



Type: Book Chapter

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Source: *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy*

Editor(s): Noel B. Reynolds

Published: Provo, UT; Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2005

Page(s): 163-204



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THE CORRUPTION OF SCRIPTURE IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

John Gee

Latter-day Saints are familiar with the concept of the corruption of scripture coming from a passage in the Book of Mormon that discusses the removal “from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious” (1 Nephi 13:26). Latter-day Saint discussions of the removal of plain and precious things from scripture can benefit from clarity of the processes of removal and their historical setting. One early discussion by W. W. Phelps in 1832, for example, claims that “It will be seen . . . that the most plain parts of the New Testament, have been taken from it by the Mother of Harlots . . . from the year A.D. 460 to 1400.”¹ While the image of medieval monks making changes to the text of scripture might be true in certain isolated instances, the changes came long before. We neither need to nor should look later than the second century for these changes. By the early second century, Christianity had

1. W. W. Phelps, *Evening and Morning Star* 1 (June 1832): 3.

fragmented into dozens of splinter groups² with each group charging that the other possessed both forged and corrupted texts.³ I shall limit this discussion to documenting changes and corruptions of scripture during the second century under three headings: (1) Christian groups of the second century accuse each other of corrupting scripture, providing both the class of errors and the motives for such changes. (2) No substantial biblical manuscript antedates these charges of

2. Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 1.1 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (hereafter ANF), ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1885; reprint, Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 3:633–64; Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 1.28.1, 29.1 (ANF 1:353) describes them as popping up “like mushrooms”; more poignantly, Mārūtā, the bishop of Maipherqaṭ says that there was only one ear of wheat left in all the tares, see Mārūtā, *Against the Canons from the Synod of 318*, 5, in Arthur Vööbus, *The Canons Ascribed to Mārūtā of Maipherqaṭ and Related Sources*, 2 vols., CSCO vol. 439–40 (Louvain: Peeters, 1982), 1:22. See also Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1967), 34; W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 201–3; Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979), 7–8.

3. Acts 20:30 (Paul prophesying the coming corruption of the teachings; cf. Kent P. Jackson, “Watch and Remember’: The New Testament and the Great Apostasy,” in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also By Faith*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990], 1:85); 2 Peter 3:15–16 (showing the process starting in apostolic times); Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 1.73 (accusing the Jews); Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 1.7.3, 8.1, 9.4, 18.1, 19.1, 20.1–2, 22.1–2, 26.2, 27.2, 4; 5.30.1 (ANF 1:558–59) (accusing various groups); 3.2.1 (ANF 1:415) (for the counter charges); Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 1.17 (ANF 3:677) (discussing well-intentioned but nonetheless misguided tampering with Paul); Tertullian, *Contra Marcionem* 14.2.2–5 (ANF 3:347) (charging Marcion with corrupting Luke); Tertullian, *De*

corruption. (3) Those scriptural passages that are quoted by Christian authors at the beginning of the second century are different from those preserved in the scriptural canon.

A wide variety of types of changes will be discussed here under the heading of corruption that can be distinguished in theory but often elide in practice. Textual corruption is the deliberate or unintentional changing of the text, either through the expansion, deletion, or alteration of the passages. Corruption can also occur through faulty interpretation (either exegesis or translation), and manipulation of the canon (which books are considered scripture).

Accusations of Corruption

Though the number of Christian authors from the first two centuries of Christianity is limited, a close look at the few Christian authors of the first and second centuries shows that they were aware of changes in scripture.

Praescriptione Haereticorum 16–19, 38–40 (ANF 3:251–52, 261–63) (the charges run both ways); Mārūtā, *Against the Canons from the Synod of 318*, 5, in Vööbus, *Canons Ascribed to Mārūtā of Maipherqaṭ*, 1:22–23, 25–26 (with a long list of groups); Mārūtā, *The Seventy Three Canons* 1, in Vööbus, *Canons Ascribed to Mārūtā of Maipherqaṭ*, 1:57–58, cf. 135; *The Apocalypse of Peter* VII, 76, 24–78, 31 (no specific sect specified); *Apocalypse of Adam* V, 77, 18–82, 25 lists fourteen different views of Christ, thirteen of which—including the “orthodox” one—are labeled as being in error; see also *New Testament Abstracts* 1 (May, 1956): 31–34; Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, 20–21. Though from the fourth century, Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30.13.1, 14.1; 42.9.1–2 accuses the second century figures Ebion, Cerinthus, Carpocrates, and Marcion of corrupting the text of the Gospel of Matthew; Epiphanius, however, is not necessarily a reliable source. See *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, trans. Frank Williams (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 1:129–30, 278–79.

Peter noted that one of the processes of corruption, misinterpretation, had started in apostolic times: “And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:15–16).

The most sacred teachings of Jesus were not committed to writing (3 John 1:13–14) but reserved for a close few.⁴ Indicative of this are the fifty-three parables of Jesus preserved in the Gospels, of which only three have interpretations, all of the interpretations being given behind closed doors to a small, select group.⁵ Those so privileged to receive this hidden treasure of knowledge prized it most highly⁶ but shared it with few if any others.⁷ The situation is most poignantly explained by one of John’s disciples, Ignatius of Antioch (d. ca. 110)⁸ as he was lead off to his death:

4. Matthew 13:11–16; 19:11; Mark 4:2, 33; Luke 18:34; 22:67; John 3:12; 6:60–61; 8:43; 10:27; 16:12, 18, 25; Acts 10:41. See also William J. Hamblin, “Aspects of an Early Christian Initiation Ritual,” in Lundquist and Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also By Faith*, 1:204–7.

5. This was noted in ancient times in the *Apocryphon of James I*, 8, 4–10 listing some previously unknown parables as well.

6. Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 1.20–22 (ANF 3:252–53).

7. 1 Corinthians 3:1–2; 2 Corinthians 12:4; Colossians 1:26; Hebrews 5:11; 2 John 1:12. See also Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, 17–18; Hamblin, “Early Christian Initiation Ritual,” 208–10.

8. *Ignatius the Martyr*, in J. B. Lightfoot, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 2.1:29–30.

Could I not write you the celestial matters? I fear, however, lest I might set harm before you, since you are but babes; so pardon me, lest, if you are unable to make room, you be suffocated; for although I am bound and am able to comprehend the celestial matters and the angelic orders and the principle revelations,⁹ seen and unseen, nonetheless I am not yet a disciple.¹⁰

Oral communication, or lack thereof, however, is only part of the problem; even the written texts could be corrupted.

Justin Martyr, a Christian philosopher who lived in the middle of the second century,¹¹ levels the following accusation against the Jews: “From the ninety-fifth (ninety-sixth) Psalm they have taken away this short saying of the words of David:

9. Greek *tas systaseis tas archontikas*. Unless specified, all translations are the author’s own. Though Ignatius does use the word *systasis* in other senses (see Ignatius, *To the Romans*, 5; see ANF 1:75–76), here it seems to be used in a more technical sense of oracular inquiry, the equivalent of the Demotic *ph-ntr*; see Janet H. Johnson, “Louvre E 3229: A Demotic Magical Text,” *Enchoria* 7 (1977): 90–91; Robert K. Ritner, “Gleanings from Magical Texts,” *Enchoria* 14 (1986): 95; Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, SAOC 54 (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1993), 214–20.

