

PRESERVING THE WORD OF GOD

My Faith

I thank God that I had parents who were Christians. And as far back as I can remember we accepted the Bible as a divine book written by God's Holy Spirit through the hands of men. Although there were a few things that I did not agree with my father and my mother about, faith in God, his Christ, and the Holy Bible was not any of them. For I am a man who loves truth no matter how unpopular it may be or how troubling it might appear. And the existence of God, the authenticity of his Christ, and the truthfulness of the Bible are too obvious for me to ever deny. Although I have a Ph.D. in the field of psychology, and have been trained in scientific research, the more I have learned the stronger my faith in the Holy Scriptures has grown. You see, every man must have faith in something. Even this latter day atheistic world of science has a fundamental faith. For faith of some kind is the foundation of all knowledge and reason. Yes, science is based on faith; faith that there are laws of nature, and that these laws can be discovered. It was Christian Europe that gave birth to modern science because of faith in the God of the Bible, the God of law and order who created the world.

Thanks to my early education and my deep faith in God and his Bible, I have always retained my Christian identity and values. Yet after leaving my parents, while I was a young man I had slowly drifted away from church involvement. Then in the midst of my doctoral training I experienced some personal crises. As a reaction to those crises I became much more committed to Christ and his Church. Having already seen so much wisdom in the Bible, and remembering such scriptures as Hebrews 4:12, which says, **“For the word of God is living, and potent, and sharper, above every two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division both of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and discernible of the thoughts and intentions of the heart,”** I decided to spend the rest of my life striving to find more of that wisdom, and to share it with other men. Most of that effort during my teaching years was spent adding Biblical principles to the secular content of the courses I taught.

Bible Translations

Back in 1950, when I was a freshman in college, I purchased a copy of the Revised Standard Version New Testament (RSV). The following year I purchased the entire RSV Bible. I much preferred the RSV to the King James Version (KJV) because it was so much easier to read and understand. Yet in later years as I began to get more acquainted with the original Greek text I began to see how loosely the RSV was translated from the Greek. It was then that I began to develop a greater appreciation for the KJV in spite of its antiquated vocabulary. Eventually, like so many others who are deeply involved with Bible study, I found myself dissatisfied to some degree with all of the translations of the Bible I have used or that I know about. Hence, I too decided to go back to its original languages. So far I have limited myself to the Greek of the New Testament. At first I simply used Berry's *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, and Strong's dictionary of the Greek words included in that edition. I later added Thayer's lexicon, and a few other books such as Wigram's *The New Englishman's Greek Concordance and Lexicon*. I also studied a Greek grammar book. Nevertheless, I found myself often spending hours on a single verse. Moreover, with a few passages I was totally frustrated attempting to find what I considered to be the correct translation.

After my retirement from college teaching my son created a web site for me so that I might make available some of what I have learned about the Bible that I believe could be of help to other men. As I began to write more essays I found myself increasingly frustrated with having to quote from the translations I was using. So, sometime in 1997 I decided, since the KJV is public domain, to simply convert its archaic words to those of more contemporary English (I have later learned that other men had already done this). In the meantime I also purchased a copy of BibleWorks software. This is a powerful program which provides tools very helpful for translation. Indeed, BibleWorks provides all of the parsing information for each Greek word in the New Testament. Learning the rules for parsing is perhaps the most difficult part of learning Greek. As I progressed in my word conversions of the KJV New Testament, I would check the wording with the Greek in BibleWorks. It was then that it became apparent to me that the KJV is far from being a literal translation. And there were many places where it, too, was loosely translated.

Hence, I decided to use BibleWorks to make my own translation. Since the American Standard Version is now also in the public domain, and I was told by most of my knowledgeable friends that it was the most accurate of them all, I decided to revise the ASV New Testament. I started with its text, then using the Greek parsing information supplied with BibleWorks I would make revisions as I judged best. It was a great challenge for a man who has never been formally trained in the Greek language. I also purchased several more books and a software tutor to help me learn the language.

During this time I began to search the Internet for material about translation. The Internet has been another great blessing in this regard. It was there that I began to learn about the differences in Bible manuscripts, and some of the controversies about the text of the Greek New Testament itself. I learned that there is division of opinion about where the authentic words

of the Greek New Testament are found. For the ASV was translated primarily from one group of Greek manuscripts, and the KJV from another. So for several weeks I stopped translating, and began researching those issues. This essay is a summary of what I found.

The Goal of this Essay

My brothers, I am neither a biologist nor a paleontologist, but I certainly have both the right and the duty to evaluate the theory of evolution—a theory that explains the origin of life in contradiction to the Bible. And remember, most of the Jews of Jesus' day were not scribes and scholars, but they certainly had both the right and the duty to evaluate his teachings in light of what they knew about the Holy Scriptures. In the same way, most of us are not Greek scholars, but we are literate, educated men who have both the right and the duty to evaluate and choose what we consider to be the true words of Holy Scripture.

This essay is only a brief overview of the issues involved in the quest for the original words of the New Testament, for many books have been written. As with any overview most of the detail was left out. I tried to take what I considered to be the essential elements of the subject without encumbering it with a lot of detail. My goal in writing this essay was to present the basic facts of the matter, and to evaluate them from my perspective as a believer in Christ so as both to inform and to strengthen the faith of my Christian brothers. Modern establishment scholars condemn any such commitment to our faith. They call it a prejudicial agenda. I have found most of them to be either unbelievers or pseudo-believers who close their minds to anything but their own glorified skepticism.

Greek New Testament Manuscripts

All documents created before the invention of printing were, of course, hand written. And before the invention of paper the Holy Scriptures were written on either papyrus or parchment. The New Testament books had their origin in the first century A.D., but many thousands of copies have been made. In addition to the original manuscripts (autographs), most of the ancient copies no longer exist. Indeed, at the beginning of the 4th century Emperor Diocletian began a great persecution against Christianity, which included an edict to destroy all of the Scriptures. The oldest surviving manuscripts are all of papyrus, a relatively inexpensive material. Papyrus is made of stalks of the papyrus plant. The stalks were cut into strips and laid out side by side in two layers with one layer perpendicular to the other. Then they were pressed together and allowed to dry. This bonded them together into a flat sheet that was convenient for writing. Sheets could be bonded to each other to form long strips for scrolls, but Christians wrote on both sides and assembled the sheets together into a codex, or book. Many scholars believe that Christians invented the book form of written material. For the codex was unknown before Christianity, and most secular writing continued to be on scrolls for several centuries even afterward. By the 4th century parchment began to be used more frequently. Parchment is far more durable than papyrus, but also much more expensive. It was usually made of stretched sheepskins or goatskins. Vellum is a higher quality parchment made of kid, lamb, or antelope skins. According to the Alands (1989 pg 77),

One sheep or goat could provide only two double folios, i.e., only four folios of the finished manuscript, the size of which would be determined by the size of the animal. A manuscript containing a group of New Testament writings in the average format (about 200-250 folios of approximately 25 X 19 cm.) required the hides of at least fifty to sixty sheep or goats.

