "everyone" vs. "each one"]	Low

Verse	Accepted Text (in boldface type) Variant (in plain type)	Relative likelihood of variant (always less than the text)
2:5	Let this mind be in you ... Now let this mind be in you ...	Moderate
2:12	... not as in my presence only ... ... not <i>in</i> my presence only	Low
2:26	For he longed after you all ... For he longed to <i>see</i> you all ...	Moderate
2:30	Because for the work of Christ ... Because for the work of <i>the Lord</i> ...	Moderate
3:3	... who worship in the Spirit of God ... ... who worship <i>God in the Spirit</i> ... [A two-letter spelling difference of "God" causes the difference in meanings. Compare the NASV & KJV]	Moderate
3:12	... had already attained, either were already perfect ... ... had already attained, either <i>had been</i> <i>approved</i> or were already perfect ...	Low
3:13	... I count not myself to have ... ... I count <i>in this way</i> myself to have ...	Moderate
3:16	... let us walk by the same rule. ... let us walk by the same rule, <i>let us</i> <i>mind the same thing</i> . [Compare the NASV & KJV]	Low
3:21	... subdue all things to Himself ... ... subdue all things to <i>Himself</i> ... [Some MSS have <i>heautos</i> instead of <i>autos</i> . Both words are synonyms for "Himself", though <i>autos</i> is a more versatile word]	Low
4:3	... the rest of my fellow-workers ... ... my fellow-workers <i>and</i> the rest ... [Translations based on the NASV]	Low
4:16	... unto the need for me ... ... unto the need <i>of</i> me ... [Translations based on literal Greek. Compare the smoother renditions of the NASV, top, & the KJV, bottom]	Moderate
4:23	... be with you all. ... be with you all. <i>Amen</i> .	Low

## Appendix C1. The accepted principles of textual criticism

The following list is included for the student who is interested in the precepts textual critics follow to arrive at accurate texts of the New Testament. Like appendix B, it also helps to convince the skeptic that textual criticism is a task which is scientific and objective.

Gleason Archer lists and explains seven principles of textual criticism in his book, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*. The material below is based on his. 56 The principles are listed in the order of their importance, according to Archer.

### A. Older readings are better.

Archer states, "Normally the older a manuscript is, the less likelihood there is of deviation from the reading of the autograph."

This is true unless some other factor enters in. For example, a relatively old manuscript might be unreliable because it was a rapidly made copy. Of course, all of these principles are used with caution, and are valuable only to the extent that other things are equal.

### B. More difficult readings are better than simpler readings.

Textual critics use this principle because if a copyist changed material, he tended to simplify the text, not make it more difficult. Doctrinally, it was much easier to leave something out than to add to it.

Naturally, if it is clear that the more difficult reading is the false one, the rule is discarded. This would be the case "when the more difficult reading seems to have resulted from confusion or inadvertence on the part of the scribe . . . [or] if the reading is so difficult that it does not really make sense, or, again, if the more difficult reading expresses an idea or viewpoint quite contradictory to the sentiments expressed elsewhere in the book."

### C. Shorter readings are better than longer ones.

Sometimes material is added when copyists insert in order to clarify. Therefore a longer reading is considered more likely to be a later addition.

An exception to this is found if the shorter reading seems to be due to haplography or homoeoteleuton.

(This principle seems at first sight to be contradictory to principle B above, but it is not. Sometimes a shorter reading is more difficult, and a longer one is simpler.)

### D. A reading that explains other variants is better.

This tells us that sometimes it is easy to imagine variant A causing variant B through a misspelling or other mistake, whereas it is impossible to imagine variant B causing variant A. The explanation of this principle is very technical. For a more thorough explanation, see Archer.

### E. A variant from different geographical locations is better than one from a restricted area.

Copies from a restricted area might come from one (or a small number) of "master" copies, and might all repeat the same mistake.

However, if MSS from different locations agree on a variant, we have "independent substantiation" of that variant. If MSS have different sources, and they unite on a reading, it is all but certain that the reading is correct.