10. Ignatius, *To the Trallians* 5 (see ANF 1:68). This list of characteristics of the secret teachings makes its way into the magic tradition eventually to end up in an English fairy tale as the content of the magician’s “one big book bound in black calf and clasped with iron, and with iron corners;” see “The Master and his Pupil,” in Joseph Jacobs, comp., *English Fairy Tales*, 3rd ed. rev. (London: Nutt; 1898, reprint New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 74–77. These matters are also the principle subject of the books of 1 Jeu and 2 Jeu as well as much of the Jewish Hekalot literature.

11. For more information, see Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (Utrecht-Brussels: Spectrum, 1950), 1:196–219.

‘From the wood.’ For when the passage said, ‘Tell ye among the nations, the Lord hath reigned from the wood,’ they have left, ‘Tell ye among the nations, the Lord hath reigned.’” Justin’s antagonist, Trypho downplays the accusation by saying, “Whether [or not] the rulers of the people have erased any portion of the Scriptures, as you affirm, God knows; but it seems incredible.”¹²

A work attributed to Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215), head of the catechetical school at Alexandria,¹³ describes the corruption of the Gospel of Mark by Carpocrates:

Now then, Mark during Peter’s stay in Rome wrote down the acts of the Lord, nevertheless not telling all, nor even hinting at the sacred ones (*tas mystikas*), but selecting those which he thought most useful for the growth of the investigators’ faith. When Peter was martyred, Mark came to Alexandria; polishing both his own and Peter’s notes, from which by transferring into his first book those things appropriate for those progressing in the testimony (*gnōsis*), he compiled a more spiritual gospel for the use of those being perfected (*tōn teleioudenōn*). In no way, however, did he betray those things not discussed, nor did he write down the initiatory teaching (*hierophantikēn didaskalian*)¹⁴ of

12. Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 73 (ANF 1:235, brackets in original).

13. For a biography and discussion of his writings, see Quasten, *Patrology*, 2:5–36.

14. For a discussion of other ways this phrase has been taken, see Werner Jaeger’s comments in Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 38; John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 59; and the response of Todd Compton, review of Welch, *Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount*, in *Review of Books*

the Lord. But adding to the previously written acts yet others, he still added certain sayings thereto, the explanation of which would be capable of initiating (*mystagōgēsein*) their hearers into the holy of holies (*adyton*) of the truth veiled seven times. Wherefore he prepared it thus—neither corruptly nor unprecautiously—so I deem it. And when he died he left his compilation at the church which is in Alexandria, where it is kept very safe and secure to this day, being read only to those who are initiated into the great mysteries (*tous myoumenous ta megala mystēria*).

But Carpocrates who was taught by the defiled demons who continually plot destruction for the children of men, having even used the arts of deception, thus enslaved a certain elder of the church in Alexandria so that he prepared a copy of the secret gospel (*tou mystikou euangeliou*). And he explained it according to his own blasphemous and carnal thought. But still he defiled it by mixing into the immaculate and holy words the most abominable lies. From this tincture he extracted the Carpocratian doctrine.¹⁵

Ironically, it is not known whether this text itself is authentic or an ancient, medieval, or modern forgery.¹⁶

The bishop of Lyon at the end of the second century, Irenaeus,¹⁷ claims that the Valentinians changed the scriptures

in the Book of Mormon 3 (1991): 322; Hamblin, “Early Christian Initiation Ritual,” 209.

15. Clement of Alexandria, *Letter to Theodore*, 1.15–2.10, in Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*, 448–51, plates I–II; cf. Hamblin, “Early Christian Initiation Ritual,” 210–11.

16. When I originally wrote this article, I considered it genuine. When the manuscript repository that supposedly possessed the work denied its existence, I began to have my doubts about its authenticity. At the present I simply do not know whether it is authentic or not.

17. For a biography and discussion of his work, see Quasten, *Patrology*, 1:287–313.

“by transferring passages, and dressing them up anew, and making one thing out of another.”¹⁸ Irenaeus notes that among some biblical manuscripts circulating in his day, the number of the beast in Revelation was not 666 but 616.¹⁹ (Manuscript variations, like this one cited by Irenaeus, can come either inadvertently or intentionally, but reveals a type of corruption nonetheless.) Irenaeus reveals that accusations of corruption of scripture were also applied to the orthodox church as well, for the so-called heretics “turn round and accuse these same Scriptures, as if they were not correct.”²⁰

Tertullian was a lawyer who lived at the end of the second century.²¹ He was a prolific author and the first Christian father to write in Latin. Tertullian wrote against many of the Christian sects in his day and eventually switched from what we today call the “orthodox” Christian sect to the Montanist Christian sect because the Montanists still believed in continuing revelation, whereas the other Christian sects did not. He claimed there was “proof of the Gospel . . . having become meanwhile adulterated.”²² Tertullian notes that a Christian sect of his day “does not receive certain Scriptures; and whichever of them it does receive, it perverts by means of additions and diminutions, for the accomplishment of it[s] own purpose; and such as it does receive, it receives not in their entirety; but even when it does receive any up to a certain point as entire, it nevertheless perverts even these by the contrivance of diverse interpretations.”²³ One of the sects that Tertullian deals with is

18. Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 1.8.1, (ANF 1:326).

19. Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 5.30.1, (ANF 1:558–59).

20. Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 3.2.1 (ANF 1:415).

21. For a biography and discussion of his works, see Quasten, *Patrology*, 2:246–340.

22. Tertullian, *Contra Marcionem* 4.2 (ANF 3:347).

23. Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 17 (ANF 3:251).

that of Marcion, a Christian leader in the early second century who accepted Paul and a modified form of Luke, but rejected all other Christian scriptures. Tertullian specifically claims that “Marcion expressly and openly used the knife, not the pen, since he made such an excision of the Scriptures as suited his own subject-matter,”²⁴ and that “Marcion seems to have singled out Luke for his mutilating process.”²⁵ Another sect that Tertullian writes about is the Valentinians, named after Valentinus, a mid-second century Christian leader who almost became bishop of Rome. Tertullian also claims that although Valentinus “seems to use the entire volume, he has none the less laid violent hands on the truth only with a more cunning mind and skill than Marcion,”²⁶ for although he “abstained from such excision, because he did not invent Scriptures to square with his own subject-matter, but adapted his matter to the Scriptures; and yet he took away more, and added more, by removing the proper meaning of every particular word, and adding fantastic arrangements of things which have no real existence.”²⁷ Tertullian discusses “writings which wrongly go under Paul’s name” but instead were composed by a presbyter in Asia.²⁸ Each of these leaders, Marcion, Valentinus, and other like them, had his own Christian sect. Tertullian acknowledges that these other sects “go so far as to say that adulterations of the Scriptures, and false expositions thereof, are rather introduced by ourselves [meaning Tertullian’s sect, the one that later became orthodox], inasmuch as they, no less than we maintain that truth is on their side.”²⁹

24. Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 38 (ANF 3:262).

25. Tertullian, *Contra Marcionem* 4.2 (ANF 3:347).

26. Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 38 (ANF 3:262).

27. Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 38 (ANF 3:262).

28. Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 1.17 (ANF 3:677).

29. Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 18 (ANF 3:251).

At this distant time in history, the evidence that might prove or disprove individual allegations has long been unavailable. What we can note is that in the second century, there were a variety of accusations of corrupting scripture made against every party, including the sect that eventually became the “orthodox” or “Catholic” one.