Hence, not only did the cost involve months of labor of a skilled scribe, but also the skins of a large herd of animals. Paper did not begin to be used for Bible manuscripts until the 12th century.

The form of the text of the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament is also very different from modern writing. Edward Miller (1886 pg 105) described it as follows:

Uncial Manuscripts were originally made up of continuous writing in large letters without any space between the words or sentences. The most ancient letters were upright and square: afterwards they became narrow, or oblong, or leaning; and the writing gradually assumed a more elaborate and artistic form.

Moreover, there were no punctuation marks of any kind. Such writing is called "uncial." This form of text is simply strings of capital letters broken only at the end of each line. Cursive writing did not begin until about the 9th century. Such writing is called "minuscule." However, technical terminology for classifying manuscripts has developed which can be confusing. According to modern jargon, all manuscripts written on papyrus are called "papyrus" whether in uncial or minuscule letters. Non-papyrus manuscripts are designated by the kind of letters used: uncial or minuscule. Hence, this makes three classes of manuscripts: papyrus, uncial, and minuscule. Lectionaries are also manuscripts of the New Testament, but they are classified differently because their text is non-continuous, being segments of scripture that were used for liturgical purposes. Some lectionaries have uncial text, but most have minuscule.

The original manuscripts of the books of the Bible have all disappeared. Nevertheless, over the centuries copies continued to be made, not only to spread the word, but also to replace manuscripts as they wore away or were destroyed by enemies. Some of those old hand written documents continue to be discovered from time to time. Most of the surviving Greek New Testament manuscripts have been microfilmed and are stored at the Institute for New Testament Textual Research at the University of Munster in Germany under the direction of Kurt and Barbara Aland. However, the Alands (1989 pg 74-75) report that "...a great many manuscripts have been irretrievably lost in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through wars and their consequences, and through natural disasters." Nevertheless, they report that currently there are known to be over 5000 surviving manuscripts of the New Testament, although they vary in degrees of completeness. For example, only 60 manuscripts have all of the books of the New Testament (3 uncials and 57 minuscules), but only one still has all of the text. There are 149 that have all but the book of Revelation (2 uncials and 147 minuscules). There are 2123 manuscripts that have only the four Gospels (43 papyri 284 uncials and 1896 minuscules). There are 273 that have only Acts, Paul's letters, and the letters of James, Peter, John, and Jude (8 uncials and 265 minuscules). There are 220 that only have Paul's letters (26 papyri 56 uncials and 138 minuscules). According to the Alands, there are a total of 2361 manuscripts containing the Gospels, 792 containing Paul's letters, 287 containing Revelation, and 662 containing the remaining letters. Some manuscripts are mere fragments.

These surviving manuscripts vary in age from the second century to the 16th century, just after printing began. The most famous are the 4th century manuscripts Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus. Codex Sinaiticus contains the New Testament and most of the Old Testament as well as the epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas. Codex Vaticanus has extensive coverage of both the New Testament and the Old Testament. There are 46 other manuscripts dated before the 5th century. The oldest is a papyrus fragment about 2.5 by 3.5 inches in size dated about A.D. 125 containing a few words of John 18. There are 210 manuscripts from the 5th century to the 8th century. Hence, about 95 percent of the surviving manuscripts are no older than the 8th century. All of the earliest manuscripts, both papyrus and parchment, come from Egypt, just as the most ancient corpses and other perishable things have been found there, since its hot dry climate is less conducive to decay.

When reading about these manuscripts, it will help you to know something about how they have been coded. Each papyrus manuscript is assigned a number preceded by the letter "p". The coding of uncials began with Greek letters, and then as the list grew Roman letters were added. One uncial is coded with the first Hebrew letter, Aleph. The uncials are also assigned numbers, all beginning with a zero. Minuscules are assigned numbers only. Lectionaries are given numbers with an "l" in front of them.

Comparing the Text of the Surviving Manuscripts

One of the greatest problems of identifying the original text of the New Testament is that none of the manuscripts for the different books read exactly the same. No two of them agree with *every* word. The Spirit of God guided the hands of the authors, but not those of all the men who later copied what they wrote. In his great wisdom God requires us to struggle for truth against the many forces that work to obscure it, just as it is a never-ending struggle to remove weeds from a garden and dust from a house. Since hand copying large amounts of text is a very laborious task, without divine intervention errors of some kind are virtually unavoidable. As one copyist of long ago was quoted saying, "Three fingers hold the pen, but the whole body labors." And so, all of the manuscripts vary in their text to some degree. Nevertheless, faithful Christian men have continually sought both to prevent and to remove errors of copying. For just as men have created clever signal detection and enhancement devices to correct for modern transmission errors, so faithful men through the centuries worked to preserve the Holy Scriptures using (and continuing to use) their intelligence to correct for errors.

Hence, we can have confidence that the Scriptures have been accurately preserved. For the great majority of the surviving manuscripts contain very few differences, and most of those involve minor things such as differences in spelling and word order—things that are insignificant to the content of the information. For example, some manuscripts differ in the spelling of David's name. Some use the letter beta in its spelling, while others use the letter upsilon: ΔΑΒΙΔ versus ΔΑΥΙΔ. Another example involves how the words "Jesus" and "Christ" are paired together. Some manuscripts have "Jesus Christ," while others have "Christ Jesus." Such differences are trivial to its content. Otherwise how could the Bible be translated into languages that have a different alphabet and different rules of syntax? I think it is providential that all of the Old Testament quotations contained in the New Testament are from the Septuagint (a Greek translation made from the original Hebrew text about two centuries before Christ), thus giving God's approval for translating the Holy Scriptures into other languages, where potential for inaccuracy is much greater. For all scholars agree that differences in translations far exceed differences in manuscripts.

Reported estimates of several hundred thousand differences among all the manuscripts are very deceptive. Since David's name occurs 15 times in the gospel of Matthew, a single letter difference in the spelling of his name would be counted as 15

differences between two manuscripts of that book. Since 2361 manuscripts contain Matthew, if half of them used a different letter from the other half, then 15 times half of 2361 would produce about 17,700 so-called “differences” in Matthew alone, when in fact it involves but one letter difference in the spelling of one word.

To my knowledge an exact count and comparison of every kind of difference among the 5000 manuscripts has yet to be made. Collating and comparing so many documents is a formidable task—as the Alands have reported. But they did speak of recent efforts (reported in 1987) they have made using modern information processing techniques (pg 318):

This new tool has been developed on the corpus of the Catholic letters [those of James, Peter, John, and Jude], but in principle it is equally useful for each of the New Testament scriptures. In the present application all existing manuscripts of the Catholic letters were considered. There were 540, more than could possibly be examined by any of the traditional methods of textual criticism. This tool, or rather this method for evaluating all the manuscripts of the New Testament corpus, is based on a series of test passages. These short units have been carefully selected and are spread over the complete range of a book (or a corpus) of scripture like a net...Glancing through the list of test passages and collations also makes it obvious that the profusion of data represented cannot be managed or effectively arranged for evaluation without the aid of data processing. Taking any one manuscript through all the test passages would require a great amount of time.