### F. A reading which conforms to the author's style and diction is preferable to one that doesn't.

Some variants are obviously man-written. When this is obvious enough for textual critics to spot, they will take this principle into consideration.

Archer writes, "Of course this criterion must be applied with caution . . . we must firmly resist any emendation that merely reflects our own personal preference or opinion on a largely subjective basis."

### G. A reading that reflects no doctrinal bias of the copyist is superior.

Archer gives an example in Isa. 1:12, where a variant in the Masoretic Text seems to be traceable to the Masoretes' bias against figures comparing God to man. They changed the text because they assumed that Isaiah would never use the figurative expression "behold My face" concerning God.



## Appendix C2: Causes of variation in the text

This appendix, like appendix C1, is relatively technical. We include them because they illustrate the fact that textual criticism is an objective science. Christians can rely on the text of their Bibles, secure in the knowledge that experts in the field have applied proper technique and judgment to its restoration. TC's classify errors found in the manuscripts as follows:

The following list is based on that given by Wallace Wartick in *New Testament Evidences*. 57

### A. Accidental.

1. Inattention. When trying to copy exactly over a long period of time, it is possible to lose one's attention. This produces errors such as repeating or omitting words or letters, substituting and transposing words, etc.
2. Dictation. If a scribe copied from a MS which was being read to him, mistakes could have been made. For example, there are words which sound the same but which are spelled differently (homophones).
3. Memory lapse. A copyist would not look back and forth to the original MS between each word; he would carry a few words in his memory at a time. If too many words were carried, errors could be made.
4. Nature of exemplar. The exemplar (the copy from which you were working) might be difficult to read. Uncials, for example, were often written without punctuation. Or, the exemplar might be faded or otherwise difficult to read.

### B. Nomenclature. Some words and parts of speech are associated with errors.

1. Haplography means single writing. This refers to the failure to write a letter or word which should be repeated. For example, "So it is, is it?" could be miswritten as, "So is it?", especially if no punctuation was used in the exemplar.
2. Dittography is the opposite of haplography. For example, in Acts 19:34, the cry of the mob about Artemis is given twice in the Codex Vaticanus.
3. Homeoteleuton means that endings are similar. If phrases end similarly from one line to the next, they might be omitted. 1 Jn. 2:23 has a phrase, "He who confesses the Son has the Father also," which was probably omitted because of this.
4. Itacism refers to letters which sound similar. Misspelling a word due to itacism could result in words which were changed. The words for "we" and "you" sound similar in Greek, for example.

### C. Intentional.

1. Doctrinal. Many times copyists were conservative in doctrine, and in their fight against heretics, would "strengthen" the text if it didn't say all they thought they needed. The addition "and fasting" in Mk. 8:29 may be an example of this.
2. Conflation. If scribes couldn't decide between two readings, they might include both. In Acts 6:8, some MSS read that Philip was "full of faith and power," and some read that he was "full of grace and power". Some copyists wrote that he was "full of grace and faith and power."
3. Harmonizing passages. Copyists had an annoying habit of trying to embellish passages to match their parallel passages. The words "to repentance" in Matt. 9:13 were probably written there by a scribe who remembered them from Lk. 5:32. The three accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts 9, 22, and 26 often reflect this, as do NT quotations of the LXX. The Byzantine "family" of MSS reflect a "fulness" of style, meaning that they often added these embellishments. Perhaps copyists of this "family" were schooled to copy this way.
4. "Correcting" the grammar. As Greek changed through the centuries, a scribe might "find" a passage he thought had a grammatical "mistake" - judging by the grammar of his own time. Even today some accuse the NT of grammatical errors. More level-headed scholars realize that we do not know everything that there is to know about koine Greek. Those who presume to be experts on the grammar of NT times assume too much.
5. Marginal notes. Sometimes early copyists made notes and comments in the text. Later copyists might assume that these notes were meant to be incorporated into the text. John 5:3b-4 is probably an example of this. Note that the NASV omits the passage. Such passages are called *interpolations*.