Methods of Corruption

We learn about some of the types of changes made in the Christian texts because, ironically, they are clearly enumerated by the very people responsible for preserving them. For example Rufinus (fourth century) says of the earlier Christian texts he is copying:

Wherever, therefore, we have found in his [in this case Origen’s] books anything contrary to that which was piously established by him about the Trinity in other places, either we have *omitted* it as corrupt and interpolated, or edited it according to that pattern that we often find asserted by himself. If, however, speaking to the trained and learned, he writes obscurely because he desires to briefly pass over something, we, to make the passage plainer, have *added* those things that we have read on the same subject openly in his other books. . . . All who shall copy or read this . . . shall neither add anything to this writing, nor remove anything, nor insert anything, nor change anything.³⁰

30. Rufinus, preface to Origen, *Peri Archon*, 2–4, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1857–86), 11:113–14 (author’s translation; hereafter *PG*); cf. *Origen On First Principles*, trans. G. W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), lxiii–lxiv. This particular work of Origen’s is preserved only through Rufinus’s Latin translation and a few fragments quoted by Greek authors. Rufinus’s unreliable translations of this and other works were known both to his contemporaries and to modern scholars as “vitiating and

In this Rufinus simultaneously and almost hypocritically pleads that others not do to him what he has done to them. Rufinus is explicitly following the example of his predecessors, specifically the example of Macarius:

who when he translated over seventy works of Origen, which are called homilies and also several of his writings on the apostle into Latin in which are found several offensive passages, therefore he *removed or cleaned up all of these* when he translated, so that a Latin reader would find nothing in them that disagrees with *our* belief. *This, therefore, we follow* even if we are not so eloquent, nevertheless as much as we can, by the same rules, watching to be sure not to reveal those passages in the books of Origen that disagree and contradict with himself.³¹

Rufinus provides us with a convenient list of types of textual corruption: Omission or deletion, addition, and alteration.

Removal is the easiest textual corruption to introduce and the most frequent form of scribal error. Justin Martyr accuses the Jews of removing small phrases from the scriptures that were significant for Christian understanding and interpretation of Old Testament passages as prophecies of Christ.³² Tertullian makes the same accusation against Marcion: he made “such an excision of the Scriptures” that he used “the knife, not the pen.”³³ From a modern vantage point, it is difficult if not impossible to tell whether any particular omission in a scriptural

confused” if not “very hasty and careless” since “he frequently paraphrases and misinterprets his original.” Quasten, *Patrology*, 3:172, 240, 315; see 1:61, 170; 2:37, 49–50, 58, 146; 3:341, 533.

31. Rufinus, preface to Origen, *Peri Archon*, 2, in *PG* 11:112–13, emphasis added (author’s translation).

32. Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 73 (*ANF* 1:235).

33. Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 38 (*ANF* 3:262).

passage is the work of an intentional, potentially malicious, editor or the work of a careless, all too human, scribe. Scribal omissions, called haplography, occur frequently. Those that are caused by identical sequences of letters at the beginning (homoeoarchteon) or the end of words (homoeoteleuton) are at least understandable, but most omissions by scribes have no such apparent explanation. The second century authors, however, make specific accusations of deliberate malicious deletion of specific portions of the text.

Addition is also a textual corruption, though less frequent than deletion. Scribal additions can result in simply repeating a portion of a text twice (dittography), supplying material from familiar turns of phrase (a form of harmonization), or sometimes from a slip of the eye that may or may not be caught. Intelligible additions of nonduplicate material are more likely to be the result of editorial work. Unfortunately for the modern scholar, when two groups of manuscripts differ in the inclusion of material, it is difficult and sometimes impossible to discern whether one group omits material or the other group adds it. The most extensive form of addition is when not just a passage but an entire work has been created. Tertullian, for example, discusses entire forged “writings which wrongly go under Paul’s name” and which circulated in his day.³⁴ Another method of forging was simply to circulate something anonymously. Tertullian makes the accusation that Marcion “ascribes no author to his Gospel, as if it could not be allowed him to affix a title to that from which it was no crime (in his eyes) to subvert the very body.”³⁵

Alteration of the text can include both addition or omission but sometimes it is the simple substitution of one word

34. Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 17 (ANF 3:677).

35. Tertullian, *Contra Marcionem* 4.2 (ANF 3:347).

for another. Comparison of manuscripts shows that this was a common phenomenon. Is it deliberate editorial work or accidental on the part of the ancient scribe? It is interesting that although an examination of the manuscripts reveals this as a common phenomenon, the second century authors do not seem to isolate this as a problem. (Perhaps they thought that the essential message was more important than the exact wording and thus they did not think that it was a problem.)

Deleting,³⁶ altering, and even adding to works have been problems in antiquity,³⁷ in the Renaissance,³⁸ and even in the

36. See Rufinus's preface to pseudo-Clement, *Recognitiones* (ANF 8:75, and n. 3). "The most common scribal error (I think) is haplography, that is, reading two identical sequences of letters as one and omitting whatever intervenes." P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *Textual Criticism: Recovering the Text of the Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 17.

37. An excellent introduction to the problems involved may be found in Hugh Nibley, "The Way of the Church," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 209–63. An awareness of the problems of textual tampering appears very early in human history; see, for example, Ur-Nammu (2112–2095 BC), the first king of the Ur III Dynasty: *lú mu-sar-ra-ba šu bí-ib-ùr-a 4Bil-ga-mes-e nam a-ba-da-ku₅-e* "may Gilgamesh curse whosoever alters this inscription;" Urnammu 41, in Ilmari Kärki, *Die Königsinschriften der dritten Dynastie von Ur* (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 1986), 26; similar imprecations spanning the length of Babylonian history may be found in Hermann Hunger, *Babylonische und assyrische Kolophone* (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1968); for the spread of this curse formula into Hittite culture at the beginning of its written history, see O. R. Gurney, *The Hittites* (London: Penguin, 1990), 141.

38. See A. E. Housman, *M. Manilii Astronomicon*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 1:xiv-xxii; for an estimate of Renaissance and previous Byzantine textual work, see Alexander

present day.³⁹ But other types of corruptions also affect the text, including presuppositional, grammatical, and lexical reinterpretations.

Presuppositional reinterpretation occurs when the basic assumptions with which the text is read are changed. For example, Irenaeus accuses Valentinus of acting in a fashion similar to some modern biblical critics and dividing “the prophecies [into different classes], maintaining that one portion was uttered by the mother, a second by her seed, and a third by the Demiurge. In like manner, they hold that Jesus uttered some things under the influence of the Saviour, others under that of the mother, and others still under that of the Demiurge.”⁴⁰ The Valentinians believed, in line with the best Neo-Platonic thinking of their day, that God did not create the world, but rather a junior god who created a more junior god, and so on until one of these junior gods created a devil, called the Demiurge, who created the world.

Hugh McDonald, “Textual Criticism,” *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 1049.

39. On the modern rewriting of Polybius, see Robert K. Ritner, “Implicit Models of Cross-Cultural Interaction: A Question of Noses, Soap, and Prejudice,” in Janet H. Johnson, ed., *Life in a Multi-Cultural Society: Egypt from Cambyses to Constantine and Beyond* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1992), 287–88. This central point in Ritner’s argument, was itself omitted in the original published version and the errata sheet must be checked. Another egregious example of rewriting the sources is Morton Smith’s *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978). On page 53, Smith claims to take Pliny the Younger’s *Epistulae* X.96 “as it is usually taken, at face value” and then proceeds to introduce magical spells, demons, and cannibalism into a text which actually lacks all of these elements.

40. Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 1.7.3 (ANF 1:326).

