

# Mark 1:2 - Isaiah or the Prophets?

So, I had a chance to glance at some of the data on Mark 1:2. Here's a basic breakdown. Portions of the Gospels are present in 2,012 manuscripts. Portions of Mark are found in 1,754 manuscripts. The primary witness to the text of the NT is Greek manuscripts (handwritten documents). But the text is also witnessed to by ancient authors who quoted the text (what we call Patristic Citations), and by ancient translations of the text that were made from Greek into other languages (what we call the Ancient Versions).

## Data From the Greek Manuscripts

Greek Manuscripts are categorized primarily by the type of manuscript. The earliest manuscripts were writing on Papyri (a page made by smashing reeds together). They are designated with a roman "P" then a number. These are naturally our most valuable manuscripts. We have 134 of these today, but most of them are fragmentary, and none of them contains this section of Mark (though there have been rumors that a fragment of papyri discovered some time ago but not yet published is a page from a 1st century copy of Mark).

The second kind of manuscript is the Majuscule or Uncial. These are designated with a "0" then a number. These are parchment manuscripts that came into common use when more money was able to be spent on producing a longer lasting manuscript. For most of the first millennium (with some exceptions), the scribes producing these manuscripts wrote with all capital letters, in what we call the Majuscule script. While not as important as the Papyri, these manuscripts are still early witnesses to the original text of the NT. We have 323 of these extant.

The third kind of manuscript is also a parchment manuscript, but one coming after the change was made in handwriting style, where lower-case letters began to be used (and spaces were placed between words, and generally more ornate pictures and such were added). Almost all of these come from the second millennium (with a few exceptions - there are some in the ninth century and a handful from earlier). Because these manuscripts are so late, and often represent repeated copying of the same text, these are generally considered less valuable for the reconstruction of the original text of the NT. I won't spell out the exact date of most of these manuscripts, simply lumping them together.<sup>1</sup> Here's the data from the Greek manuscripts;

The fourth type of manuscript is known as a "lectionary." These are represented by an 'l' followed by a number. They are not continuous-text manuscripts. They are a collection of readings from various parts of Scripture organized according to the ecclesiastical calendar. Thus, for a given Sunday, a given lectionary might contain a few verses from a Gospel, followed by a few verses from the Psalms, followed by some verses from a prophet. It doesn't have a continuous text. These manuscripts are mostly very late, and can be on parchment, or even on paper. But because they are typically so late, and more, because they are a collection of readings rather than a continuous-text manuscript, I have not included the data from them individually here (and most apparatuses contain little of the lectionary data to begin with). I have

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<sup>1</sup> data gathered from *Text und Textwert* Volume on Mark; NA 28, NET, CNTTS, and UBS5.

instead simply grouped them all together and presumed them to support the Majority text reading (which most of them likely would do if spelled out individually). Thus, we turn to look now at the data from the Greek manuscripts. There are basically 7 different forms of the text found in the Greek manuscripts.

- “in Isaiah the Prophet” is read by;

Majuscules: 01, 03, 019, 037,

Minuscules: 33, 63, 151, 161, 184, 222, 391, 565, 747, 800, 892, 989, 1241, 1243, 1579, 2427.

- Without the Article before “Isaiah,” (which translates the same, “In Isaiah the prophet”) read by;

majuscules: 05, 038,

Minuscules: 1, 22, 61, 115, 131, 152, 176, 205, 209, 348, 372, 555, 566, 700, 829, 873, 929, 1032, 1071, 1087, 1279, 1582, 2174, 2193, 2486, 2737

- “in the book of Isaiah the prophet” is read by;

544, 1273, 2680

(51 manuscripts read some form of “Isaiah the prophet”)

- “in the prophet” (singular) is read by

872c

- “The prophet” (without the article)

- “in the prophets” (plural) is read by the majority;

Majuscules: 02, 011, 032, 042, 043, 0211,

Minuscules: 4, 13, 16, 26, 28, 69, 79, 117, 118, 124, 153, 154, 178, 179, 191, 238, 273, 346, 349, 377, 382, 389, 427, 472, 495, 513, 517, 543, 569, 579, 590, 595, 695, 697, 706, 713, 716, 719, 728, 732, 740, 747, 752, 766, 780, 788, 791, 792, 803, 826, 827, 828, 837, 855, 863, 949, 954s, 979, 983, 1009, 1029, 1047, 1082, 1084, 1093, 1128, 1160, 1216, 1253, 1302, 1326, 1337, 1342, 1396, 1424, 1446, 1451s, 1457, 1495, 1506, 1515, 1528, 1530, 1542, 1546, 1555, 1574, 1593, 1612, 1645, 1654, 1675, 2106, 2148, 2193, 2200, 2206, 2411, 2487, 2542, 2606, 2726, 2738, 2766, 2782, 2786,

- and (in a different case) 287, 492, 755, 1089, 2721, and a different case, 666, 1110.

In addition, though not listed separately, 1,396 or so of these later minuscules from the second millennium have the same reading here, with the “in the prophets.”  
(thus, 1,508 manuscripts have some form of “in the prophets”)

Manuscripts with a Lacuna here (a missing section of text no longer present in the manuscript, though it was once present in the manuscript)

p45, p88, 04, 022, 033, 044, 055, 059, 064, 067, 072, 083, 099, 0103, 0104, 0107, 0126, 0130, 0131, 0132, 0134, 0135, 0167, 0184, 0187, 0213, 0214, 0233, 0250, 0257, 0269, 0274, 0283, 0292, 24, 25, 57, 85, 136, 157, 267, 274, 339, 352, 359, 369, 401, 416, 491, 540, 541, 559, 593, 648, 677, 710, 722, 733, 784, 790, 807, 844, 852, 894, 936, 950, 957, 991, 998, 1061, 1112, 1119, 1124, 1157, 1176, 1183, 1220, 1231, 1281, 1283, 1291, 1317, 1338, 1399, 1417, 1420, 1421, 1459, 1567, 1633, 1669, 1698, 1714, 1804, 2097, 2108, 2117, 2121, 2139, 2144, 2147, 2160, 2172, 2222, 2280, 2282, 2309, 2310, 2322, 2346, 2353, 2356, 2358, 2362, 2380, 2390, 2398, 2399, 2409, 2442, 2445, 2451, 2457, 2462, 2468, 2491, 2517, 2521, 2529, 2534, 2535, 2537, 2538, 2557, 2559, 2561, 2584, 2592, 2650, 2653, 2656, 2657, 2661, 2666, 2686, 2688, 2697, 2699, 2722, 2727, 2744, 2750, 2752, 2761, 2773, 2778, 2790, 2792, 2794, 2798, 2804, 2804, 2811, 2825, 2831  
(165 manuscripts have a lacunae)

## Patristic Data (Quotations from Ancient Authors)

There appear to be quotations of the passage in, Irenaeus (in all the original Greek copies of his work, and in some later translations of his work into Latin), Origen (4 different passages), Serapion, Epiphanius, Severian, Hesychius, Ambrosiaster (Jerome), Augustine, Victorinus-Pettau, and Asterius.