The results of their analysis confirm the fact that the overall differences in the great majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts are very small. For they said (pg 321),

The picture we gain from this randomly selected test passage recurs elsewhere almost consistently: the overwhelming majority of manuscripts support *one* reading...always the same...These manuscripts are essentially mere copies, repeating the same text with only minor variation...[There is a] high degree of uniformity which characterizes [the majority of the manuscripts] (with frequently 100 percent agreement among manuscripts!)

The Few Deviant Manuscripts

Nevertheless, there is a small minority of manuscripts with some significant differences. Men have attempted to classify these deviant manuscripts into various “types” because there is such variation among them. I have no faith in such schemes because various proposed “types” have come and gone. The only thing certain is that there is a great majority of unified manuscripts, and a small minority of manuscripts that not only deviate to some extent from the majority, but also differ from themselves. Most of the deviant manuscripts come from Egypt. And they are almost always older copies that most likely owe their survival to the inferiority of their text, having been put away and not used. The two most famous ancient manuscripts, Codex Sinaiticus (coded Aleph or 01) and Codex Vaticanus (coded Beta or 03), are examples of this very thing. Dean John Burgon was a renowned 19th century Greek scholar in England (www.deanburgonsociety.org). He said (1896 pg 25),

It will be found in the end that we have been guilty of no exaggeration in characterizing B, [Aleph], and D at the outset, as three of the most corrupt copies in existence. Let not any one suppose that the age of these five MSS. [Aleph, A, B, C, D] places them upon a pedestal higher than all others. They can be proved to be wrong time and time by evidence of an earlier period than that which they can boast.

Further on he added (pg 33),

...these Codexes abound with so much licentiousness or carelessness as to suggest the inference, that they are in fact indebted for their preservation to their hopeless character. Thus it would appear that an evil reputation ensured their neglect in ancient times; and has procured that they should survive to our own, long after multitudes which were much better had perished in the master’s service.

The Alands compared the text of the unified majority of manuscripts with the text of the remnants. (The unified majority is sometimes called “Byzantine” because that region of the Roman Empire is where Paul did most of his work, and it was where the Church first grew strong.) The following is how they described their results (1989 pg 323):

This illustrates what we noticed above in our first example of test passage collations: the greatest number of manuscripts, comprising the bloc of Majority text witnesses in most instances, are always the same—they are manuscripts with a Byzantine text. The representatives of this text type are extremely homogeneous, exhibiting a high ratio of agreement among themselves. For manuscripts with the fewest Majority [text] readings, that is, most of the early manuscripts, exactly the opposite is true. Even the most closely related among them generally show agreement ratios of between 60 and 70 percent. This is clearly illustrated by the great uncials from 01 to 04

Notice what they said about the deviant manuscripts; that is, the ones “...with the fewest Majority [text] readings.” They said, “Even the most closely related among them generally show agreement ratios between 60 and 70 percent.” That means that the texts of even the most unified of those deviant documents disagree with each other about one third of the time. And

they went on to say that those manuscripts with this great disparity of text include the famous codices Sinaiticus (01) and Vaticanus (03).

Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus

The great Roman emperor Constantine may have been indirectly responsible for the paradox of those two codices: their magnificent physical quality but inferior textual quality. Constantine in the early 4th century was the Roman emperor who first legalized and supported Christianity. And as part of his support he promoted the use of the Bible. Miller (1886 pgs 81-82) describes one famous order he gave:

Constantine...gave the celebrated order to Eusebius, probably between A.D. 330 and 340, to send him fifty magnificent copies of the Holy Scriptures. They were to be written on the best vellum by skilful and accomplished penmen, and in a form well fitted for use. Orders were at the same time issued to the Governor of the province to supply the materials for the work, which was to be accomplished with all possible speed. Two carriages were placed at the disposal of Eusebius for conveying the copies to Constantinople, and he sent them off soon under the charge of a deacon. Now there are reasons for supposing that B [Vaticanus] and [Aleph or Sinaiticus] were amongst these fifty manuscripts. They are referred by the best judges to about the period of Constantine's letter, to speak generally. In Tischendorf's opinion, which is confirmed by Dr. Scrivener, the scribe of B wrote six 'conjugate leaves' of [Aleph]. These manuscripts are unrivalled for the beauty of their vellum and for their other grandeur, and are just what we should expect to find amongst such as would be supplied in obedience to an imperial command, and executed with the aid of imperial resources.

Although they are "...unrivalled for the beauty of their vellum and for their other grandeur," not so the text itself, for Miller (pgs 82-83) went on to say,

They abound in omissions, and show marks of such carelessness as would attend an order carried out with more than ordinary expedition. And even the corrector, who always followed the copyist, did his work with similar carelessness to the scribe whom he was following.

Metzger (1968 pgs 47-48) also reports the same theory of origin, saying,

...some scholars believe that these two manuscripts were originally among the fifty copies of the Scriptures which the Emperor Constantine commissioned Eusebius to have written. Indeed, T. C. Skeat of the British Museum has suggested to the present writer that codex Vaticanus was a 'reject' among the fifty copies, for it is deficient in the Eusebian canon tables, has many corrections by different scribes, and, as was mentioned above lacks the books of Maccabees apparently through an oversight.

Dean Burgon studied ancient manuscripts extensively. Indeed, his sixteen folio volumes of scripture quotations contained in the writings of the ancient Church patriarchs are housed in the British museum. He likewise judged the so-called "great uncials" including Sinaiticus and Vaticanus to be remnants of manuscripts rejected because of their textual inferiority.

Astonished at their modern popularity, he asked (1896 pg 36),

Do men indeed find it impossible to realize the notion that there must have existed such things as refuse copies in the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries as well as in the eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh? and that the Codexes which we call B [Aleph] C D may possibly, if not as I hold probably, have been of that class?

Printing the New Testament

According to historians the time from about A.D. 1300 to A.D. 1500 was a time of great ferment in Europe marking the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of modern times. Modern humanism within the cultural elite began to develop early in the 1300's (historians call that period the "renaissance"). Also during that period there were many wars and natural disasters. The most devastating of which was the great bubonic plague called the Black Death, which occurred during the years 1347 to 1352. It caused the death of 25 percent of the population of Europe. Strife and moral corruption within the Roman Catholic Church also gave birth to the Protestant Reformation, which began in the early 1500's. No doubt the development of the printing press, and the consequent greater availability of the Bible helped make it succeed. It was the Bible that revealed to Martin Luther how far the practices of the Roman Catholic system had deviated from original Christianity. This helped encourage the Protestants to revolt away from the spiritual authority of the Roman Catholic hierarchy to the Holy Scriptures, and to proclaim their slogan, "sola scriptura," which is Latin for "only scripture." Until that time Jerome's Latin Vulgate translation (A.D. 405) was the only authorized Bible of the Roman Catholic Church. And so there developed a desire for more copies of the original Greek New Testament. One of the first books ever printed was the famous Bible of Johann Gutenberg in Germany at some time around 1450. But that book was from the Latin Vulgate. It was not until 1516 that a Greek New Testament was published. It was edited by the Catholic humanist, Desiderius Erasmus. His edition included a Latin translation, and was printed in Basel, Switzerland. However, it seems the

Roman Catholic Cardinal Ximenes of Spain actually had the Greek New Testament printed two years earlier, but it was not published until 1520, after Vatican approval, when the entire Bible was published. It was called the Complutensian Polyglot, because it consisted of the Latin, Hebrew, and Aramaic texts in parallel columns with the Greek. Although different manuscripts were used, the Greek text differed very little from that of Erasmus' editions.