They gather their views from other sources than the Scriptures; and to use a common proverb, they strive to weave ropes of sand, while they endeavour to adapt with an air of probability to their own peculiar assertions the parables of the Lord, the sayings of the prophets, and the words of the apostles, in order that their scheme may not seem altogether without support. In doing so, however, they disregard the order and the connection of the Scriptures, and so far as in them lies, dismember and destroy the truth. By transferring passages, and dressing them up anew, and making one thing out of another, they succeed in deluding many through their wicked art in adapting the oracles of the Lord to their opinions.⁴¹

Another type of presuppositional reinterpretation is the process by which the texts are reinterpreted in a nonliteral or allegorical framework.⁴² Allegorical interpretation had been a well-known way of reinterpreting texts in Egypt,⁴³ and became a popular way of reinterpreting texts among Alexandrian

41. Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 1.8.1 (ANF 1:326).

42. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 376–77; Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 317. For an exhaustive analysis of the switch in interpretation in one passage of scripture, see Thomas W. Mackay, “Early Christian Millenarianist Interpretation of the Two Witnesses in John’s Apocalypse 11:3–13,” in Lundquist and Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also By Faith*, 1:222–331. For the use of the allegorical approach in Rabbinic Judaism, see Jacob Neusner, “The Case of Leviticus Rabbah,” in Lundquist and Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also By Faith*, 1:366–70. For a historical discussion of allegory, see C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 44–111.

43. J. Gwyn Griffiths, “Allegory in Greece and Egypt,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 53 (1967): 79–102.

intellectuals: Pagans like Theagenes, Anaxagoras, Metrodorus, and Stoics allegorized Homer;⁴⁴ Philo allegorized the Old Testament, and some Egyptian sects of Christianity did the same with Christianity. In combating this trend, Irenaeus along with the leaders of the catechetical school in Alexandria, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, brought the method into mainstream Christianity.

Grammatical reinterpretation exploits ambiguities in Greek (and later Latin) to fashion understandings of the text that significantly differ from previous understandings. Origen provides a good example of such grammatical reinterpretation in his interpretation of the beatitude in Matthew 5:8:

If the question is put to us why it was said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God', I answer that in my opinion our argument will be much more firmly established by this passage. For what else is 'to see God in the heart' but to understand and know him in the mind, just as we have explained above? For the names of the organs of sense are often applied to the soul, so that we speak of seeing with the eyes of the heart, that is, of drawing some intellectual conclusion by means of the faculty of intelligence.⁴⁵

Origen has moved the modifying phrase *tē kardia* "in the heart" from modifying the adjacent *katharoi* "pure" to the distant *opsontai* "they shall see," and by so doing has denied the explicit promise of the scripture.⁴⁶

44. Griffiths, "Allegory in Greece and Egypt," 79.

45. Origen, *On First Principles* 1.1.9, in Origen, *On First Principles*, trans. Butterworth, 14.

46. This is no mere isolated interpretation by Origen, see also Origen, *On First Principles* 2.11.7, in Origen, *On First Principles*, trans. Butterworth, 154.

Lexical reinterpretation is the changing of the meanings of words, such as occurred during the second sophistic period.⁴⁷ Between the time of writing the New Testament and the end of the second century, the meanings of several of the words changed. Examples include the change of the principle meanings of *pistis* from “collateral, guarantee” to “belief;”⁴⁸ of *pisteuein* from “to trust, rely on; entrust, commit, put up collateral” to “to believe;”⁴⁹ of *homologeîn* from “to agree to terms, accept an agreement, enter into a legal contract, promise” to “to confess;”⁵⁰ of *mystêrion* from “(initiation) rite” to “secret.”⁵¹ Such changes in language are common in all languages and in all periods, some deliberate and some not. The Christians, like the Jews before them, used the Greek language in an idiosyncratic way that seemed strange to non-Christians around them. For example, both Christians and Jews used the term *ouranoi* “heavens”, the plural of *ouranos* “sky”, as a term for the dwelling place of God, even though Greeks never used the term in the plural.⁵² In the second century, however, various

47. In general, this topic has not received adequate treatment. Preliminary steps in this direction are Hugh Nibley, “Evangelium Quadraginta Dierum,” in *When the Lights Went Out* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001), 75–76 n 61; Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount*, 88. For analysis of some of the dynamics involved, see Hugh Nibley, “Victoriosa Loquacitas: The Rise of Rhetoric and the Decline of Everything Else,” in *The Ancient State* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 243–86.

48. H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, H. S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1940; hereafter *LSJ*), 1408.

49. *LSJ* 1407–8.

50. *LSJ* 1226.

51. *LSJ* 1156.

52. *LSJ* 1273. The distinction between singular and plural in the Greek does not usually appear in the King James Version.

sects of Christianity began to redefine terminology to mean something different.⁵³ Irenaeus claims that the Valentinians adopted pagan fables “changing . . . the names of the things referred to” to fit into Christian scripture.⁵⁴ Because the New Testament is usually read with meanings of the second sophistic period and later—meanings which have often changed—the understanding of the text has sometimes been drastically changed. This can be seen in the interpretation of a passage from Paul’s epistle to the Romans:

The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of **faith**, which we preach; That if thou shalt **confess** with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt **believe** in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man **believeth** unto righteousness; and with the mouth **confession is made** unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not

“The word is next to you through your mouth and through your heart.” That is the word of **collateral** that we announce, that if you will **make an agreement** by means of your mouth that Jesus is Lord and **put up collateral** by means of your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved; for by means of the heart **is collateral put up** toward righteousness, and by means of the mouth **are terms agreed upon** toward

53. James Allen provides an interesting argument that the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten did the same thing, and that his Amarna revolution was not so much monotheistic as naturalistic and ultimately atheistic. See James P. Allen, “The Natural Philosophy of Akhenaten,” in *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt*, ed. William Kelly Simpson (New Haven: Yale Egyptological Seminar, 1989), 89–101.

54. Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 2.14.1 (ANF 1:376).

be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that **call upon** him. For whosoever shall **call upon** the name of the Lord shall be saved.

How then shall they **call on** him in whom they have not **believed**? and how shall they **believe** in him of whom they have not **heard**? and how shall they **hear** without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? (Romans 10:8–15, KJV, emphasis added)

salvation; for the scripture says: “Every one who relies on him will not be disgraced;” because there is no discrimination of Jew or of Greek, for he himself is the Lord of all, generous towards all who **invoke** him; for “whosoever shall **invoke** the name of the Lord shall be rescued.”

How therefore shall they **invoke** him with whom they have no **agreement**? How shall they **make an agreement** with him whom they have not **obeyed**? How shall they **obey** without one proclaiming? How shall they proclaim if they have not been commissioned? (Romans 10:8–15, author’s translation, emphasis added)

How the words in a text are understood can make an enormous difference.

All of the methods of changing the text that we have just discussed occur in the second century. The result is that there were many different interpretations of scriptures and scriptural events among the Christian communities. An indicative example of the variety of interpretations can be seen in the *Apocalypse of Adam*, a text that dates no later than the fourth century, where it enumerates fourteen different views of the events leading to the baptism of Jesus, of which we sample five:

The third kingdom says about him that he came into being from a virgin mother. He was cast out of his city, he and his mother. He was received in a desert place. He nourished himself there. He came and he received glory and power. And in this way he arrived at the water.

...

The sixth kingdom says about him that a [. . .] to this world which is below in order to gather flowers. She became pregnant from the desire of the flowers. She bore him in that place. The angels of the garden nourished him. He received glory and power in that place. And in this way he arrived at the water.

...

The tenth kingdom says about him that his god loved a cloud of lust. He begot him by his hand, and he cast from this drop upon that nearby cloud and begot him. He received glory and power in that place. And in this way he arrived at the water.

...