## Versional Data (Ancient Translations of the Text)

The Passage appears in the ancient Armenian, Georgian, Vulgate, Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopian, Slavonic, and some Old Latin texts.

## Data combined By Date

If we consider the data that comes basically from the first millennium, we can chart it out by century. Technically, there are a little over a half dozen different forms in which the text is found. But we will break them into two basic categories - those that refer to “Isaiah” in some form, and those that refer to “the prophets” (plural, with no Isaiah mention), in some form.

1st century -

No Evidence from the First century (though there are rumors that a few pages from a First century Copy of Mark have been discovered, and one friend who examined it pointed out that it adds no readings to the NA 28. But I don't know which passage it contains).

2nd Century -

- Has Isaiah - Irenaeus (in his original Greek text always and his later translated Latin text once), Origen (in four passages, in his Greek and Latin text)
- No Isaiah - Irenaeus (in his later translated Latin text twice)

## 3rd Century -

- Has Isaiah - Coptic Sahidic, Coptic Boharic, ITa,
- No Isaiah - Coptic Sahidic (never in the text, but in the margin of a few manuscripts, which may have been added much later)

## 4th century -

- Has Isaiah - 01, 03, almost all the Vulgate Mss (and there are thousands of them), Serapion, Victorianus-Pettau, Ambrosiaster,
- No Isaiah - a handful of Vulgate Mss.

## 5th Century -

- Has Isaiah - 05, Arm, geo, ITb, ITd, ITff2, (Old Latin Manuscripts are individually noted with an IT), Syriac Peshitta, Epiphanius, Hesychius, Chromatius, Augustine,
- No Isaiah - 02, 032, Asterius

## 6th century -

- Has Isaiah- ITf, ITq, Palestinian Syriac, Severian,
- No Isaiah - 042, 043, Ethiopian

## 7th century -

- Has Isaiah - ITaur, Syriac Herc. (in the Margin), ITr1,
- No Isaiah - Syriac Herc. (in the text)

## 8th Century -

- Has Isaiah - 019, 038, ITI,
- No Isaiah-

## 9th Century -

- Has Isaiah - 037,
- No Isaiah - 011, 0211, Old Church slavonic

## In Chart Form (First Millennium)

Date	Has Isaiah			No Isaiah / Prophets		
	Greek	Vers	Pat	Greek	Vers	Pat
2			- Irenaeus (Greek+Lat)	- Irenaeus (in 2 later Latin copies)		
3		- Coptic Sahidic - Coptic Boharic Its	- Origen		- Coptic Sahidic (Mrg of a few mss.)	
4	01, 03,	- The Vulgate Mss.	-Serapion -Victoranus -Ambrosiaster		- A few Vulgate Mss, esp. later ones	
5	05,	-Armenian -Georgian -It <sup>b,d,ff2</sup> -Syriac Peshitta	-Epiph. -Hesyc. -Chromat. -Augustine	02, 032		-Asterius
6		-ITf, ITq -Pal-Syr -Severian		042, 043	-Ethiopian	
7		-ITaur, r1 -Syriac Herc. (in the Margin),			-Syriac Herc. (in the text)	
8	019, 038	IT1				
9	037,			011, 0211,	-Slavonic	

## In Chart Form (The Greek Data from the Second Millennium)

The Later Minuscules (Mostly from the second Millennium)		
Date	Has Isaiah	No Isaiah/Prophets
10 +	33, 63, 151, 161, 184, 222, 391, 565, 747, 800, 892, 989, 1241, 1243, 1579, 2427, 1, 22, 61, 115, 131, 152, 176, 205, 209, 348, 372, 555, 566, 700, 829, 873, 929, 1032, 1071, 1087, 1279, 1582, 2174, 2193, 2486, 2737, 544, 1273, 2680	872c, 4, 13, 16, 26, 28, 69, 79, 117, 118, 124, 153, 154, 178, 179, 191, 238, 273, 346, 349, 377, 382, 389, 427, 472, 495, 513, 517, 543, 569, 579, 590, 595, 695, 697, 706, 713, 716, 719, 728, 732, 740, 747, 752, 766, 780, 788, 791, 792, 803, 826, 827, 828, 837, 855, 863, 949, 954s, 979, 983, 1009, 1029, 1047, 1082, 1084, 1093, 1128, 1160, 1216, 1253, 1302, 1326, 1337, 1342, 1396, 1424, 1446, 1451s, 1457, 1495, 1506, 1515, 1528, 1530, 1542, 1546, 1555, 1574, 1593, 1612, 1645, 1654, 1675, 2106, 2148, 2193, 2200, 2206, 2411, 2487, 2542, 2606, 2726, 2738, 2766, 2782, 2786, and (in a different case) 492, 755, 1089, 2721
		<b><u>+ 1,396 additional Manuscripts from the second Millennium</u></b>

Note that since we are asking, “What was the original form of the text?” the earlier a witness is, the more valuable it is in answering that question, at least generally speaking. The Greek witnesses are generally most important, but where they are absent, ancient translations of the text bear witness to whatever form of the Greek text was being translated into that language at that time. Thus they are indirect witnesses. Patristic citations refer to places in the writings of a church Father where he quotes the text. These are by far the least valuable type of witness, for several reasons. They could be quoting from memory, someone copying their text may have made changes at a later stage, etc. But, again, in the absence of Greek data, the citations of the Fathers can bear witness to the state of the Greek text that was being used in their day in their part of the world. Most textual critics place the highest value (by far) on the manuscripts from the first half of the first millennium. Any reading that doesn't appear at all until after that is highly suspect. If we are trying to discover which reading is a later scribal alteration, then a reading that doesn't show up anywhere for the first five centuries of the Church raises an immediate flag.