### An important note on interpolations

If the student is concerned about interpolations in his Bible, he should consult the NASV. It does a thorough job of documenting interpolations, following a philosophy of, "if in doubt, leave it out." If the NASV does not specifically mention a problem, you may be sure that the text is certain.

Don't get caught up in "wondering about your Bible." Very few passages are in doubt. Passages which aren't mentioned in the NASV as in doubt - in other words, practically the whole Bible - are above reproach.

We repeat this statement here because of its importance.

### Conclusion

The important thing to understand about this appendix is that it shows that errors and variations are not a serious problem. If critics understand errors, then they can find and correct them. Scholars understand these errors quite thoroughly. The result is summed up by Kenyon: "The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation, throughout the centuries." 58

## **Appendix D: Textual criticism of the Old Testament**

The science of textual criticism was covered earlier in these notes. The principles of textual criticism apply in the same way to both the NT and the OT. Where the OT differs, of course, is in its MS evidence.

### **Manuscripts**

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, with a few small sections in Aramaic. No autographs survive. The best complete manuscripts existing today come from the 9th and 10 centuries. They include: the Cambridge Codex XIII; the Aleppo Sephardic Codex; and the Codex L, in Leningrad. 59 The authoritative text of the Hebrew Bible today is the third edition of *Biblia Hebraica* (1937), based on the Codex L. Fragments exist which date much earlier.

### **The scarcity of MSS**

When new copies were made, the Jews used to destroy the older copies for fear they would fall into the wrong hands. This prevented the "desecration" of the Scriptures, but it didn't help the TC.

In addition, enemies of the Jews posed a hazard. Antiochus Ephiphanes (ca. 167 B.C.) burned all the copies he could find, and many scrolls were destroyed in the fall of Jerusalem (70 A.D.). 60

### **Versions**

Versions are much older than Hebrew MSS. A network of copies of the OT in other languages is comparable to those of the NT in age. Fragments of the LXX, for example, date 150 B.C. 61 The LXX agrees extremely well with the Massoretic Text, and NT authors quote it frequently. Codex Vaticanus contains most of the OT in Greek.

Although the evidence for the text of the OT is not as full as that of the NT, it is more than sufficient. At any rate, all doubt about its accuracy was removed in 1947.

### **The Dead Sea Scrolls**

The *Dead Sea Scrolls* were discovered in Wadi Qumran, Palestine, in 1947. They present an amazing proof of the accuracy of transmission of the Bible. Before 1947, the oldest MSS of the OT dated later than 900 B.C., whereas the Dead Sea Scrolls date ca. 100 B.C. Thus in one fell swoop a thousand years of transmission were bridged.

The problem before the discovery was, "how accurate are the tenth-century copies compared to the text that NT authors used in the first century?" The Dead Sea Scrolls gave an overwhelming answer.

Comparing the Isaiah scroll (125 B.C.) with the Massoretic Text of Isaiah (916 A.D.), Geisler and Nix say, "Of the 166 words in Isa. 53, there are only seventeen letters in question. Ten of these letters are simply a matter of spelling, which does not affect the sense. Four more letters are minor stylistic changes, such as conjunctions. The remaining three letters comprise the word 'light,' which is added in verse 11, and does not affect the meaning greatly. Furthermore, this word is supported by the LXX ... Thus, in one chapter of 166 words, there is only one word (three letters) in question after a thousand years of transmission - and this word does not significantly change the meaning of the passage." 62

F.F. Bruce says, "An incomplete scroll of Isaiah, found along with the other in the first Qumran cave ... agrees even more closely with the Massoretic Text." 63

The result is that all doubt has been removed as to the accuracy of transmission of the OT and the Bible in general.

## **Appendix E1: *The canon of the Massoretic Text***

The Massoretic Text, the Bible of the Jews of Christ's day, divides the OT into 24 books in 3 main sections, with 6 sub-groupings. This list gives an idea of what the NT means when it refers to "the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms" (Lk. 24:44).