The thirteenth kingdom says about him that every birth of their ruler [is] a word. And this word received an appointment in that place. He received glory and power. And in this way he arrived at the water so that the desire of these powers might be mingled.

But the indomitable generation says about him that God chose him from all the Eons. He caused a knowledge of the undefiled truth to exist in him. He said that [that great] heavenly light came from a strange air from the great Eon. And [he caused] that generation of those men whom he chose for himself to give light, so that they light this whole world. Then that seed, all those who will receive his name upon the water, shall oppose that power.⁵⁵

55. *Apocalypse of Adam* V, 77, 27–83, 7 (author's translation).

The variety of interpretations set forth in this work begin from different assumptions and result in completely different views of the Savior.

Motivations for Manipulating the Text

What motives did second century individuals and groups have to change scripture? Clement, the bishop of Rome, wrote his epistle at the beginning of the second century at the request of leaders in Corinth to settle a dispute they were having. Clement accuses individuals at Corinth of “pride and sedition” and as setting themselves up as “leaders” and usurping the authority that was not theirs.⁵⁶ Irenaeus cites the Corinthians to whom Clement directed his letter as precursors of Valentinus and Marcion.⁵⁷ Toward the end of the second century, a text attributed to Clement of Alexandria notes that the Carpocratians changed scripture to sanction their own homosexual and other immoral practices.⁵⁸ Irenaeus claims that the Valentinians “endeavour to adapt with an air of probability to their own peculiar assertions the parables of the Lord, the sayings of the prophets, and the words of the apostles, in order that their scheme may not seem altogether without support.”⁵⁹ Irenaeus further claims that the Valentinians wanted to “bring together the things which have been said by all those who were ignorant of God, and who are termed philosophers” and have their Christian teachings match the intellectual traditions of

56. 1 Clement 14 (*ANF* 1:8; 9:233; for original text see Oscar von Gebhardt, Adolf von Harnack, Theodor Zahn, *Patrum Apostolicorum Opera* [Leipzig: Heinrichs, 1906], 8–9).

57. Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses*, 3. chaps. 3–4 (*ANF* 1:416–17).

58. Clement of Alexandria, *Letter to Theodore*, in Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*, 448–53, plates I–III.

59. Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses* 1.8.1 (*ANF* 1:326).

the Roman world;⁶⁰ they wanted intellectual respectability. Another example is the author of *The Sophia of Jesus Christ* who took the philosophical writings of Eugnostos and put them, mostly word for word, into the mouth of the risen Jesus.⁶¹ Tertullian says that “writings which wrongly go under Paul’s name” were forged by a presbyter in Asia to give “a license for women’s teaching and baptizing.”⁶² Changes in the texts and the motivations to alter the text of scriptures both canonical and noncanonical,⁶³ in general, match those Nephi gave “After the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book” (1 Nephi 13:28). “Behold the gold, and the silver and the silks, and the scarlets, and the fine-twined linen, and the precious clothing, and the harlots, are the desires of this great and abominable church” (1 Nephi 13:8). While not all second century Christians were consumed by these desires, some clearly were.⁶⁴

60. Irenaeus, *Contra Haereses*, 2.14.1–6 (ANF 1:376–78).

61. See the edition of Douglas M. Parrott, *Nag Hammadi Codices III, 3–4 and V,1* (Leiden: Brill, 1991). It is interesting that whoever compiled Nag Hammadi Codex III recognized this because he copied the texts back to back in the volume.

62. Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 1.17 (ANF 3:677).

63. Also Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 1.38–40 (ANF 3:261–62); other categories and examples given in Stephen D. Robinson, “Lying for God,” in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. C. Wilford Griggs (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1986), 144–46.

64. 1 Clement 44:1 (ANF 1:17; 9:282); Hegesippus, quoted in Eusebius, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 3.32.7, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2, ed. Philip Schaff (reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1:164; *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* VII, 59, 19–61, 24.

Manuscript Evidence

The accusations of the second century writers might be shown to be mistaken if only one could show that the scriptural texts have not become corrupted during the time period specified. Unfortunately, the nature of the manuscript evidence does not allow us to determine such a proposition. While thousands of Greek biblical manuscripts have survived, each fragment that contains any portion of the Bible counts the same as one that includes the entire Bible. Most of these manuscripts are cursive manuscripts, later manuscripts written in the cursive business handwriting rather than the earlier manuscripts which were written in a clear literary hand (called uncial) that has more of the appearance of a printed book. If we consider only those of the New Testament, we have about 341 uncial manuscripts (which are generally earlier than the cursive manuscripts).⁶⁵ Of these, about ten percent date before the time of Constantine, and only one dates to the second century. This second century manuscript (P52 = Rylands 458) is about the size of a postage stamp and contains only ten complete words. (Peter Thiede's redating of the Magdalen College fragments to the first century⁶⁶ would be wonderful if true, but his arguments have been demonstrated wrong.)⁶⁷ Ninety-nine

The urge to usurp authority might have been the cause of the anonymous accusations attested in Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* 10.96.5.

65. The information in this section was compiled from Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graecae*, 26th ed., 7th corrected printing (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983), 684–702.

66. Carsten Peter Thiede, "Papyrus Magdalen Greek 17 (Gregory-Aland P64) A Reappraisal," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 105 (1995): 13–20.

67. Klaus Wachtel, "P64/67: Fragmente des Matthäusevangeliums aus dem 1. Jahrhundert?" *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 107

point seven percent of Greek uncial New Testament manuscripts come after the time period when accusations of textual corruption are rampant. If we included the cursive manuscripts as well, the percentage of second century manuscripts would become even smaller. So only ten complete words of the New Testament are attested in manuscript form *during* the time of textual corruption, and not a single one is attested *before* that time.

If we assemble all the manuscripts from the second and third centuries and note just those chapters where even a part of a verse is attested, we find that entire books are missing, including 1–2 Timothy, 1–2 Peter, 2–3 John, and Jude. Of the twenty-eight chapters in the Gospel of Matthew, there is no manuscript containing even a single verse of sixteen of these chapters before the end of the third century (see table 3). Reconstruction of a pre-second century text is simply not possible unless one makes the *a priori* assumption that there are no changes, which is a circular argument. So the biblical manuscripts themselves cannot test the second century accusations of textual corruption.

So one is left with no definitive way to show from manuscripts what the scriptural text looked like at the beginning of the second century and thus to show whether the text was corrupted or not. Occasional passages show that the text was already corrupt when the manuscript tradition appeared. Consider the text of Matthew 19:9 where Jesus identifies who commits adultery in the case of divorce and remarriage. The passage is not preserved before the fourth century when there

(1995): 73–80. Thiede appears to have been something of an imposter posing as an expert; Harald Vocke, “Papyrus Magdalen 17—weitere Argumente gegen die Frühdatierung des angeblichen Jesus-Papyrus,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 113 (1996): 153–57.

are three major variant traditions,⁶⁸ one of which reads: “who-soever divorces his wife except by reason of sexual immorality makes her commit adultery and whosoever marries the divorced woman commits adultery;”⁶⁹ another reads: “who-soever divorces his wife except for adultery and marries another commits adultery;”⁷⁰ a third reads “whosoever divorces his wife except for adultery and marries another commits adultery himself and whosoever marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”⁷¹ Here, between the variants, we have Jesus making opposite rulings about who is guilty in case of divorce. We have no way of knowing which of the textual readings, if any, is correct, but we know that at least two cannot be. We cannot appeal to the earliest text because all the variants are attested in the fourth century when the earliest manuscripts appear. The matter discussed in this passage is a very practical one with significant implications for Christian practice, one where the text is significantly corrupted, and the manuscripts reflect various biases.