And this is basically the case with the reading “the prophets.” There is no real evidence for the reading from the first four centuries of the church. Notice three things. First, I have placed “Irenaeus” in the column for the second century, but understand what is going on there. Irenaeus wrote in Greek in the second century. All the copies of his work in its original language have the “Isaiah.” But sometime later, his works were translated into Latin for broader distribution. The Latin texts have the “Isaiah” as well. Except for two copies of the Latin translation. It is clear that whoever made these copies of a translation of his work into Latin made his text conform to the form of the text they had before them (this happens a lot with the Fathers). Thus, these two copies are not *really* witnesses to the text of Irenaeus. The second thing to notice is that I have placed the Coptic Sahidic translation in the third century. The Sahidic is a very important early witness to the text. All of the Sahidic manuscripts have the

“Isaiah” in the text. And most of them have no notice of any other reading. But a small handful of Sahidic manuscripts do have a note in the margin that points out that there is another reading known, without the Isaiah. But these notes were likely added much, much, later, and are not really witnesses to the text in the third century. Third, notice the mention of Vulgate manuscripts. I have placed the Vulgate manuscripts in the fourth century, because that is when this important translation was basically made (by different people). We have today literally thousands of copies of the Latin Vulgate translation (often in many different forms). They almost unambiguously have the Isaiah. However, there are later copies that don't have the Isaiah, which is what I refer to in the chart. However, these copies don't represent the *original* text of the Vulgate (which is clear from the thousands of unanimous copies), but represent much later copies of the translation, where someone added the reading they found in their form of the text. But this reading doesn't actually stretch back to the fourth century. There is no clear reference to the reading “the prophets” anywhere until the 5th century. That is an immediate flag.

However, one does get some Greek evidence of the reading “in the prophets” in the 5th and 6th century (01, 032, 042, 043). Thus, we do have a textual variant. This means there is some uncertainty about which of the readings is the original one. But if one looks over the data from the first Millennium, the weight of evidence is very clearly strongly in favor of the reading with the “Isaiah.” The earliest Greek manuscripts have that reading. Church Fathers from all different parts of the world were clearly using a Greek text that had the “Isaiah.” Even as early as Irenaeus, writing less than a century after Mark penned the original, represents the form of the text with the Isaiah. The reading is amazingly widespread. And ancient translations of the Greek text, made in all different parts of the World, from Antioch, to Africa, to Rome, to Byzantium, have the “Isaiah” in them. The Armenian translation, of which we have a thousand plus extant copies, was distributed and used all over for centuries, and it has the Isaiah. The Syriac Peshitta, which was translated in Antioch and became its Bible for basically the next millennium, has the Isaiah.

The reading without the “Isaiah” seems to have arisen as early as the 5th century. But it was not the common form of the text anywhere in the world, until the second Millennium. And here, the story changes. Scribes in Byzantium began to create numerous copies of the text of Scripture (and their copies all differ from one another in small places - none of them are identical to each other). They generally copy the same form of the text though. Majority text scholars consider this important, believing basically that whatever form of the text retained the most copies is most likely original (thus, such scholars deny that Acts 8:37 is original, which you looked at earlier). But the vast majority of scholars recognize that it is entirely possible to make numerous copies of a mistaken text. So, while they consider the later minuscules as important witnesses to the text, they don't treat them as 1,000+ separate witnesses. They recognize that they all reflect basically one form of the text that got copied in one small part of the world. These are the manuscripts reflected in the righthand part of the second chart, known as the “majority text” or the “Byzantine text.” They copied the form of the text without the “Isaiah.” And that form of the text became the commonly used form during the second Millennium (until the age several centuries ago when scholars began to realize the extent of textual variants, and thus seek the readings of the earliest manuscripts).

## Internal Data

Thus far, what we have looked at is what is known as “external data.” That is, the actual physical materials themselves. But God did not design us as robots to simply crunch numbers, and the text of the NT is not decided by simply simply counting noses (unless one is a Majority

text critic - they typically consider whichever reading has the highest number of Greek manuscripts to support it to be the original reading, regardless of the date of the manuscripts, and regardless of the patristic and versional data). Once we have gathered the external data, we then consider internal data that helps us interpret and make sense of the external data. We are asking, "Which reading is the original reading?" And typically the best way to answer this question is to *accept as original whichever reading can best make sense of how all the other readings arose*. Internal considerations are of two basic types. First, we ask, "Which reading(s) is (are) most likely to have been the one written by the original writer? This is called "intrinsic probability." Second we ask, "Which reading(s) is (are) most likely to have been the alteration of a later scribe(s)?" We are asking these questions to try to make sense of all of the data in the chart above. If we can't make sense of all of the data, we can't speak with much confidence about which form of the text was the original one. We simply must admit that we don't know. But if we can make sense of each part of the chart, we have most likely discovered the original reading of the text, and can speak with confidence about which reading was the original.

## Internal Data - Intrinsic Probability

At this juncture, we ask which reading makes the most sense as having been originally written by Mark. Mark contains quotations from Isaiah in 4:12; 7:6-7; 11:17; Moses in 7:10; 10:2-8, 19; 12:19, 26, 29-31; Psalms in 12:10-11, 36; 14:62; 15:34; Daniel in 13:26; 14:62; Zechariah in 13:27, though these all occur in the mouths of characters in Mark (mostly Jesus), rather than in the mouths of Mark as an editor. We can note that it is quite common for him to introduce quotations by naming the author of the passage, though in a few of these instances he does not. Thus we might expect Mark to attribute a quotation to a particular author. But in Mark 1:2, the situation is slightly more complicated. Mark is presenting a composite quotation, which borrows from at least two and possibly three OT passages. He combines elements from Mal. 3:1, Is. 40:3, and possibly also Ex. 23:20 (his first clause matches Exodus LXX better than Malachi, and the text in Exodus and Malachi were commonly combined in rabbinic messianic thought). It is likely that Mark has combined these texts to introduce the ministry of John the Baptist as one who would announce the coming second exodus from the wilderness that Isaiah had prophesied. He alters the pronouns in the text so that the messianic implications are brought out. "The Lord" whose path John prepares is "our God" for Mark. He follows the LXX of Isaiah in omitting the mention of "the desert" (as do Luke and Matthew as well). Strouse and Wessel explain, "Whereas the Hebrew text of Isaiah linked the desert to the preparation of a way, Mark follows the LXX in connecting the desert to the messenger. John the Baptist is the messenger in the desert who will prepare the way for a new and greater exodus deliverance, the revelation of God's salvation in Christ" (EBC, Matthew-Mark, pg. 700). He then continues to present John the Baptist's ministry as this herald (Mark 1:4-8), making throughout the entire Gospel allusions to Jesus as the one prophesied in Isaiah (see EB, Matthew-Mark, pg. 700-701). Mark introduces this initial composite quotation, focusing on Isaiah, in order to set the scene for his entire gospel. The eschatological comfort and deliverance prophesied in the last half of Isaiah has come now in Jesus. (Luke similarly sees Jesus filling the role prophesied by Isaiah as programmatic for his ministry - see Luke 4). This would naturally explain why, while combining quotations from Exodus, Malachi, and Isaiah, Mark would only mention Isaiah in the attribution. As we will see below, it could be entirely possible (and certainly not any kind of "error") that Mark is combining several texts but only mentioning one author in the attribution, especially if he wants to emphasize that author (Isaiah), and his broader context and themes. If we don't understand what Mark is doing, it might seem on the surface to be a difficulty in the text. And we probably aren't the first to sense the possibility of a difficulty in the text, at least on a surface reading.