Erasmus relied on about a half dozen (the exact number is debated) Greek manuscripts of the New Testament for his printed edition. He also inserted a few verses translated from the Latin Vulgate. Erasmus eventually produced five editions, making corrections and changes each time. But it was not until the third edition that he inserted the controversial words in 1 John 5:7 about the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit being one. He did not have them in his first editions because they were not in the Greek manuscripts he used. Having been criticized by some because of that, he promised to include the words in the next edition, but only if a manuscript could be found containing them. Eventually a paper copy was "found." But it is almost certain that it was written for the expressed purpose of satisfying his demand. For scholars date the age of that manuscript in the same century that Erasmus did his work.

The editions of the Greek New Testament assembled by Erasmus were a good beginning. But other editions of better quality were later produced based upon more manuscripts. For example, Robert Estienne (also called Stephanus or Stephen) published 4 editions in France from 1546 to 1551. It was Stephanus who first introduced verse numbers into the text. Another well known editor was Theodore Beza (the successor of John Calvin in Geneva) who produced nine editions of a Greek New Testament from 1565 to 1598. However, his did not differ much from the text of Stephanus. It was the two brothers Bonaventure and Abraham Elzevir (publishers in the Netherlands) who popularized the expression "Textus Receptus," or "Received Text." They published seven editions of a Greek New Testament from 1624 to 1678, which was very similar to that of Stephanus and Beza. In the preface to their second edition they wrote Latin words to the effect that all errors had been corrected, and the text was the "textum ab omnibus receptum," meaning, the text received by all. This expression "Textus Receptus" became so popular that it now refers to every edition of the Greek New Testament based upon the text of the great majority of the manuscripts, which, remember, the Alands said were, "...essentially mere copies, repeating the same text with only minor variation..."

Regarding the various editions of the Textus Receptus, the scholar George Ricker Berry (1897) noted a century ago that they are, "...in the main one and the same; and [any] of them may be referred to as the *Textus Receptus*." More recently G. W. Anderson (1999) of the Trinitarian Bible Society (www.trinityfoundation.org) said, "There were approximately thirty distinct editions of the Textus Receptus made over the years. Each differs slightly from the others... These variations include spelling, accents and breathing marks, word order and other minor kinds of differences." Regarding the most famous early editions, he said, "The editions of Stephens, Beza and the Elzevirs all present substantially the same text, and the variations are not of great significance and rarely affect the sense." In the late 19th century, because of uncertainty about the exact Greek text from which came the very popular King James Version, F.H.A. Scrivener edited a new text (published posthumously in 1894) which he believed most closely underlay the KJV. Regarding Scrivener's edition, Anderson said, "There are 283 differences between the Scrivener text and the Stephanus 1550. These differences are minor, and pale into insignificance when compared with the approximately 6,000 differences—many of which are quite substantial—between the [text of the remnants] and the Textus Receptus."

Translations

The Protestant Reformation also generated a great desire for translations of the Bible into native languages. Men of that time were hungry for the Word of God. Martin Luther was the first to translate the Greek New Testament into German. He used Erasmus' edition, and published in 1522. The 14th century English priest John Wycliffe was a forerunner of the Protestant Reformation. He opposed many of the erroneous practices of the Catholic Church, and claimed that the Bible was the authority for Christian beliefs. He was the first to translate the New Testament into English (about 1382). But he translated from the Latin Vulgate, and, of course, it was in manuscript form because printing was not yet available. He was persecuted but managed to survive with the help of the Royal family, although his followers began to be severely persecuted not long after his death. William Tyndale was the first to translate the Hebrew and Greek texts into English for publication beginning in 1525 (he never completed the Old Testament). Because of opposition in England he had to go to Germany to have them printed. And then they had to be smuggled into England. He also used Erasmus' edition of the Greek New Testament. Tyndale was finally burned at the stake in Belgium for his efforts. However, not long after his martyrdom English translations were finally accepted officially in England.

In order to standardize the text of the English Bible, in 1604 King James authorized a committee of about 50 scholars to develop a new version, which has come to be known as the Authorized Version (AV) or King James Version. It was first published in 1611. For the Greek New Testament the committee relied on the Beza edition of 1598, in addition to the Stephens 1550 and 1551 editions. They also relied heavily upon the translations of William Tyndale and other editions of

the English Bible. Many other lesser known translations were made from the traditional Textus Receptus family. Examples of these are the 19th century versions of Noah Webster and Robert Young, and two more recent ones by Jay Green. In 1982 Thomas Nelson published what they called “The New King James Version.” Its New Testament version is based primarily upon the Majority Text Greek edition of Zane Hodges and Arthur Farstad (1985).

The Rise of Textual Critics

The book of Psalms begins with these words: **“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of Jehovah, and on his law he meditates day and night”** (Psalm 1:1-2). God warns against heeding the counsel of wicked men, fraternizing with sinners, and joining scoffers. Scoffers are men who sow seeds of doubt about truth and righteousness. Since the word of God is called the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17) it was to be expected when the Bible became widely available and commonly read that scoffers would arise who would promote doubts about its words. Hence, among modern scholars there has developed a movement called “Biblical Criticism” which is dominated by Bible skeptics. There are two general divisions: interpretive (higher) criticism and textual (lower) criticism. Like latter day scientists these Bible scholars are committed to a secular mentality. The fruits of interpretive criticism have led to doubts about anything divine in the Bible, including such things as the virgin birth, the historical reality of Moses, and Jesus’ resurrection. Such scholars at the recent Jesus Seminar series concluded that only about 20 percent of Jesus’ words quoted in the New Testament are authentic—a conclusion based entirely upon their own subjective judgment. Textual criticism is most relevant to this essay. Men of that field claim to seek the original words of the books of the Bible. But after reading much of their work, I agree with D. A. Thompson (1971) who said,

As Darwin’s work undermined the belief of many in the biblical doctrine of direct creation, so Westcott and Hort’s theories [19th century textual critics] have led to the disparagement of the Textus Receptus and the craze for a new Greek text and fresh translations of the Bible. As Darwin’s followers generally ignore the objections to the theory of evolution, so the new textual critics never attempt to answer the classic works of a scholar like Dean Burgon in defence of the Reformation text. As evolutionists have captured most of the key positions in the universities, colleges and schools, it has become common to exclude those who still believe in the Genesis account of creation from teaching positions, and to regard them as behind the times. Very often those who from deep conviction uphold the traditional text and the Authorized Version of the Bible, are considered a nuisance and incomprehensible cranks.