### **The Law (*Torah*):**

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

### **The Prophets:**

#### *Former Prophets:*

Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings

#### *Latter Prophets:*

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve (our Minor Prophets)

### **The Writings (or, loosely, *the Psalms* or, even more loosely, *the Prophets*):**

#### *Poetical Books:*

Psalms, Proverbs, Job

#### *Five Rolls:*

Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, Ecclesiastes

#### *Historical Books:*

Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles



## **Appendix E2: The historical rejection of the OT Apocrypha**

At the Council of Trent (1546) the Roman Catholic Church included the Apocrypha of the Vulgate, except 1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh. It is widely acknowledged that this was a reaction to the Reformers, who rejected many Catholic doctrines which are only found in the Apocrypha.

The Apocrypha were rejected long before the Council of Trent on two grounds: they were obviously not inspired, and they had been rejected by those who were qualified to judge. In the case of the OT, a third, and overwhelming, consideration is the testimony of the NT.

Geisler and Nix give a succession of 10 testimonies of antiquity against accepting the Apocrypha:

1. Phil, Alexandrian Jewish philosopher (20 B.C. - A.D. 40), quoted the OT prolifically and even recognized the threefold division, but he never quoted from the Apocrypha as inspired.
2. Josephus (A.D. 30-100), Jewish historian, explicitly excludes the Apocrypha, numbering the books of the OT as 22. Neither does he quote these books as Scripture.  
*(Author's note - the Jews combined many of the books which we divide. The Massoretic Text combines our 39 books into 24 books. Josephus further combined the books to total 22. See appendix E1.)*
3. Jesus and the NT writers never once quote the Apocrypha although there are hundreds of quotes and references to almost all of the canonical books of the OT.  
*(Author's note - this consideration is the most important, and it is decisive.)*
4. The Jewish scholars of Jamnia (A.D. 90) did not recognize the Apocrypha.
5. No canon or council of the Christian church for the first four centuries recognized the Apocrypha as inspired.
6. Many of the great Fathers of the early church spoke out against the Apocrypha, for example, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius.
7. Jerome (340-420), the great scholar and translator of the Vulgate, rejected the Apocrypha as part of the canon. He disputed across the Mediterranean with Augustine on this point. He at first refused even to translate the Apocryphal books into Latin, but later he made a hurried translation of a few of them. After his death, and literally "over his dead body," the Apocryphal books were brought into his Latin Vulgate directly from the Old Latin Version.
8. Many Roman Catholic scholars through the Reformation period rejected the Apocrypha.
9. Luther and the Reformers rejected the canonicity of the Apocrypha.
10. Not until A.D. 1546, in a polemical action at the Counter Reformation Council of Trent, did the Apocryphal books receive full canonical status by the Roman Catholic Church. 64

### Appendix E3: A summary of the books of the OT Apocrypha

The second way to decide whether a book is inspired is to judge it by its own characteristics. This test results in the rejection of the Apocrypha.

Some students might be interested in studying the OT apocrypha, or in a review of their contents. The following outline is taken from *How We Got Our Bible* by Ralph Earle. 65 Comments by the author are in brackets.

"1 Esdras (about 150 B.C.) tells of the restoration of the Jews to Palestine after the Babylonian exile. It draws considerably from Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, but the author has added much legendary material.

"The most interesting item is the Story of the Three Guardsmen. They were debating what was the strongest thing in the world. One said, 'Wine'; another, 'the King'; the third, 'Woman and Truth.' They put these three answers under the king's pillow. When he awoke he required the three men to defend their answers. The unanimous decision was: 'Truth is greatly and supremely strong.' Because Zerubbabel had given this answer he was allowed, as a reward, to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem."

[After the council of Trent, the Catholics edited the Vulgate to designate 1 & 2 Esdras as 3 & 4 Esdras. They renamed the books of Ezra and Nehemiah 1 & 2 Esdras.]