KJV Mark	KJV OT	LXX Brenton
<p><i>“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written <u>in the prophets</u>,</i></p> <p><i>Behold, I send my messenger <u>before thy face</u>,</i></p> <p><i>which shall prepare <u>thy way</u> before <u>thee</u>.</i> (Mark 1:1-2)</p>	<p><i>“Behold, I will send my messenger,</i></p> <p><i>and he shall prepare <u>the way</u> before <u>me</u>:</i></p> <p><i>(Mal. 3:1 KJV)</i></p>	<p><i>“And, behold, I send my angel <u>before thy face</u>,</i> (Exodus 23:20 LXX-B)</p> <p><i>“Behold, I send forth my messenger,</i></p> <p><i>and he shall survey <u>the way</u> before <u>me</u>:</i></p>
<p><i>The voice of <u>one</u> crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord,</i></p> <p><i>make <u>his</u> paths straight.</i> (Mark 1:1-2)</p>	<p><i>“The voice of <u>him</u> that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD,</i></p> <p><i>make straight <u>in the desert</u> a <u>highway</u> for <u>our God</u>.</i></p> <p><i>Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:”</i> (Isaiah 40:3-4 KJV)</p>	<p><i>“The voice of <u>one</u> crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord,</i></p> <p><i>make straight the paths of our <u>God</u>.</i></p> <p><i>Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low: and all the crooked ways shall become straight, and the rough places plains.”(Isaiah 40:3-4 LXX-B)</i></p>

So, at first glance, the data doesn't seem to point either way specifically as to which reading Mark originally wrote.

But a second issue must be taken into account. This is how the other evangelists handle Mark's phrase, and his quotation. The literary relationship of the Synoptic gospels to each other is today known as the “Synoptic problem.” The vast majority of scholars today (something like 97%) hold the position that Mark wrote first (thus the position is known as “Markan priority”), and that Matthew and Luke later used Mark as a source, while also having others sources (some of which appear to have been shared between them). The evidence for this order is extremely persuasive to most. However, as we will note below, the church throughout history has commonly held to “Matthean priority,” or the view that Matthew wrote first, and that Mark and Luke (perhaps) used Matthew. We will proceed with the standard contemporary view, and interact with the older view below.

Mark introduces Jesus by introducing the ministry of John the Baptist. And he introduces the ministry of John with this quote. Matthew and Luke both follow his basic arraignment here, placing John, his ministry, and especially his baptism of Jesus, at the inception period of the ministry of Jesus (see Matt. 3:1-7; Luke 3:1-38). And they each follow Mark in placing this quote from Isaiah as the overall description of John's ministry.

In Matthew, note how he follows Mark's basic arrangement.

*"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins."*  
(Matthew 3:1-6 KJV)

He keeps the identification of John with the Messenger in the wilderness identified by Isaiah. And he keeps the quotation from Isaiah 40:3 in a paradigmatic place. And Matthew clearly keeps the attribution of the phrase to its author, who he names as "Isaiah the prophet." But he doesn't include the other elements in the composite quotation (the phrases from Exodus and Malachi). Why not? Could it be that he felt the same tension that made you ask me about this text, and what could \*on the surface\* look like an error in Mark, and so, in his own edition of the Gospel, simply made the subject smoother by keeping the "Isaiah," but removing the other two parts of the quotation? This seems to be exactly what he has done. But Matthew didn't want to "lose" the importance of the text in Exodus and Malachi, and their prophecies pointing towards John. So he includes them, just like Mark. But he moves them. In Matthew 11:2-19, Matthew shares a section of several parts (11:2-6; 11:7-15; 11:16-19) building the comparison between Jesus and John the Baptist. In the second part of this section, Matthew presents Jesus as making the same connection between John and the combination of OT quotations that Mark used in Mark 1:1-2.

*"And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."*  
(Matthew 11:7-15 KJV)

Matthew doesn't want to "lose" the connection of these OT citations to John, but he seems content to place them later, where they couldn't be accidentally read as a "mistake" on Mark's

part. This isn't to say Matthew thought Mark made a mistake - it's to point at that he could see how an earlier text could be misread, or misunderstood.

And when we come to Luke, we see precisely the same thing. Luke likewise follows the basic chronology of Mark in placing the ministry of John the Baptist (Luke 3:1-20), his baptism of Jesus (Luke 3:21-23), and the Isaiah quote, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. But Luke seems to want to make the connection to Isaiah even more explicit, so while Mark (and Matthew) only quoted the first part of Isaiah 40:3, Luke extends the quotation covering (some elements) all the way to Isaiah 40:5.

*"Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God."*  
(Luke 3:1-6 KJV)

Just like Matthew, Luke has removed the parts of the composite quotation that comes from Exodus and Malachi. And just like Matthew, he attributes the quotation to "Isaiah the prophet." Further, just as Matthew didn't seem to want to "lose" the other elements of the quotes and their connection to John, Luke also shares in common the section similar to Matthew 11:2-19 where he compares Jesus and John, in Luke 7:18-35. Since this section is present in Matthew and Luke, but not Mark, it is known as "Q material," simply meaning that Matthew and Luke (on the common view) share a source here that Mark didn't have access to. And note in this section what Luke does with the OT quotes and their connection to John.

*"And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."*  
(Luke 7:24-29 KJV)

He keeps the allusions of Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1 to John the Baptist, but just like Matthew, he records these only later in his gospel, and removes them from the section which first introduces John. And just like Matthew, he uses the phrase, "Isaiah the prophet" in his section parallel to Mark 1:2. Note that he has a slightly different form of the introductory clause, "as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet." But he retains the specific attribution to Isaiah.

Note what all this means. If Matthew and Luke both had a copy of Mark in front of them that read, “in the prophets” at Mark 1:2, there would be no reason to move the Malachi and Exodus parts of the quote to a later point in their gospels. And even if they did for other reasons share only the quotation from Isaiah in their introduction to John’s ministry, if their copy of Mark read, “in the prophets,” instead of mentioning Isaiah, there would be no reason why they would *both* alter the attribution to explicitly mention *Isaiah!* They would simply have needed to turn Mark’s “The prophets” in a singular form and press on, if that were what their copy of Mark read. This provides a strong case that the original form of Mark 1:2 read, “in Isaiah the prophet.” In fact, this very likely shows us *a first century copy of Mark’s gospel* (that is, the one that Matthew and Luke used). This weighs very heavily towards the likelihood that Mark’s gospel originally read, “in Isaiah the prophet.”

But we have considered only which reading was most likely written by Mark. We have to also find a way to explain the rise of the other readings. Thus we not only ask, “which reading was most likely to have been written by the original author?” but also, “which reading(s) was most likely the alteration of a scribe?” This is what we call transcriptional probability.