The following are some example of how these men think. Now, the epistle of 1st Peter begins this way: **“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the chosen who are sojourners of the Dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...”** The epistle of 2nd Peter begins this way: **“Simon Peter, a bondman and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received an equally precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.”** But the Alands (1989 pg 49) claim the author of one of them is a liar, saying, “1 Peter and 2 Peter were clearly written by two different authors for completely different occasions, and were brought together only by a much later church tradition.” Indeed, they scoff at the idea that the New Testament was inspired by God when they say (pg 6), “This idea of verbal inspiration (i.e., of the literal and inerrant inspiration of the text), which the orthodoxy of both Protestant traditions maintained so vigorously...” In contrast to what they believe, the apostle Paul said, **“Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for instruction, for reproof, for correction, for discipline in righteousness, so that the man of God may be qualified, having been completed for every good work”** (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Regarding the confusion in some of the deviant manuscripts about who was the first husband of Herodias, Bruce Metzger, another one of their champions, says (1993 pg 29), “It appears, therefore, that either Josephus failed to give the full name of Herodias’s first husband (Herod Philip), or Mark confused Herodias’s husband and son-in-law.” Thus he gives the words of the gospel of Mark no more credibility than the writings of the ancient Jewish historian Josephus. Another skeptic of their kind (Finegan 1974 pg 54) wrote the following: “If the author [of the original text] wrote it himself, he could have made mistakes; if he dictated it to a scribe, the latter could have made mistakes.”

These men not only deny the divinity of the New Testament, but they also have contempt for the great majority of the New Testament Greek manuscripts upon which the Textus Receptus and the KJV are based. Regarding those manuscripts, the Alands (1989) say they are “irrelevant for establishing the original text.” The Alands claim that wherever those words are found they have caused “corrosive effects” on what they call the “normal” text. Bruce Metzger frequently used the following words regarding the great majority of the New Testament Greek manuscripts: “debased,” “corrupt,” “inferior,” “disfigured.” The 19th century scholars B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort are commonly cited as being most responsible for turning the world of Bible scholars away from the traditional Textus Receptus and the KJV. Regarding the traditional Textus Receptus they judged it to be (1895 pg 134), “...appreciably impoverished in sense and force, more fitted for cursory perusal or recitation than for repeated and diligent study,” thus, casting great doubt on the reliability of the KJV.

Hort was known to have been very hostile to the Textus Receptus early in his life, for in 1851 at the age of 23 (as reported in 1896 by his son, Arthur) he wrote to a friend, saying, "I had no idea till the last few weeks of the importance of texts, having read so little Greek Testament, and dragged on with the villainous Textus Receptus ... Think of that vile Textus Receptus leaning entirely on late manuscripts; it is a blessing there are such early ones.

What Hort was referring to by "early ones" was the tiny minority of error laden ancient manuscripts that had managed to survive because they were stored away and unused; the remnants and the rejects. A few critics beginning as far back as the 17th century had found such manuscripts, and began to publish works showing how much they differed from the great majority. Some of those early critics edited Greek New Testaments of their own, and included what they call a "critical apparatus." This so called "apparatus" is intended to show how the text differs among manuscripts. The idea is to describe each difference, as well as list the manuscripts (by code) with other evidence (e.g., from ancient versions and the writings of Church patriarchs) that support each one. Commonly, this information about "variant readings" is included as a set of footnotes at the bottom of each page of the text of the New Testament edition.

The trouble is, the critical apparatuses of their editions, even the most recent ones, do not include the vast majority of the existing manuscripts. In fact, if they tried to list them all it would increase the size of their text to many volumes. So instead they lump them together with a symbol like "byz" and treat them as a single manuscript. It is like a judge being informed about witnesses. Suppose several thousand men from New England testify that the accused is innocent, while the southern men Bill, Henry, Fred, and Charles testify that he is guilty. The clever prosecutor, wanting to strengthen his very weak case, classifies the several thousand New England witnesses into a group called "yank." Then he gives the judge a list of the witnesses and their testimony as follows: against the defendant, Bill Henry Fred and Charles; for the defendant, yank. When the critics use the expression "the great mass of the manuscripts" in their critical apparatuses, they are not referring to the thousands of unified Byzantine manuscripts, but rather to (at most) a few dozen of the remnants. Kilpatrick (1978 pg 8-9) describes their deceptive claims this way:

The criterion which seems to count for most with the editors [of the UBS/NA text based on the old remnant manuscripts] is best described in their words 'the weight of the external evidence' ... Certain of the phrases used in describing external evidence are particularly significant: 'the great mass of the manuscripts' ... 'the overwhelming evidence' ... 'overwhelmingly supported' ... 'the overwhelming weight of the testimony' ... 'overwhelming testimony' ... 'the overwhelming weight of evidence.' ... To judge from appearances, while they are prepared to be swayed by the great mass of manuscripts, they are not prepared to let themselves be swayed by the great mass of Byzantine manuscripts, as they would call them. Their use of the symbol Byz, whose representatives they do not detail, enables them to avoid giving in full the long lists of those witnesses and often permits the reader to form the impression that the reading of their choice is that of the great mass of manuscripts, whereas it may sometimes be the reading only of the great mass of non-Byzantine manuscripts.

The movement to undermine faith in the traditional Textus Receptus and the KJV became more vigorous in the early 19th century both in Germany and England. Indeed, according to the Alands (1989 pg 11), a German scholar of classical literature named Karl Lachmann, "...initiated a campaign against the Textus Receptus. His slogan: 'Down with the late text of the Textus Receptus, and back to the text of the early fourth-century church!' This slogan set the goal for the generations following." That period in history was a time of intense searching for more of the ancient remnants. One of the most successful of those men was the German Constantin von Tischendorf. He discovered twenty-one of the old rejected manuscripts, but the most famous was the Codex Sinaiticus. It had been in the possession of Monks at St Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai. Tischendorf has been criticized for how he got it from them. Supposedly they were about to destroy it (if you can believe that, after over a thousand years of possession) when he got there and rescued it. But according to Elliott and Moir (1974 pg 16) many people are "...aware of the somewhat underhanded way in which Tischendorf persuaded the monks of St Catherine's to part with their manuscript." Tischendorf was also criticized for coding Codex Sinaiticus with the Hebrew letter, Aleph. It was his way of placing it at the head of the list.