"2 Esdras (A.D. 100) is an apocalyptic work, containing seven visions. Martin Luther was so confused by these visions that he is said to have thrown the book into the Elbe River."

[The book consists of visions of a future. It is believed to be a reaction to the destruction of Jerusalem.]

"Tobit (early 2nd century B.C.) is a short novel. Strongly Pharisaic in tone, it emphasizes the Law, clean foods, ceremonial washings, charity, fasting and prayer. It is clearly unscriptural in its statement that almsgiving atones for sin."

[Tobit, the hero, is carried into Assyrian captivity and meets tragedy there. This is remedied by his son Tobias, who is guarded by the angel Raphael.]

"Judith (about the middle of 2nd century B.C.) is also fictitious and Pharisaic. The heroine of this novel is Judith, a beautiful Jewish widow. When her city was besieged she took her maid, together with Jewish clean food, and went out to the tent of the attacking general. He was enamored of her beauty and gave her a place in his tent. Fortunately, he had imbibed too freely and sank into a drunken stupor. Judith took his sword and cut off his head. Then she and her maid left the camp, taking his head in their provision bag. It was hung on the wall of a nearby city and the leaderless Assyrian army was defeated."

[A patent ripoff of the story of Jael. It contains many anachronisms to amuse scholars.]

"Additions to Esther (about 100 B.C.). Esther stands alone among the books of the OT in having no mention of God. We are told that Esther and Mordecai fasted but not specifically that they prayed. To compensate for this lack, the Additions have long prayers attributed to these two, together with a couple of letters supposedly written by Artaxerxes."

[The additions are interspersed periodically through the book of Esther. Scholars consider that its contradictions of language and doctrine are some of the most obvious of the Apocrypha.]

"The Wisdom of Solomon (about A.D. 40) was written to keep the Jews from falling into skepticism, materialism, and idolatry. As in Proverbs, Wisdom is personified. There are many noble sentiments expressed in the book."

[Unfortunately, it reflects the philosophies of the first century, such as the creation of the world from pre-existing matter, the pre-existence of souls, and others.]

"Ecclesiasticus, or Wisdom of Sirach (about 180 B.C.), shows a high level of religious wisdom, somewhat like the canonical Book of Proverbs. It also contains much practical advice . . .

"In his sermons John Wesley quotes several times from the Book of Ecclesiasticus. It is still widely used in Anglican circles."

*[It teaches that almsgiving atones for sin.]*

"**Baruch** (about A.D. 100) represents itself as being written by Baruch, the scribe of Jeremiah, in 582 B.C. Actually, it is probably trying to interpret the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The book urges the Jews not to revolt again, but to be in submission to the emperor. In spite of this the Bar-Cochba revolution against Roman rule took place soon after, in A.D. 132-135. The sixth chapter of Baruch contains the so-called "Letter of Jeremiah", with its strong warning against idolatry - probably addressed to Jews in Alexandria, Egypt."

"Our Book of Daniel contains 12 chapters. In the first century before Christ a thirteenth chapter was added, the story of **Susanna**. She was the beautiful wife of a leading Jew in Babylon, to whose house the Jewish elders and judges frequently came. Two of these became enamored of her and tried to seduce her. When she cried out, the two elders said they had found her in the arms of a young man. She was brought to trial. Since there were two witnesses who agreed in their testimony, she was convicted and sentenced to death.

"But a young man named Daniel interrupted the proceedings and began to cross-examine the witnesses. He asked each one separately under which tree in the garden they had found Susanna with a lover. When they gave different answers they were put to death and Susanna was saved."

"**Bel and the Dragon** was added at about the same time and called chapter 14 of Daniel. Its main purpose was to show the folly of idolatry. It really contains two stories.

"In the first, King Cyrus asked Daniel why he did not worship Bel, since that deity showed his greatness by daily consuming many sheep, together with much flour and oil. So Daniel scattered ashes on the floor of the Temple where the food had been placed that evening. In the morning the king took Daniel in to show him that Bel had eaten all the food during the night. But Daniel showed the king in the ashes on the floor the footprints of the priests and their families who had entered secretly under the table. The priests were slain and the temple destroyed.