## Internal Data - Transcriptional Probability

Here we take each reading and probe it to ask, which readings make most sense as scribal alterations? Technically, we should start with each of the seven different forms of the text of Mark 1:2 found in the Greek manuscripts (spelled out at the beginning), presume it to be original, and ask how we can make sense of each of the other five forms as being alterations of a scribe following commonly known scribal practice. Whichever reading, when presumed original, best explains how the other readings came about, is most likely the original reading. But since we have basically narrowed the six options down to two forms, we can simply treat both of those and see where the data points.

First, what if we presume that the reading “In the prophets” was the original reading? Can we make sense of the other readings rising as scribal alterations? We could perhaps explain the rise of a reading like “in Isaiah the prophet” by noting what might have appeared to a scribe aware of the other gospels. As we have seen, both Matthew and Luke referred in their parallel passages to “Isaiah the prophet” (Luke 3:4; Matthew 3:3). It was very common for scribes to smooth out the text and remove what they perceived to be errors. One of the most common ways this occurs is by “harmonizing” differences between the different gospels. This happens thousands of times over. Understand, there is no malicious or deceitful intent here. Every scribe was producing a handwritten copy of Scripture, *from* a handwritten copy of scripture. They knew without a doubt that whoever had produced the copy they were working from had made some mistakes. Those who were professional scribes knew all too well how common these mistakes were and how easy they were to make. Thus, when they found that appeared to be “mistakes” in their copy, they often assumed that of course, the original text hadn’t included that “mistake.” Surely it must have been a mistake made by a scribe before them. So they altered the text. They didn’t intend to create a textual variant - they intended to restore the original text to its pristine original form. This happened especially commonly when a scribe noticed a difference between the gospels. Perhaps he flipped over to the other gospel in his exemplar. Perhaps he had another copy open. Perhaps he simply knew the reading of the other Gospel by memory and thus knew, “this isn’t how Matthew reads.” Thus, it is possible that if the original form of the text read, “in the prophets,” and a scribe came across this and thought, “Hey, in Matthew and

Luke this section refers to *Isaiah* the prophet. The guy before me must have made a mistake and accidentally omitted the reference to Isaiah, so now it looks like the Gospels contradict each other. I'll fix his mistake for him and put the text back how it was supposed to be, where Mark 1:2 mentions Isaiah." Notice that the scribe is feeling the same tension we mentioned above in relation to Matthew and Luke's handling of Mark. The scribe loves the Bible, and has a high view of scripture. That's why he assumes that "in the prophets" must have been a scribal mistake which he feels the responsibility to correct. This scenario could account for the rise of manuscripts which read "in Isaiah the prophets." In fact, this is the strongest case that can be made for the reading "in the prophets" being original. If the only data that we knew was that there were two readings, and we didn't have the external data that we do, this might be a compelling reason to accept that "in the prophets" was the original reading.

But in this scenario, how do we account for the rise of the other variant forms of the text? If the reading "in Isaiah the prophet" is the result of scribal alteration to make the texts of the Gospels harmonize with each other, then it would make sense that different scribes would create various forms of the reading, since they often conform to a parallel text known only in their imperfect memory. And there are basically three forms of the reading with Isaiah in it found, as noted above. The first is the common text, "In Isaiah the prophet." The second is the similar text, but without the article. A Scribe harmonizing the text by memory could conceivably forget whether the article was present or not, and so not include it in their manuscript. And the third form certainly makes sense, because the third form isn't just, "In Isaiah the prophet," but rather, "In the book of Isaiah the prophet" (found in three late manuscripts). This reading is undeniably a harmonization, because this exact phrase (with the addition of "in the book of") is the form of the text found in Luke 3:4. It is undeniable that these three scribes at least were harmonizing their form of the text of Mark to match the form of the text which they had in Luke. But the question is, why does this happen only three times? It could be that every scribe which sought to harmonize the text of Mark chose to harmonize it to Matthew, except for three, who harmonized it to Luke. But the fact that Luke's form of the text so rarely is inserted into the text of Mark makes this less likely. Further, one must explain the different forms of "in the prophets." If this is the original reading, then why does its form get changed (sometimes with the article, sometimes without; sometimes in the neuter/masculine, sometimes in a misspelled feminine form)? One might expect more consistency if this were the original reading.

But let us now consider the other possibility. What if the original form of the text were, "In Isaiah the prophet?" Can we make sense of the other forms of the text as being due to scribal alterations? And in fact, every form of the text makes perfect sense on this supposition. Naturally many scribes felt the tension of the fact that the text before them read "in Isaiah the prophet" while the actual quotation that precedes it come not just from Isaiah, but also from Malachi and possibly from Exodus. Thus, they would assume that Mark had originally written, "In the prophets" and whoever had copied the manuscript they were using had made an error by inserting "Isaiah." They are well acquainted with the fact that the manuscript they are working with contains numerous such errors. So they change the text to some form of "in the prophets." They think they are correcting an error in their exemplar, and restoring the true text, but they are actually creating a textual variant. Some, who don't notice the source of the quotations that follow, notice the difference from Luke, and so harmonize the text to Luke's form (writing, "In the book of Isaiah the prophet"). But most notice more sharply the apparent tension between Mark only mentioning Isaiah but quoting from more than Isaiah. Some simply copy the text as they have it (retaining the "in Isaiah the prophet"). However, as is often the case in scribal work,

some spell the phrase in different ways, and a few accidentally omit the article. It is easy to skip a word when glancing between two manuscripts. This makes sense of the rise of each variant.

## Conclusion of External And Internal Data

To conclude the examination of the evidence, the external evidence weighs very heavily towards the original reading being “in Isaiah the prophet.” This is the only reading known until the 5th century, and in the first millennium, it is by far the most widespread reading, in various languages, in various parts of the world, throughout the centuries. However, if one holds to a Majority text position, then the larger number of manuscripts (later though they may be) weigh more heavily, and so such an approach would see the external data as leaning towards “in the prophets” being the original reading.

In terms of the internal evidence, the intrinsic evidence weighs very heavily towards the form, “In Isaiah the prophet” being the original one. The transcriptional evidence could provide a case for either form, but the case for the form “in Isaiah the prophet” is still the stronger one.

Combing all the evidence, there is very clearly a stronger weight, both internally and externally, for the reading “In Isaiah the prophets” being the original one. The rise of the form “In the prophets” can be seen as a natural tendency on the part of scribes to produce a smoother reading, and they are recognizing the same tension which was apparently noticed even by Matthew and Luke in their own use of Mark as a source for their own Gospels.

But now we must turn to one other issue. It is regularly claimed by those defending the KJV that the reading “in Isaiah the prophet” is an “error” in scripture. In fact, it’s quite common for them to say something like, “I cannot use any version except the KJV, because all other versions have a mistake in the Bible here, and only the KJV doesn’t.” But this is absurd logic, which mishandles and misrepresents the facts. And it proceeds with many of the same basic presumptions that modern skeptics use in their approach to the Bible. Is a composite quotation from Malachi, Exodus, and Isaiah that is only attributed to Isaiah, and “error” in the text?