Tischendorf also edited a Greek New Testament of his own based heavily upon his beloved Codex Sinaiticus. But it was the work of Westcott and Hort that gained the most attention. For those two men could be called the Charles Darwins of Biblical Criticism. They developed an elaborate theory that explained to the satisfaction of the scholarly world why the great majority of Greek New Testament manuscripts that the Christian world relied on were "corrupted." Hence, as Borland (1987 pg 46) wrote, "With minor changes it was adopted by the scholarly world and has been *the* guiding theory for the past century." In brief, they first grouped the manuscripts into "types." Although they did not originate this idea, it enabled them to compensate for the overwhelming number of manuscripts that testified against the few they preferred. Thus, they reduced the several thousand they opposed to but one type, which they said was based on a single 4th century recension. Supposedly, this (in their words) "smooth" but "disfigured" version was chosen by church leaders at Antioch in Syria who then foisted it upon the majority of the churches, hence, explaining why it became dominant. This claim of an official 4th

century recension of the text was what made their theory popular. It was a bold way of explaining away the vast majority of almost identical manuscripts, which the Christian world had accepted as having come from the autographs.

But as with the theory of evolution, they offered no proof, only speculation, and no proof has ever been found. Indeed, only a few years after they announced their theory, Dean Burgon (1896 pg 2) wrote these words: “The argument advanced by Dr. Hort that the Traditional Text was a new Text formed by successive recensions has been refuted upon examination of the verdict of the Fathers in the first four centuries, and of the early Syriac and Latin Versions.” Yet the enemies of the Textus Receptus and the KJV still cling to the idea that the great majority of Greek New Testament manuscripts are the result of a 4th century recension imposed upon the Christian world. Like supporters of biological evolution, they have contrived lots of complex theories, and made many bold but unsubstantiated claims. Of course, they weave many facts among their theories to make them more persuasive. But, dear brothers, my advice is to filter out the facts, then reason for yourselves what they mean.

To promote their theory Westcott and Holt made other bold claims, and even the Alands (1989 pg 18) were critical of some of them. For they said:

...neither Westcott nor Holt ever actually collated a single manuscript but worked completely from published material, i.e., critical editions (viz., Tischendorf). This makes the claim in the first sentence of their appendix a trifle puzzling, that “the text of this edition of the New Testament has been formed exclusively on documentary evidence, no account being taken of any printed edition.

Nevertheless, just as Darwin turned the hearts of most scientists away from belief in the Bible description of creation, so also Westcott and Hort turned the hearts of most Bible scholars away from the great majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts, and the KJV based upon them. Westcott and Hort also published their own edition of the Greek New

Testament based heavily upon the previously ignored 4th century manuscript Codex Vaticanus. Ironically, neither the Greek New Testament edition of those two British scholars, nor the one by the German scholar Tischendorf prevailed. It was their combination by another German, Eberhard Nestle that eventually became widely accepted. Since Tischendorf was partial to Codex Sinaiticus, and Westcott and Hort were partial to Codex Vaticanus, Nestle developed an edition composed of both. He chose every text that the editions of Westcott/Hort and Tischendorf agreed upon, and where they differed he consulted another text for the deciding vote. Thus he published in 1898 a hybrid text that satisfied the world of modern Bible scholars; men who now scoff at the great number of New Testament manuscripts from which the Textus Receptus and the KJV were made. Nestle’s son, Erwin, later added a more detailed “critical apparatus.” In 1950 Kurt Aland became associated with the work. It now has his name also on the title page, and is commonly referred to as the Nestle-Aland text. That text is now in its 27th edition.

In 1955 the American Bible Society and several other Bible societies began cooperating on an edition of the Greek New Testament that was to be, in their words (Aland et al. 1993 viii), “specifically adapted to the requirements of Bible translators.” Reporting about the first edition, the Alands (1989 pg 69) said,

In 1966 there was published simultaneously in New York by the American Bible Society, in London by the British and Foreign Bible Society, in Edinburgh by the National Bible Society of Scotland, in Amsterdam by the Netherlands Bible Society, and in Stuttgart by the Wurttemberg Bible Society, *The Greek New Testament*, edited by Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Bruce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren.

It is now called the Greek New Testament of the United Bible Societies, which they proudly abbreviate “GNT.” Its Greek text is identical to that of the Nestle-Aland. The two editions differ only in the format and composition of the “apparatus.” And now this text of the Greek New Testament created by Bible critics has, according to the Alands (1989 pg 20), “...achieved a position of absolute preeminence comparable only to that of the Textus Receptus in earlier centuries...” It has become, in the words of Kilpatrick (1978), “A Textus Receptus Redivivus.” I call it the “Modern Textus Receptus,” for it is the text which is now “received by all,” or almost all.

The Reasoning of the Critics

Robertson and Pierpont (1991 pg xx) provide a good summary of the diverse approaches taken by different critics, saying they have,

...a preference for early witnesses (as espoused by Lachmann, Tregelles or Aland); a partiality for a favorite document (as demonstrated by Tischendorf or Westcott and Hort); a “reasoned” eclectic approach (as advocated by Metzger and Fee); and a “rigorous” eclectic approach (as argued for by Kilpatrick and Elliott).

Then they give their evaluation of these positions:

The weakness of each of these positions is the *subjective* preference for either a specific manuscript and its textual allies, for a small group of early manuscripts, and/or for certain types of “internal evidence” [meaning, judgment based on rules they created] regarding a reading’s length, difficulty, style, or contextual considerations.

The “rules” these modern critics created for themselves were obviously crafted to favor the deviant manuscripts. And the reasoning they use to justify them disparages both the original text of the New Testament and the scribes of old who labored to maintain and perpetuate its integrity. The following words illustrate the kind of rationale they use to justify their “rules” for selection (Metzger 1991 pg 13):

The characteristic of most scribal emendations is their superficiality, often combining “the appearance of improvement with the absence of its reality” [a quotation from Westcott and Hort]...The scribe may have omitted material that was deemed to be (i) superfluous, (ii) harsh, or (iii) contrary to pious belief, liturgical usage, or ascetical practice...scribes would frequently bring divergent passages into harmony with one another, in parallel passages (whether quotations from the Old Testament or different accounts or in the Gospels of the same event or narrative)...Scribes would sometimes (a) Replace an unfamiliar word with a more familiar synonym; (b) Alter a less refined grammatical form or less elegant lexical expression...or (c) Add pronouns, conjunctions, and expletives to make a smoother text.

That deliberate alterations of the text did occur in ancient times is well documented. But it was rare, and faithful Christians were very vigilant to reject such attacks, as the writings of the Church patriarchs testifies. Nevertheless, the modern critics appear to have assumed that most of the manuscript differences between their favorite few and the great majority were deliberately created by scribes who desired to improve the original text. Hence, by their logic any of the manuscripts with better text must have resulted from later alterations. I can come to no other conclusion, having read much of the committee’s verse by verse reasoning which is presented in *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. It is filled with unverified accusations of scribal falsification.

Kilpatrick (1978 pg 6) lists some of their “rules” as follows (he paraphrases the last two):

the more difficult reading is to be preferred
in general the shorter reading is to be preferred
the reading which avoids harmonization or assimilation [textual agreement] is to be preferred
the reading of inferior language or style is to be preferred

Such judgments by those critics expose them for what they are: scoffers who believe that the original text of the New Testament was poorly written, and that later copyists deceitfully altered the wording to improve it. Dear brothers, this way of thinking prevails throughout the academic world of Biblical Criticism.