While we are looking at the biases of our sources, we should also consider geographical bias in the biblical manuscript record. Not all climates preserve manuscripts equally well. The earliest manuscripts come from Egypt which has the most suitable climate for preservation of manuscripts. But this does not mean that the manuscripts from Egypt are necessarily superior to those of other locations. Paul’s letters, for example, were directed to churches in Ephesus, Corinth, and Thessalonike, not

68. I have used only the fourth century manuscripts. Others manuscripts back various readings and other variants are attested for this passage.

69. Following Codex Vaticanus (fourth century).

70. Following Codex Sinaiticus (fourth century).

71. Following P25 = P. Bertlin. 16388 (fourth century).

to the Egyptian backwater of Oxyrhynchus.⁷² Yet that same Oxyrhynchite backwater has provided 36 New Testament papyri manuscripts (just over a third of the papyri corpus, all of which comes from Egypt).⁷³ Egypt has never been considered in the mainstream of what became normative Western Christianity, and yet the manuscripts from this location dominate current editions of the Greek New Testament and most recent translations.

The Scriptures of the Early Second Century

If biblical manuscripts cannot give us a view of the biblical text before the accusations of corruption in the second century, early second century quotations of scripture may provide a somewhat restricted view of the state of scripture before those charges.

The scriptures that the Christians had at the beginning of the second century were different from those that they had at the end of the second century at both the level of the canon and the level of the text. By the end of the second century, Christian quotations of scriptures were closer to those we have at present. Tertullian, writing at the end of the second century, cites every book in the New Testament except Philemon. Irenaeus, also writing at the end of the second century, cites every book in the current New Testament except the tiny books of Philemon, 3 John, and Jude. Irenaeus also cites a few apocryphal books as authoritative. (Even in the third century the canon of scripture was still in flux, the Chester Beatty codex contained a copy of

72. See Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 138–42.

73. See the lists in Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 684–89, and Orsolina Montevicchi, *La Papirologia*, 2nd ed. (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1998), 309–21.

the first book of Enoch in the New Testament as well as a homily on the Passion by Melito, bishop of Sardis.)⁷⁴

Accordingly Christian writers at the beginning of the second century had a different set of authoritative writings than their counterparts at the end of the second century. Clement of Rome is generally seen as the earliest of the Christian authors after the New Testament. Clement quotes from many books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, 1 Samuel, 2 Chronicles, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Malachi), and the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Hebrews, and 1 Peter. But Clement also quotes from the apocryphal books of the Wisdom of Solomon and Judith. Furthermore, Clement quotes from other scriptural passages, passages that are not known from any writings. We will list these in roughly the order they might have been found in our current Bibles if they contained them. For example, Clement quotes Moses as saying: “I am smoke from a vessel,”⁷⁵ a quotation that is not found in any known biblical or apocryphal work.⁷⁶ Clement further cites a passage from Psalm 28:⁷⁷ “Thou shalt raise me up and I shall acknowledge thee.”⁷⁸ This reading of the psalm, however, is not attested in any extant manuscript. Clement also quotes from a passage attributed to Ezekiel⁷⁹ but not in our text, “Repent, O

74. See Campbell Bonner, *The Last Chapters of Enoch in Greek* (London: Christophers, 1937), 1–12.

75. 1 Clement 17:6 (ANF 1:9–10; 9:234).

76. See *The Epistle of S. Clement* 17 (Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, 1.2:64–65).

77. See *The Epistle of S. Clement* 17 (Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, 1.2:89).

78. 1 Clement 26:2 (ANF 1:12; 9:237).

79. See *The Epistle of S. Clement* 17 (Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, 1.2:39–41).

house of Israel, from your sins from the earth to heaven, and though they be red like scarlet and black as ashes, and you turn to me with your whole soul and say: Father, hearken to us as to the holy people.”⁸⁰ Clement quotes the following passage as scripture, although its source is currently unknown,⁸¹ “Wretched are the double-minded, who doubt in their soul, who say: This we have heard against our fathers and behold, we have grown old and none of them have happened even to us. O fools, compare yourselves to a tree—take the vine—first it sheds the leaf, then the bud comes, then the leaf, then the blossom, and after that the sour grape, then comes forth the ripened grape.”⁸² Finally, Clement cites as scripture “Cleave to the saints, for those who cleave to them shall be sanctified,”⁸³ though this is not found in any current body of scripture:⁸⁴

The homily known as 2 Clement, a second century letter which may or may not have been written by the same Clement of Rome, also contains variations in quotations of the scriptures. Consider the following passage which comes from a gospel but is not found in any of the gospels known to us: “Ye shall be as sheep in the midst of wolves. And Peter answering, said to him: What if the wolves should scatter the sheep? Jesus saith to Peter: The sheep shall not fear the wolves after they kill them; ye also shall not fear those who shall kill you and cannot do anything against you, but ye shall fear him who hath power after your death to cast soul and body into the hell of

80. 1 Clement 8:3 (*ANF* 1:7; 9:231).

81. See *The Epistle of S. Clement* 17 (Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, 1.2:80–81).

82. 1 Clement 23:3–4 (*ANF* 1:11; 9:236).

83. 1 Clement 46:2 (*ANF* 1:17–18; 9:243).

84. “This quotation is no where [*sic*] found in the Old Testament.” Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, 1.2:139–40.

fire.”⁸⁵ The sentiments are generally found in gospels but not as they are here. Second Clement attributes the following saying to Jesus also: “If ye are gathered to me in my bosom and do not my commandments, I shall cast you out and shall say to you: Depart from me, workers of iniquity; I know not whence ye are.”⁸⁶ Of course, this passage resembles the Sermon on the Mount, but if the passage is from Matthew, it is a different form of Matthew than what we now have.

The epistle of Barnabas purports to be written by Barnabas, normally presumed to be Paul’s missionary companion, to his sons and daughters in the gospel. Most scholars date the epistle to the early second century rather than the first century. The epistle of Barnabas is largely a pastiche of scriptural quotations; he simply strings one scripture after another. Barnabas cites Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zachariah, *4 Ezra*, Sirach, Matthew, Romans, *1 Enoch*, and the *Didache*, although editors routinely note that the citations of these passages differ from the later standard text. Among these quotations is the following attributed to the prophets but not found in the scriptures: “And they shall eat from the goat offered by fasting on behalf of the sinners. . . . And the priests only shall eat the innards, unwashed with vinegar”⁸⁷ Barnabas quotes from Enoch: “The final offense has arrived, about which is written, as Enoch says. For therefore the Lord cuts off the times and days, so that his beloved might hurry and come to his inheritance.”⁸⁸ The epistle also includes the following as part of the law of Moses referring to the scapegoat rite: “And all you shall

85. 2 Clement 5:2–4 (*ANF* 7:518–19; 9:252).

86. 2 Clement 4:5 (*ANF* 7:518; 9:252).