"The story of the Dragon is just as obviously legendary in character. Along with Tobit, Judith, and Susanna, these stories may be classified as purely Jewish fiction. They have little if any religious value."

"**The Song of the Three Hebrew Children** follows Dan. 3:23 in the Septuagint and the Vulgate. Borrowing heavily from Psalms 148, it is antiphonal like Psalms 136, having 32 times the refrain: 'Sing praise to Him and greatly exalt Him forever.'"

*[Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, and The Song of the Three Hebrew Children are all added to Daniel in the LXX.]*

"**The Prayer of Manasseh** was composed in Maccabean times (2nd century B.C.) as the supposed prayer of Manasseh, the wicked king of Judah. It was obviously suggested by the statement in 2 Chron. 33:19 - 'His prayer also, and how God was entreated of him . . . behold, they are written among the sayings of the seers.' Since this prayer is not found in the Bible, some scribe had to make up the deficiency!"

*[This book contains the idea that certain sinless men need no forgiveness.]*

"**1 Maccabees** (1st century B.C.) is perhaps the most valuable book in the Apocrypha. For it describes the exploits of the three Maccabean brothers - Judas, Jonathan, and Simon. Along with Josephus it is our most important source for the history of this crucial and exciting period in Jewish history.

"**2 Maccabees** (same time) is not a sequel to 1 Maccabees, but a parallel account, treating only the victories of Judas Maccabeus. It is generally thought to be more legendary than 1 Maccabees." pp. 37-41.

*[Another book, the Epistle to Jeremiah, is found after Lamentations in some Greek and Syriac MSS. In English versions it is included as the 6th chapter of Baruch. A strange passage refers to "seven generations" of exile, although Jer. 29:10 clearly contradicts this.]*

## Appendix F: A brief summary of the books of the NT Apocrypha

Halley gives the following brief review of the topics of some of the main books the NT Apocrypha. 66  
Halley's synopses of the books:

**"Gospel of Nicodemus.** Embodies "Acts of Pilate," an alleged official report of the trial of Jesus to Emperor Tiberius. Produced in the 2nd or 5th century. Purely imaginary.

**"Protevangelium of James.** Narrative from the birth of Mary to the slaughter of the Innocents. Stories that had begun to circulate in the 2nd century. Completed in the 5th century.

**"Passing of Mary.** Abounds in silly miracles, and culminates in the removal of "her spotless and precious body" to Paradise. Written in the 4th century, with the rise of Virgin worship.

**"Gospel according to the Hebrews.** Additions to the canonical Gospels, with some alleged sayings of Jesus. About A.D. 100.

**"Gospel of the Ebionites.** Compiled from the synoptic Gospels, in interest of Ebionite doctrine. Between 2nd and 4th centuries.

**"Gospel of the Egyptians.** Imaginary conversations between Jesus and Salome. Between A.D. 130 and 150. Used by the Sabellians.

**"Gospel of Peter.** Middle of 2nd century. Based on canonical Gospels. Written in interest of Anti-Jewish, Docetic doctrines.

**"Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew.** A 5th century forged translation of Matthew, abounding with the childhood miracles of Jesus.

**"Gospel of Thomas.** 2nd century. Jesus' life from 5th to 12th year. Makes Him a miracle worker to satisfy boyish whims.

**"Nativity of Mary.** A deliberate forgery of 6th century, to further worship of Virgin Mary. Stories about daily visits of angels to Mary. With Papal growth it became immensely popular.

**"Arabic Gospel of the Childhood.** 7th century. Stories of miracles during the sojourn in Egypt. Extremely fantastic.

**"Gospel of Joseph the Carpenter.** 4th century. Originated in Egypt. Devoted to the glorification of Joseph.

**"Apocalypse of Peter.** Purported visions of heaven and hell, granted to Peter. Called 'spurious' by Eusebius.

**"Acts of Paul.** Middle of 2nd century. A romance inculcating continence. Contains the supposed lost Epistle to the Corinthians.