Some Differences in the Text

There are many important differences between the traditional Textus Receptus and the modern one preferred by the critics. Below are four specific examples. The first concerns two men listed in Matthew’s genealogy of Christ. The old remnant manuscripts favored by the modern textual critics name the wrong men; even the critics admit this. Yet they still insist that is what Matthew originally wrote. James Borland (1987 pg 41-52) gives a good description of this difference, which demonstrates how committed those modern critics are to the belief that the New Testament was a human book containing errors from the beginning, and was never divine. He said,

One example of current import is found in the readings of Matthew 1:7, 10. These texts contain part of the kingly genealogy of Christ. Many conservative commentators seem almost oblivious to the problem. But scholars who do not adhere to the doctrine of inerrancy do not pass up a chance to point out what they consider to be a fallacy in Matthew’s autograph. The majority of all MSS read Asa and Amon, easily recognized as two kings of Judah who were ancestors of Christ. Matthew’s point is to demonstrate our Lord’s royal lineage. But the United Bible Societies’ text [and the Nestle/Aland] instead chooses alternative readings based on the ‘better’ [as they judge] manuscripts as well as some very subjective internal considerations. They substitute for the kings Asa and Amon the names ‘Asaph’ and ‘Amos,’ a psalmist and a prophet respectively. They reason that ‘the evangelist may have derived material for the genealogy, not from the Old Testament directly, but from subsequent genealogical lists, in which the erroneous spelling occurred.’ Prior to that confident assertion, Bruce Metzger and others, claimed that ‘most scholars are impressed by the overwhelming weight of textual evidence supporting *Asaph*.’ What is the composition of this ‘overwhelming weight of textual evidence’ in favor of the Asaph blunder? [evidence given here] In summary, barely more than a dozen Greek MSS carry the Asaph reading, followed by a few Old Latin MSS, the Coptic and several minor versions. On the other hand, the expected Asa is found in literally hundreds of Greek witnesses...[dating] from the fifth through the tenth centuries [Borland presents much detail here] [as well as] a number of Old Latin MSS...The entire Vulgate...as are the Curetonian, Sinaitic, Peshitta, Harclean, and Palestinian versions of the Syriac. To these may be added both Epephanus and Augustine of the first quarter of the fifth Century. Only a preconceived notion as to which witnesses are best would cause anyone to deny that the truly ‘overwhelming weight of textual evidence’ favors the traditional reading of Asa...The evidence for Amon versus Amos in Matthew 1:10 is somewhat similar...Lest one thinks this all amounts to academic irrelevance, we should be aware that the RSV places the prophet’s name Amos in the text of Matthew 1:10 with the note ‘other authorities read Amon.’ The

Catholic New American Bible (1970) reads Amos without explanation. The ASV, the RSV and the NASB each read Asa for Matthew 1:7 but append a note indicating that the Greek reads Asaph. But where does the reading for Asa come from if not also the Greek?

Another example of their preference for the old remnant manuscripts even if it results in a Biblical contradiction concerns the story of the girl who danced before Herod. In both Matthew and Mark, the traditional Textus Receptus calls her Herodias's daughter. Codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus plus a few others call her Herodias's daughter in Matthew, but Herod's daughter in Mark—a clear contradiction between the two Gospels. Yet rather than doubt their favorite manuscripts, these modern critics accept the reading in Mark that contradicts the one in Matthew, saying (Metzger 1994 pg 77), “A majority of the Committee [of the UBS/NA text] decided...[it] must be adopted on the strength of its external attestation”; meaning, because Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus plus a few others have it that way.

I found the following comments by Borland (1987 pgs 49-50) to be very insightful about the mentality of those modern skeptics:

In other words, the prevalent textual methodology can be and is being used to deny the inerrancy of the original autographs. Nearly a century ago George Salmon astutely observed that Westcott and Hort has attributed to the gospel writers ‘erroneous statements which their predecessors had regarded as copyists’ blunders.’ Salmon noted that ‘there was indeed but little rhetorical exaggeration in the statement that the canon of these editors was that Codex B was infallible and the Evangelists were not. Nay, it seems as if Hort regarded it as a note of genuineness if a reading implies error on the part of the sacred writer.’

Another difference showing their extreme prejudice for the old remnants concerns Matthew 5:22. **“But I say to you, that every man who is angry at his brother without cause will be liable to the judgment...”** There is one Greek word (εικη) in this verse which means, “without cause.” The traditional Textus Receptus has it, but the modern one does not. Evidence against the word is one papyrus (p64), Sinaiticus (Aleph), Vaticanus (Beta), one minuscule (#1292), the Latin Vulgate version, an Ethiopic version, and several Church patriarchs. Evidence for the word includes hundreds of other manuscripts, plus all of the other ancient versions and Church patriarchs. Bruce Metzger, speaking for the Committee of the UBS/NA text, gave their rationale for excluding the word εικη. (Dear brothers, judge for yourselves how scientifically objective is their thinking.) Metzger (1994 pg 11) said, “Although the reading with εικη is widespread from the second century onwards, it is much more likely that the word was added by copyists in order to soften the rigor of the precept, than omitted as unnecessary.”

What kind of logic would lead these modern skeptics to reject such overwhelming evidence that supports the word? In two sentences Gary Zeolla (www.dtl.org) summarizes their thinking very well, saying,

This variant demonstrates a “formula” often used by the CT [critical text] people: Aleph + Beta + very little other manuscript evidence + their own subjective “rules” = the best reading. This pattern is followed even if the vast majority of manuscript evidence and the known historic facts are on the other side.

Perhaps the greatest single difference between the two texts is the ending of the gospel of Mark. This is another good illustration of their total commitment to the old deviant manuscripts. Their modern Textus Receptus ends the book at verse eight which says, **“And having come out, they fled from the sepulcher, and trembling and astonishment seized them. And they said nothing to any man, for they were afraid.”** The Alands (1989 pg 292) admit that most of the evidence is for the longer ending of the traditional Textus Receptus, but unwilling to doubt Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, they cannot accept it. Instead, they imagine that everything after the words “for they were afraid” is the result of a conspiracy by ancient Christians to conceal the awkward original ending:

It is true that the longer ending of Mark 16:9-20 is found in 99 percent of the Greek manuscripts as well as the rest of the tradition, enjoying over a period of centuries practically an official ecclesiastical sanction as a genuine part of the gospel of Mark. But in Codex Vaticanus (B) as well as in Codex Sinaiticus [Aleph] the gospel of Mark ends at Mark 16:8, as it did in numerous manuscripts according to the statements of Eusebius of Caesarea and Jerome [who nevertheless included it in his Latin Vulgate translation]... The widespread practice in the early Church of concluding the gospel of Mark at 16:8 was suppressed by Church tradition, but it could not be eradicated.