## Composite Quotations of the OT in the NT

Most often, when a NT author quotes from an OT passage, (whether he quotes from the Hebrew text or a Greek translation of the text) they employ the single text they refer to. But occasionally, they create a composite quotation of two or more old testament passages which they piece together into a single quotation. We do the same thing today. Someone might ask, “What’s your philosophy of dating?” And you might reply, “I’m following the biblical admonition to guard my heart while I wait on the Lord.” But the Bible doesn’t say that, at least not in any one text. You are combining phrases that come from separate passages, (like Prov. 4:23 and Ps. 27:4) into a single quotation. The Biblical authors occasionally do this as well.

For example, when Matthew records the Voice from Heaven speaking over Jesus’ Baptism, a profoundly important statement is made about who Jesus is. In the phrase, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17), the Voice combines references to two separate texts, Is. 42:1 and Ps. 2:7. These texts were part of Jewish Messianic expectations. But Judaism didn’t understand the true nature of Messiahship. The “Son of God” language of the enthronement Psalm placed a coming Messiah in the heritage of Solomon, David, and the Kings

who reign in power. This they well understood, and it was a powerful King for whom they looked. But the “in whom I am well pleased” phrase calls clearly to mind the image of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. This image they didn’t realize to be a part of what the Messiah would do. Suffer? The Messiah? Not so my Lord! What was revealed by the heavenly Voice was that Jesus is not only the King who has come, he is also the Servant who will suffer. He combines in one person both prophetic strands. The composite quotation makes this point powerfully.

Or, for example, in Matt. 2:6, when asked where Messiah would be born, the response combines a text from Micah 5:2 with language from 2 Sam. 5:2. “And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.” (Matthew 2:5–6 KJV). Most of this quotation comes from Mic. 5:2;

“But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”

(Micah 5:2 KJV)

But there is no mention in Micah of a Ruler who will “Shepherd/Feed/Rule my people Israel.” This language comes rather from 2 Sam. 5:2;

“Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the LORD said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel.”

(2 Samuel 5:2 KJV)

Matthew is making it plain by his composite quotation that the ruler in Micah 5:2 is none other than the one who fulfills the promises to David. But notice his quotation formula. He has combined texts from two authors, but has only referred to “for thus it is written by the prophet,” (Matthew 2:5 KJV) which is singular. Matthew didn’t consider a mistake to combine quotations from two sources, but only refer to one “prophet” in the attribution.

Matt. 27:9 is another great example. He describes the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot for thirty pieces of silver. But after the betrayal, the guilt ridden Judas returns the money, and hangs himself (Matt. 27:1-5). The chief priest know that they could get into trouble if they simply put the money back into the temple treasury (see Deut. 23:18), and so decide to use the money to purchase a field (apparently in Judas’ own name, and perhaps in association with his well-known death). Matthew sees prophetic significance in all of this. Thus he writes,

*“Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; And gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord appointed me.”*

*(Matthew 27:9–10 KJV)*

The problem is that Matthew attributes the quotation to Jeremiah. But no text in Jeremiah contains this passage. Rather, it is clear that Matthew is combining a passage from Jeremiah (either Jeremiah 19:1-13, or Jeremiah 32:7-9, and/or Jeremiah 18:2) with language drawn clearly from Zechariah 11:12-13. While Jeremiah mentions visiting a potter in 18:2-6, and buying

a field in 32:7-9, he doesn't mention the thirty pieces of silver that seem so significant for Matthew (27:3) and that forms part of his quotation. Rather, the largest chunk of the quotation clearly comes from Zechariah 11:12-13.

*“And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was priced at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD.”*  
(Zechariah 11:12–13 KJV)

Matthew combines elements from both Zechariah and Jeremiah (and perhaps Isaiah), and draws most of the quote from Zechariah, but only attributes the quotation to Jeremiah. Is this an “error in the Bible”? If so, it is as much an error in the KJV as it is in any other version. Thus, those saying silly things like “I can’t use anything but the KJV because it’s the only version without an error in Mark 1:2” now need to admit that by their own logic they cannot use or endorse the KJV, since it contains exactly the same “error” at Matt. 27:9. But the truth is, such a composite quotation, when attributed only to one author, while rare, and easily misunderstood, is simply not an “error.” It’s just a less common feature of some composite quotations. In fact, just as scribes who read the text “In Isaiah the prophet” in Mark 1:2 felt the text needed to be smoothed out by changing it to “in the prophets,” scribes who read the text of Matthew 27:9 who say Mathew quote Zechariah but attribute the quotation to Jeremiah also smoothed out the text. Some scribes changed the word “Jeremiah” to what they felt was the more accurate “Zechariah,” so that Matt. 27:9 read, “that which was spoken by Zechariah the prophet” (for example, Greek minuscule 22, and the margin of the Herculean Syriac manuscript), and others simply removed the “Jeremiah” so that the text read, “in the prophets” (just as some had in Mark 1:2), like Greek Uncial 043, Greek Minuscule 33, several Latin manuscripts, some Syriac manuscripts, some Boharic manuscripts, etc.). If one demands that we always accept the “easier reading” or the one that doesn't have anything that might appear to be a contradiction, then the text of the KJV needs to be changed in Matthew 27:9 to follow these manuscripts.

## The Origin of the KJV Reading

Even though the evidence seems strongly to favor the reading “In Isaiah the prophet” as the original reading, there is a textual variant, and the majority of the later manuscripts do read, “in the prophets.” Thus, there is some uncertainty about which form of the text was original. And most would recommend then that a good translation should include a footnote or marginal note to point out the fact that there are two readings that could represent the original form of the text, and that there is some uncertainty about which form was the original one. In fact, such notes have a long history, which stretches back to way before the KJV was produced. And this brings to the question of how and why the KJV has the form of the text that it does. To answer this question, we must go back to Erasmus.