87. Barnabas 7:4 (*ANF* 1:41).

88. Barnabas 4:3 (*ANF* 1:138).

spit and pierce it, and encircle its head with scarlet wool, and let it be driven into the wilderness.”⁸⁹ Leviticus, however, does not contain this rite. The epistle of Barnabas also includes the following as part of the words of the prophets, but which we do not find in our scriptures: “The parable of the Lord, who shall understand it except the wise and learned who also loves his lord?”⁹⁰ The epistle attributes this quotation to the prophets but it is also absent from our scriptures: “And when shall these things come to pass? Saith the Lord: When the tree shall bend and arise, and when blood shall flow from the wood.”⁹¹ And this is attributed to the Lord but not found in the scriptures: “Behold, I make the last as the first.”⁹²

In all of these instances, Christian authors quote from scriptures that either are not in the current canon or have been substantially altered; even when quoting from scriptures that we presently have, the quotations do not match the surviving manuscripts. The standard explanation is that these passages found in writers of the beginning of the second century but not elsewhere “are sometimes loosely and inaccurately cited from memory. . . . Indeed they are so unlike anything to be found in the known books of the Bible that despairing critics are reduced to supposing that Clement has taken them from some lost apocryphal source.”⁹³ While one can assume that quotations that do not match the current text are made from memory—and it certainly is a possibility—it is an assumption; one could equally assume that there have been changes to the

89. Barnabas 7:8 (*ANF* 1:141).

90. Barnabas 6:10 (*ANF* 1:140).

91. Barnabas 12:1 (*ANF* 1:144).

92. Barnabas 6:13 (*ANF* 1:140–41).

93. Maxwell Staniforth, trans., *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Dorset, 1986), 22.

text in the intervening period. When an early second century author quotes scripture, it is often unlike anything to be found in the books of the Bible as we know them. We know them, however, from manuscripts that date after the second century authors noted widespread charges of textual corruption. These two facts together can equally well be taken as evidence that the charges of textual corruption are correct.

Conclusions

In viewing the state of Christian scripture in the second century, we have not, generally, had to rely on scholarly interpretation or writers later than the early third century to detect a large shift in the concept and content of scripture in the second century. The books that were considered scripture, and some of the content of those books, changed from the beginning to the end of the century. During the second century various fragmentary groups of Christians accused other groups of having changed the texts to fit their own ideas. These changes took the form of deletions, some additions, and the redefining of the text. What the angel told Nephi is largely supported by what remains of early Christian literature. To the second century, if not before, we may trace the corruption of scripture and the loss of the plain and precious things, and it is worth noting that none of the extant Greek manuscripts dates before that time period. We cannot look to scholarship to restore the plain and precious portions of the text that were lost. If it is not revealed again we shall never have it.

Table 1: Greek New Testament Uncial Manuscripts (by part century)

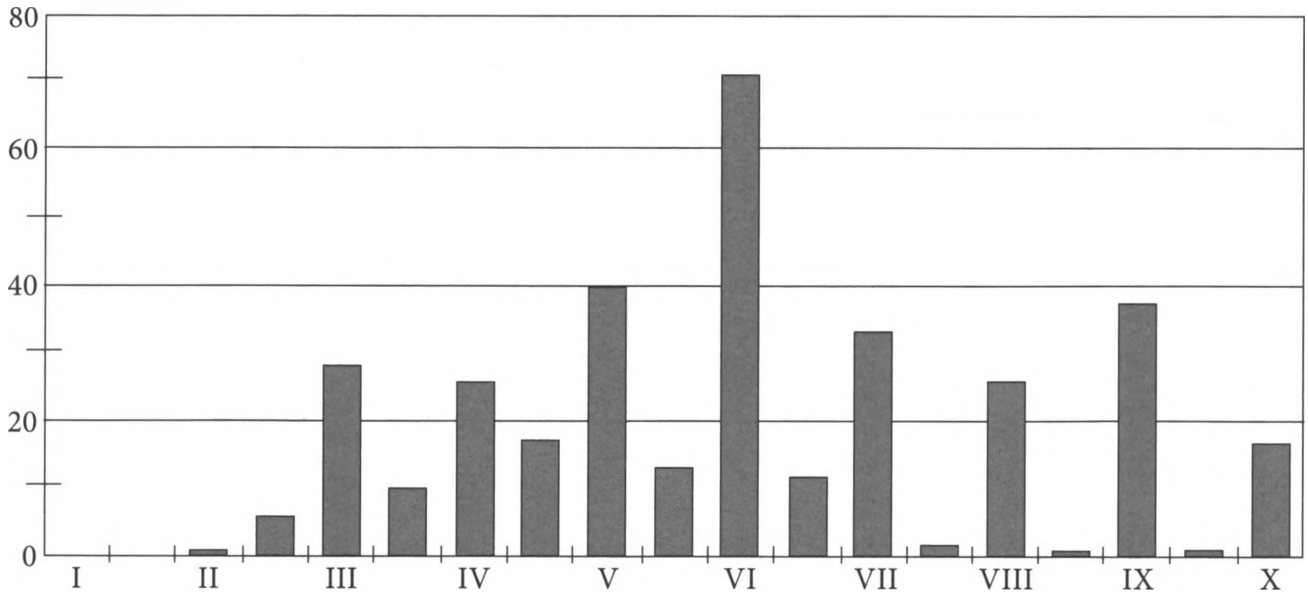


Table 2: Portions of the Pre-Constantine New Testament Attested in Manuscripts

The manuscripts are placed paleographically by century and the attested verses in each chapter are given in parentheses. Sections marked with an asterisk (*) do not have a lacuna for the missing verses in the chapter, the manuscript is continuous but does not have the verses.

	II	II or III	III	III or IV
Matt. 1			p1 (1-9, 12, 14-20)	
2			p70 (13-16, 22-23)	
3		p64+67 (9, 15)	p70 (1)	
4				
5		p64+67 (20-22, 25-28)		
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				0171 (17-23, 25-32)
11			p70 (26-27)	
12			p70 (4-5)	
13				
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				
20			p45 (24-32)	
21			p45 (13-19)	
22				
23		p77 (30-39)		

	II	II or III	III	III or IV
Matt. 24			p70 (3-6, 12-15)	
25			p45 (41-46)	
			p53 (29-40)	
26		p64+67 (7-8, 10, 14-15, 22-23, 31-33)	p45 (1-39)	p37 (19-52)
27				
28				
Mark 1				
2				
3				
4			p45 (36-40)	
5			p45 (15-26, 38-43)	
6			p45 (1-3, 16-25, 36-50)	
7			p45 (3-15, 25-37)	
8			p45 (1, 10-26, 34-38)	
9			p45 (1-9, 18-31)	
10				
11			p45 (27-33)	
12			p45 (1, 5-8, 13-19, 24-28)	
13				
14				
15				
16				
Luke 1			p4 (58-59, 62-80)	
2			p4 (1, 6-7)	
3			p4 (8-38) p75 (18-22, 33-38)	
4			p4 (1-2, 29-32, 34-35) p75 (1-2, 34-44)	
5			p4 (3-8) p75 (1-10, 37-39)	

	II	II or III	III	III or IV
Luke 6			p45 (31-41, 45-49)	
			p75 (1-4, 10-49)	
7			p45 (1-7) p75 (1-32, 35-39, 41-43, 46-50)	
8			p75 (1-56)	
9			p45 (26-41, 45-62) p75 (1-2, 4-62)	
10			p45 (1, 6-22, 26-42) p75 (1-42)	
11			p45 (1, 6-25, 28-46, 50-54) p75 (1-54)	
12			p45 (1-12, 18-37, 42-59) p75 (1-59)	
13			p45 (1, 6-24, 29-35) p75 (1-35)	
14			p45 (1-10, 17-33) p75 (1-35)	
15			p75 (1-32)	
16			p75 (1-31)	
17			p75 (1-15, 19-37)	
18			p75 (1-18)	
19				
20				
21				
22			p69 (41, 45-48, 58-61) p75 (4-71)	0171 (44-56, 61-64)
23			p75 (1-56)	
24			p75 (1-53)	
John 1		p66 (1-6, 11)	p5 (23-31, 33-40) p75 (1-51)	
2			p75 (1-25)	0162 (11-22)
3			p75 (1-36) p80 (34)	