In order for you to see more of how the Greek texts differ, I made two comparisons (selecting only the first half of the gospel of Matthew). One comparison was between the edition of Stephanus published in 1550, and the edition of Robinson and Pierpont published in 1991. Both of those editions are based upon the great majority of the surviving manuscripts, and are examples of the traditional Textus Receptus. The other comparison was between the United Bible Societies/Nestle Aland edition published in 1993 (the modern Textus Receptus) and the edition of Robinson and Pierpont. To see the comparison between two editions of the traditional Textus Receptus click here ([both traditional](#)). To see the comparison between a traditional Textus Receptus and the modern one of the Bible critics click here ([traditional versus modern](#)).

English Translations Based on the Modern Textus Receptus

The first English translation based on the modern Textus Receptus of the textual critics was the English Revised Version published in 1881. The American counterpart of this version was the American Standard Version published in 1901. Other translations followed, and now the great majority of English translations rely primarily on that Greek text. Many of them contain footnotes telling of different manuscript variations. They sometimes refer to these as “witnesses” or “authorities.” Some of their footnotes are very misleading, giving judgments like, “the best manuscripts” or “the most reliable manuscripts.” In almost every case what they call “best” or “most reliable” are the old remnants that are anything but “best” and “most reliable.” Hence, beware of such footnotes in translations about the various manuscripts. The great majority of manuscripts differ so little and so insignificantly that such things are irrelevant in translations. To list such trivial differences in footnotes of translations would be to engage in the kind of thing that Paul condemned when he said, **“But avoid foolish questionings, and genealogies, and contentions, and legal fightings, for they are useless and vain”** (Titus 3:9). The New King James Version does include notes where the USB/NA text differs with the Majority Text that its translators used. Such information can be useful for advanced students to gain some acquaintance with how much the modern Textus Receptus differs with it.

New Greek Texts from the Majority of the Manuscripts

Since there are some variations in the editions of the traditional Textus Receptus, and many more manuscripts have been discovered since they were published, efforts have continued in the quest for the exact original text from this great collection of common manuscripts. The most recent efforts have been *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* by Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, and *The New Testament in the Original Greek According to the Byzantine/Majority Textform* by Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont. Both of those editions utilized the fruits of Hermann von Soden. He was a German pastor a century ago who, with the financial support of a wealthy female patron, tackled the formidable task of collating the mass of Greek manuscripts. According to the Alands (1989 pg 22),

...von Soden was able to enlist the efforts of about forty colleagues in all for the task of collating manuscripts in the libraries of Europe and other lands. Under such favorable circumstances the four-volume work appeared in 1902-1913...Part I is a vast quarry of information that is unavailable elsewhere. Von Soden’s studies in the Koine [common] text constitute pioneering research...The text volume with its wealth of variant readings is also a useful source of information...

Hence, instead of relying upon a relatively small representative sample of the manuscripts as did each of the various earlier editions of the Textus Receptus, Hodges and Farstad, and Robinson and Pierpont were able to refer to a great many of the surviving manuscripts in their editorial work. And so, although closely related to the words of the earlier Textus Receptus editions, their editions are referred to as “Majority Text,” or, as Robinson and Pierpont prefer, “Majority Textform.” Nevertheless, they are part of the traditional Textus Receptus family, all being very similar because they are based upon the great majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts in contrast to the remnants containing a more diversified text.

Conclusion

This essay is the result of months of research. I began somewhat biased in favor of the modern Textus Receptus. Yet, the more I read and studied, the more convinced I have become about the genuineness of the majority of the New Testament manuscripts. Regarding the Old Testament, I have not done much research about those manuscripts. But what I found revealed to me that there is dispute about some Old Testament text as well. As earlier stated, this essay is only a brief overview of the issues involved in the search for the original words of the New Testament. My goal was both to inform you of where best to look for them, and to strengthen your faith about them. Such a search was not necessary before the rise of the modern textual critics. But now Bibles are filled with supplemental words expressing doubts about much of the Word of God. Yet, it can all be summarized in these few words expressed by Borland (1987 pg 16-17):

Strange as it may appear, it is undeniably true, that the whole of the controversy may be reduced to the following narrow issue: Does the truth of the Text of Scripture dwell with the vast multitude of copies, uncial and cursive, concerning which nothing is more remarkable than the marvelous agreement which subsists between them? Or is it rather to be supposed that the truth abides exclusively with a very little handful of manuscripts, which at once differ from the great bulk of the witnesses, and—strange to say—also amongst themselves?

Dear brothers, there is no doubt in my mind that God has ultimate control over the affairs of the world, for our Lord said, **“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall on the ground independent of your Father”** (Matthew 10:29). And although God has allowed men to alter their practice of Christianity from its original form, he also ensured that his New Testament would be accurately preserved, so that true Christianity could always exist. For such systems as the Catholic Church were not derived from Holy Scripture, nor are they supported by it. Indeed, it was the

testimony of the New Testament that revealed to faithful Christian men how much the dominant Catholic Church had deviated from true Christianity, thus arousing the Protestant Reformation. And it was several centuries later that textual critics dredged up some long discarded manuscripts in an effort to discredit the great majority. Jesus said, **“From their fruits ye will know them”** (Matthew 7:16). And the fruit of modern Biblical Criticism has not strengthened faith in the Holy Scriptures, but instead has cast doubt upon them.

After studying much of what has been written by both sides of the text issue, I have chosen to trust the Greek New Testament edited by Robinson and Pierpont as best. I have a copy of that New Testament. And in it, following the title page, the editors make a statement of acknowledgements. That statement begins with the words, “For the Glory of God,” and it ends with the words, “All honor and glory to the Lord Jesus Christ!” I also have a copy of the 4th edition of the Greek New Testament of the United Bible Societies edited by Aland et al. I found no statement by those editors of even a recognition of God, much less words of praise for him and his Christ. This kind of evidence may be insignificant to unbelievers, but when it concerns judges of the Holy Scriptures, it is very significant to me.

A more scholarly defense of the Byzantine textform can be seen in the article entitled “The Case for the Byzantine Textform: A New Approach to the ‘Majority Text’ Theory” by professor Robinson. I included a file of that article with this essay. It requires a web browser, like MS Internet Explorer, to view.

This life is a time of testing for our souls; the results of which will determine our eternal destiny. Therefore, God has so created this world that many things appear uncertain and ambiguous to us, including his own very existence. And so in this life we can only know of him by faith. Men who love truth and righteousness, and who seek for the true God, will—in faith—eventually be able to discover him. In the same way, there is some uncertainty and ambiguity about his Holy Scriptures—not only the original inspired words themselves, but also their proper translation into other languages, and their correct interpretation. And in the same way, men who love truth and righteousness, and who seek for the genuine words of God, and their meaning, will—in faith—eventually be able to discover them. I hope I have helped you in your quest.

“Now to the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, alone wise, to God is honor and glory into the ages of the ages. Truly” (1 Timothy 1:17).

Note: All Scripture verses quoted in this essay are from the Conservative Version of the Bible. You can find the Conservative Version, and other of my works at www.stillvoices.org.

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