## Erasmus, The Father of Modern Textual Criticism

While Erasmus and his work are almost universally misunderstood and misrepresented by KJV Only and TR Only advocates, they are right to recognize some measure of early genesis of the KJV in the text of Erasmus. This is not to equate the text of Erasmus and that of the KJV NT -

they are decidedly textually different. But Erasmus' text was a precursor to the eclectic text that would become the text of the KJV. Erasmus is generally considered the "father of modern textual criticism." He wasn't at all the first to notice textual variants in the manuscript tradition, and to make some attempt to determine which represented the original reading. But he was the first to work to create a printed Greek text, and one of the first to treat textual variants in a systematic fashion while creating an eclectic text. Erasmus of course never set out to create a perfect Greek text. He never even set out to produce a good one. The primary purpose of his work, as he repeatedly stated and explained, was to create a better Latin translation.<sup>2</sup> He felt that the form of the Latin Vulgate that had become current in his day had corrupted the original form of the Latin Vulgate, to which he mostly wished to return, and felt also that the original Latin translation needed some improvement from what he felt was his own far more qualified hand. Because the concept of altering the Latin Vulgate was an unpopular one, for which he would face a great deal of controversy, he included a Greek text alongside his revision of the Latin Vulgate, so that he could substantiate his revisions to the Latin by reference to the Greek. Thus, all of his Greek texts were published as diglots, with the Greek text in one column and the far more important (to him) Latin text in another column. His text would go through numerous revisions (he published major editions of his text in 1516, 1519, 1522, 1527, and 1535 (each are accessible here <http://vuntblog.blogspot.com/2010/11/erasmus-new-testament-editions-online.html>)).

Along with his text, Erasmus published a variety of "annotations" on the text. These were comments (printed like modern endnotes or footnotes) that took up issues of textual criticism (differences in the Greek manuscripts, differences between Greek manuscripts and the Latin manuscripts, and different readings found in patristic literature), issues of philology, and occasionally exegetical questions. His first edition contained, by his own count, over 1,000 such textual notes. And they grew increasingly more numerous with each edition. The important thing to realize is that *Erasmus often printed in the text readings that he didn't think represented the original form of the text*. The purpose of his Greek text wasn't to perfectly set out what he thought the reading of the originals was - it was only to provide substantiation for his revisions to the Latin Vulgate. Almost any form of the Greek text would have done. Any number of factors could cause him to put a reading into the text. Sometimes it was because he felt it was the correct reading from Latin manuscripts, which he translated back into Greek, even though it wasn't found in the Greek manuscripts (as in Acts 8:37). Sometimes it was because it was the common reading of the Greek manuscripts he had available, and he simply left the form as he found it, whether he agreed with it or not. Sometimes it was because the reading was the currently accepted Latin one, which he didn't agree with, but didn't want to fight about (as in I John 5:7). A number of factors shaped his actual printed text.

But Erasmus' own opinion about what readings represented the original form of the text wasn't the form printed in his text; it was his opinion stated in his comments in the Annotations. He reportedly makes this clear. He considered these Annotations the most valuable and important part of his work, and regularly reminded the reader not to read the text apart from his annotations on it. Remarking on some comments of Erasmus to this effect, and noting that there are two ways to take Erasmus' comment, Krans presents the second as making far more sense, and explains, "According to the second, what is printed as the Greek text does not necessarily

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<sup>2</sup> See an excellent explanation by H. D. Jonge, perhaps the worlds leading living Erasmus scholar, in his article here [https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/1010/279\\_121.pdf?sequence=1](https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/1010/279_121.pdf?sequence=1)

reflect Erasmus' opinion on the correct reading. Consequently, his Latin translation must be seen with the same *provisio*.<sup>3</sup> Erasmus wanted the reader to read his annotations, where he noted textual variants about which there was doubt, and to come to his own conclusion about which reading was original. Erasmus explained, "Those who read my [Latin] translation without by annotations are mistaken too. In a translation, you can only express one meaning, in annotations you can point out several, from which the reader can freely choose the one he would want to follow. There [in the annotations] I put forward the meaning of which I think it concurs best with the apostolic sense."<sup>4</sup> Even the very title page of his first 1516 edition and those following had encouraged the reader to read the text, with the annotations, and then make his own determination about which form of the text was accurate. Erasmus describes his edition on the title page as being, "together with annotations, which can explain to the reader what has been changed and for which reason. Therefore, whoever you are, if you esteem the true theology, read, understand, and then only judge."<sup>5</sup>

In his first edition (1516), Erasmus placed in the text the reading that would become the common one in printed texts for the next several centuries. He placed the phrase "in the prophets" in the text of Mark 1:2, both in the Latin column which was the primary purpose of his work, and the Greek column which was incidentally included to substantiate it (see the relevant page here;

[http://images.csntm.org/PublishedWorks/Erasmus\\_1516/Erasmus1516\\_0037a.jpg](http://images.csntm.org/PublishedWorks/Erasmus_1516/Erasmus1516_0037a.jpg)). As this differed from the common Latin Vulgate of the day, (which had "in Isaiah the prophet"), he apparently intended his text to reflect a new translation that he thought would better reflect the reading of most of the Greek manuscripts known in that day.

But he included an annotation (like a modern footnote or endnote) at the end of the work.<sup>6</sup> Under the heading, "Isaiah the Prophet" he writes a full page explaining that there is doubt about whether the text should read "in the prophets" or "in Isaiah the Prophet." He continued to expand this note in his next several editions. Erasmus' Annotation on the variant in his final 1535 edition reads (with the letters B, D, E representing the addition to his note made in the subsequent editions of his NT);<sup>7</sup>

[A] *In Esaia propheta.*

In Graecorum exemplaribus, quae quidem ego viderim, Esaiae nomen non exprimitur, sed tantum εν προφηταις, id est 'in prophetis'. Verum id apparet mutatum data opera a doctis qui deprehenderant hoc testimonium e duobus prophetis esse conflatum, quemadmodum indicat Hieronymus in libro De optimo genere

<sup>3</sup> Krans, Jan, "Beyond What Is Written: Erasmus And Beza As Conjectural Critics Of The New Testament," Brill, Leiden, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Erasmus, Desiderius, in a letter quoted and translated in *ibid*, pg. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Erasmus, Desiderius, Title page of *Novum Instrumentum*, 1516, translation from *ibid*, pg. 21, f.n. 34. The title page can be viewed here [http://www.e-rara.ch/bau\\_1/content/pageview/895559](http://www.e-rara.ch/bau_1/content/pageview/895559)

<sup>6</sup> His note on the textual variant starts at the bottom of the page here, [http://www.e-rara.ch/bau\\_1/content/pageview/896212](http://www.e-rara.ch/bau_1/content/pageview/896212) and continues here [http://www.e-rara.ch/bau\\_1/content/pageview/896213](http://www.e-rara.ch/bau_1/content/pageview/896213)