	II	II or III	III	III or IV
John 4			p75 (1-54)	
5			p75 (1-47)	
6		p66 (35-71)	p28 (8-12, 17-22) p75 (1-71)	
7		p66 (1-52)*	p75 (1-52)*	
8		p66 (12-59)*	p39 (14-22) p75 (12-59)*	
9		p66 (1-41)	p75 (1-41)	
10		p66 (1-42)	p45 (7-25, 30-42) p75 (1-42)	
11		p66 (1-57)	p45 (1-10, 18-36, 42-57) p75 (1-45, 48-57)	
12		p66 (1-50)	p75 (3-50)	
13		p66 (1-38)	p75 (1, 8-9)	
14		p66 (1-26, 29-30)	p75 (8-30)	
15		p66 (2-26)	p22 (25-27) p75 (7-8)	
16		p66 (2-4, 6-7, 10-33)	p5 (14-30) p22 (1-2, 21-32)	
17		p66 (1-26)		
18	p52 (31-33, 37-38) p66 (1-40)			
19		p66 (1-42)		
20		p66 (1-20, 22-23, 25-31)	p5 (11-17, 19-20, 22-25)	
21		p66 (1-9)		
Acts 1				
2				
3				
4			p45 (27-36)	
5		0189 (3-21)	p45 (10-21, 30-39)	
6			p45 (7-15)	
7			p45 (1-2, 10-21, 32-41, 52-60)	

	II	II or III	III	III or IV
Acts 8			p45 (1, 14-25, 34-40)	
9			p45 (1-6, 16-27, 35-43) p53 (33-43)	
10			p45 (1-2, 10-23, 31-41) p53 (1)	
11			p45 (2-14, 24-30)	
12			p45 (1-5, 13-22)	
13			p45 (6-16, 25-26, 46-52)	
14			p45 (1-3, 15-23)	
15			p45 (2-7, 19-27, 38-41)	
16			p45 (1-4, 15-21, 32-40)	
17			p45 (9-17)	
18				p38 (27-28)
19				p38 (1-6, 12-16)
20				
21				
22				
23			p48 (11-17, 23-29)	
24				
25				
26			p29 (7-8, 20)	
27				
28				
Rom. 1			p40 (24-27, 31-32)	
2			p40 (1-3)	
3			p40 (21-31)	
4			p40 (1-8) 0220 (23-25)	
5		p46 (17-21)	0220 (1-3, 8-13)	

	II	II or III	III	III or IV
Rom. 6		p46 (1-3, 5-14)	p40 (4-5, 16)	
7				
8		p46 (15-25, 27-35, 37-39)	p27 (12-22, 24-27, 33-39)	
9		p46 (1-32)	p27 (1-3, 5-9) p40 (16-17, 27)	
10		p46 (1-21)		
11		p46 (1-22, 24-33, 35-36)		
12		p46 (1-21)		
13		p46 (1-14)		
14		p46 (1-23)		
15		p46 (1-9, 11-33)		
16		p46 (1-22)		
1 Cor. 1		p46 (1-31)		
2		p46 (1-16)		
3		p46 (1-23)		
4		p46 (1-21)		
5		p46 (1-13)		
6		p46 (1-20)		
7		p46 (1-40)	p15 (18-40)	
8		p46 (1-13)	p15 (1-4)	
9		p46 (1-2, 4-27)		
10		p46 (1-33)		
11		p46 (1-34)		
12		p46 (1-31)		
13		p46 (1-13)		
14		p46 (1-14, 16-40)		
15		p46 (1-15, 17-58)		
16		p46 (1-22)		
2 Cor. 1		p46 (1-24)		
2		p46 (1-17)		
3		p46 (1-18)		

	II	II or III	III	III or IV
2 Cor. 4		p46 (1-18)		
5		p46 (1-21)		
6		p46 (1-18)		
7		p46 (1-16)		
8		p46 (1-24)		
9		p46 (1-15)		
10		p46 (1-18)		
11		p46 (1-10, 12-21, 23-33)		
12		p46 (1-21)		
13		p46 (1-13)		
Gal. 1		p46 (1-8, 10-24)		
2		p46 (1-9, 12-21)		
3		p46 (2-29)		
4		p46 (2-18, 20-31)		
5		p46 (1-17, 20-26)		
6		p46 (1-8, 10-18)		
Eph. 1		p46 (1-23)		p92 (11-13, 19-21)
2		p46 (1-7, 10-22)		
3		p46 (1-21)		
4		p46 (1-32)	p49 (16-29, 31-32)	
5		p46 (1-6, 8-33)	p49 (1-13)	
6		p46 (1-6, 8-18, 20-24)		
Philip. 1		p46 (1, 5-15, 17-28, 30)		
2		p46 (1-12, 14-27, 29-30)		
3		p46 (1-8, 10-21)		p16 (10-17)
4		p46 (2-12, 14-23)		p16 (2-8)
Col. 1		p46 (1-2, 5-13, 16-24, 27-29)		
2		p46 (1-19, 23)		

	II	II or III	III	III or IV
Col. 3		p46 (1-11, 13-24)		
4		p46 (3-12, 16-18)		
1 Thes. 1		p46 (1, 9-10)	p65 (3-10)	
2		p46 (1-3)	p65 (1, 6-13)	
3				
4			p30 (12-13, 16-17)	
5		p46 (5-9, 23-28)	p30 (3, 8-10, 12-18, 25-28)	
2 Thes. 1			p30 (1-2)	p92 (4-5, 11-12)
2				
3				
1 Tim. 1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
2 Tim. 1				
2				
3				
4				
Titus 1				
2				
3				
Philem. 1			p87 (13-15, 24-25)	
Heb. 1		p46 (1-14)	p12 (1)	
2		p46 (1-18)		p13 (14-18)
3		p46 (1-19)		p13 (1-19)
4		p46 (1-16)		p13 (1-16)
5		p46 (1-14)		p13 (1-5)
6		p46 (1-20)		
7		p46 (1-28)		

	II	II or III	III	III or IV
Heb. 8		p46 (1-13)		
9		p46 (1-16, 18-28)		
10		p46 (1-20, 22-30, 32-39)		p13 (8-22, 29-39)
11		p46 (1-40)		p13 (1-13, 28-40)
12		p46 (1-29)		p13 (1-17)
13		p46 (1-25)		
James 1			p23 (10-12, 15-18)	
2			p20 (19-26)	
3			p20 (1-9)	
4				
5				
1 Pet. 1				p72 (1-25)
2				p72 (1-25)
3				p72 (1-22)
4				p72 (1-19)
5				p72 (1-14)
2 Pet. 1				p72 (1-21)
2				p72 (1-22)
3				p72 (1-18)
1 Jn. 1				
2				
3				
4			p9 (11-12, 14-17)	
5				
2 Jn. 1				
3 Jn. 1				
Jude 1				p72 (1-25) p78 (4-5, 7-8)
Rev. 1				p18 (4-7)
2				
3				

	II	II or III	III	III or IV
Rev. 4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9			p47 (10-21)	
10			p47 (1-11)	
11			p47 (1-3, 5-19)	
12			p47 (1-18)	
13			p47 (1-18)	
14			p47 (1-20)	
15			p47 (1-8)	
16			p47 (1-15, 17-21)	
17			p47 (1-2)	
18				
19				
20				
21				
22				