**"Acts of Peter.** End of 2nd century. A love affair of Peter's daughter. Conflict with Simon Magus. Contains 'Quo vadis' story.

**"Acts of John.** End of 2nd century. Story of a visit to Rome. Purely imaginary. Contains a revolting picture of sensuality.

**"Acts of Andrew.** Story of Andrew persuading Maximilla to refrain from intercourse with her husband, resulting in his martyrdom.

**"Acts of Thomas.** End of 2nd century. Like Acts of Andrew, a travel-romance, in interest of abstinence from sexual intercourse.

**"Letter of Peter to James.** End of 2nd century. A violent attack on Paul. A pure fabrication in interest of the Ebionites.

**"The Epistle from Laodicea.** Professes to be the one referred to in Col. 4:16. A lot of Paul's phrases strung together.

**"Letters of Paul to Seneca, with Letters from Seneca to Paul.** A 4th century forgery. Object: either to commend Christianity to the followers of Seneca, or to commend Seneca to Christians.

"The main characteristic of these writings is that they are fiction representing itself as history, but for the most part they are so utterly absurd that their falsity is self-evident."

### Exclusion from the canon

For the reasons that these books were not included in the NT canon, see section 3, "The NT Canon."



## Appendix G: NT quotations of the OT

We can learn a lot from the way that Christ and the NT authors handled the OT. When they wanted to quote the OT, they had several choices: use the MT (the Hebrew version), the LXX (the Greek translation), use their own translations, or refer to the OT indirectly (sometimes paraphrasing it). In fact, all of these options were used in different areas, as circumstances dictated.

### Quotations from the MT

When the NT quotes the MT (e.g. Matt. 12:18-21 referring to Isa. 42:1ff), it proves to us that Scripture which has been handed down across generations is still Scripture, and that the Bible is still trustworthy today since it has been carefully preserved.

It also shows that translating from the original language is a Scriptural practice, since the NT books translate the MT into Greek for their audiences.

### Quotations from the LXX

When the NT quotes the LXX (e.g. Acts 4:25-26 quoting Ps. 2:1-2), it shows that Scripture translated into another language is still Scripture. These quotations put the Bible's stamp of approval on the process of translation. See also Lk. 4:16-21.

Below is an example of a quotation from the LXX. The MT edition, which was not the source of Peter's reference, is given to illustrate the slight difference between the original Hebrew and the Greek of the Septuagint. 67

#### Acts 4:25-26 in the NT

Why did the Gentiles rage,  
And the peoples imagine vain things?  
The kings of the earth set themselves in array,  
And the rulers were gathered together,  
Against the Lord, and against His Anointed.

#### LXX Ps. 2:1-2

Why did the Gentiles rage,  
And the peoples imagine vain things?  
The kings of the earth set themselves in array,  
And the rulers were gathered together,  
Against the Lord, and against His Anointed.

#### MT Ps. 2:1-2

Why do the *nations* rage,  
And the peoples imagine a *vain thing*?  
The kings of the earth set *themselves*,  
And the rulers *take counsel* together,  
Against the Lord, and against His Anointed.

### Translations of the NT Authors

In some places the NT authors seem to use their own translations. An example of this is found in Rom. 11:4, which quotes 1 Ki. 19:18. This would seem to teach that those who are qualified to translate are justified in doing so.

Of course, the apostles were inspired. Today one who aspires to translate the Bible - as one member of a group of scholars - must be ready to show some impressive credentials for doing so.

### Indirect references

The NT authors sometimes quoted indirectly from the OT, weaving the ideas of Scriptures into their speech. For example, compare Heb. 3:18 with Ps. 94:11, or Heb. 4:10 with Ps. 94:11 and Gen 2:2.

Today we do this all the time. It was done with 2 Tim. 2:15 in the introduction to this paper. We must be careful, though, that our audiences do not think that we are quoting directly if we are not.

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