<sup>7</sup> This is the text as printed in the ASD VI-5, pg. 352-356. It is also viewable here; [http://www.e-rara.ch/bau\\_1/content/pageview/13008872](http://www.e-rara.ch/bau_1/content/pageview/13008872) to here [http://www.e-rara.ch/bau\\_1/content/pageview/13008873](http://www.e-rara.ch/bau_1/content/pageview/13008873)

interpretandi. Siquidem prior pars, nempe illa: *Ego mitto angelum meum ante faciem tuam, qui praeparabit viam tuam ante te*, est apud Malachiam cap. tertio. Quo sane loco illud obiter annotandum, Hieronymum in eo quod modo citauimus opere memoria lapsum videri posse, cum ait hoc testimonium haberi in fine Malachiae. Nam cum totum huius prophetae vaticinium quatuor capitibus absoluitur et hic locus in ipsa statim fronte tertii capituli, 'in medio' verius est quam 'in fine'. Verum suspicor quae res imposuerit Hieronymianae memoriae, nimirum quod in extrema cake habeatur non dissimile vaticinium, quod et ipsum de Ioanne interpretantur: *Ecce ego mittam vobis Heliam prophetam, antequam veniet dies Domini*. [C] Neque enim mihi satisfacit excusatio cuiusdam, qui putat in fine dictum esse quod sit paulo infra medium. [E] Sunt qui indicent in bibliotheca Vaticana haberi codicem Graecum maiusculis descriptum qui consentiat cum Latina aeditione. Quid mirum, si consentiat ad Latinorum exemplaria castigatus? Quanquam arbitror hanc germanam esse lectionem. Duriusculum est quod adfert Beda, Augustinum, ni fallor, sequutus, fieri potuisse, vt Marco scribenti aliud nomen pro alio occurreret, quod tamen admonitus non putarit corrigendum, eo quod arbitraretur non temere permisisse Spiritum Sanctum, vt nomen pro nomine tum occurreret scribentis animo. Frigidior est et illa solutio, quoniam prophetae, licet diuersis modis, eadem praedixerunt eodem Spiritu, omnium omnia esse communia. Quod si recipimus, non refert, quo titulo citetur aliquid e sacris voluminibus. Certum est hie alteram vaticinii partem esse apud Esaiam. Sed hoc quaeri poterat quid geminum adducens vaticinium vnum tantum prophetam nominet. Quod ad sensum attinet, vnum reuera vaticinium est. Sed apud Matthaeum 4., quem sequitur Marcus, solus Esaias nominatur et huius tantum verba citantur; Marcus Esaias vaticinio praetexit vaticinium Malachiae contentus nominare prophetam celeberrimi nominis. [A] Caeterum quanquam sententiae summa consentit, verba tamen euangelistae nonnihil dissident tum ab Hebraica tum ab Hebraica veritate. Siquidem Hebraea sic reddidit Hieronymus: *Ecce ego mitto angelum meum, et praeparabit viam ante faciem meam*, consentientibus per omnia Septuaginta, nisi quod mitto verterunt in futurum 'mittam', in quo Marcus concordat cum Hebraeis. Caeterum addidit *tuam*, cum tantum sit *viam*. Et rursum quod illic est *ante faciem meam*, hie refert *ante faciem tuam*, mutata persona loquentis. Nam apud prophetam haec verba videntur esse Christi de se loquentis, etiamsi mox mutata persona de se tanquam de alio loquatur: *Et statim veniet ad templum dominator*. Contra apud euangelistam haec verba Patris sunt loquentis ad Filium: *qui praeparabit viam tuam ante te*. Iam posterior pars, *vox clamantis in deserto, parate viam Domini* etc., est apud Esaiam cap. quadragesimo. Hebraica sic vertit Hieronymus: *Vox clamantis in deserto, parate viam Domini, rectas facite semitas Dei nostri*, in nullo dissentientibus Septuaginta [B] ab Hebraeis. [A] Dissentiunt et hie nonnihil euangelistae, sed in verbis duntaxat. Nam quod caeteri dixerunt: *rectas facite semitas eius*, Ioannes dixit: *dirigite viam Domini*. Deinde quod habet Hebraica veritas et Septuaginta transtulerunt: *rectas facite semitas Dei nostri*, Matthaeus, Marcus et Lucas posuerunt *semitas eius*, opinor, quod euangelistae, cum Hebraice scirent, non indigerent translatione Septuaginta, deinde cum ab Hebraeis non anxie decerperent quod scriptum esset, sed quod memoria suggerebat, describerent, verbis nonnunquam dissident, in sententia concordant, id quod pluribus in locis admonuit diuus Hieronymus. Iam illud, quando notum est iis quoque qui Graece nesciunt, angelum significare nuncium, non arbitror admonendum. Fortassis hic melius vertisset 'nuncium'. Deinde non dixit simpliciter: *angelum*, sed addito articulo, τὸν ἀγγελοῦ, vt certum aliquem angelum siue nuncium intelligas designari, cum omnes alioqui prophetae nuncii flierint venturi Christi. At hic vnicus ille et eximius fuit nuncius, qui non solum praenunciavit aduentum Domini procul aduentantis, sed qui praecurrens ipse praeparavit viam iam aduenientis. Praeterea quod ait: *ante faciem tuam*, non est Graecis ἐμπροσθεν aut ἐνώπιον, quod aliquoties ita vertit - hoc est 'coram te' et 'in conspectu tuo' -, sed πρό προσώπου, vt intelligas hunc nuncium praecedere et hoc discutiente obstacula viae iam videri et apparere faciem aduenientis Domini. Mox autem qui praeparabit viam tuam ante teo Graece est ἐμπροσθεν σου, quasi dicas: 'a fronte tua', [D] vt intelligas Christum qui nunciabatur, iam adesse. Aliter enim dicitur: 'ante Ciceronem dixit hoc Cato', id est: 'priusquam Cicero diceret'.

Erasmus explains that the Greek manuscripts he has seen read "in the prophets" (which is the reading he has placed in the text), but he explains that Jerome had the text in the form "in Isaiah the prophet." And he prefers the reading of Jerome, believing it to be the original reading. Ironically, as was often the case, Erasmus didn't look very closely even at the few manuscripts which he had access to at this point. For his first edition, in terms of manuscripts that contained the Gospels, he had access to miniscule 69, 2, 817, and 1. Through his 5th edition, he also had access to miniscule 3, 61, and some readings that were sent to him from



majuscule 03. In his first edition, he opens his note by explaining “*In Graecorum exemplaribus, quae quidem ego viderim, Esiae nomen non exprimitur, sed tantum εν προφηταισ, id est ‘in prophetis’.*” That is, “In the Greek manuscripts I read, I find that Isaiah’s name is not expressed, but only [it says] ‘in the prophets.’” This was true of miniscule 2, from which he created most of his text of the Gospels. But it is not true of miniscule 1, which has “In Isaiah the prophet.” Apparently he neglected to even consult miniscule 1 at this point. One can see the manuscript here (<http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/community/modules/papyri/?zoom=18&left=2&top=49&site=INTF&image=30001/0/4050/10/1651>), and note that in the second line of text the manuscript clearly reads, “In Isaiah the prophet.” Miniscule 2 however, which Erasmus followed much more often, and actually marked up to give to the printer to use as the printer’s copy (rather than actually creating a text to print), reads, “In the prophets” (one can see the manuscript here <http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/community/modules/papyri/?zoom=20&left=2&top=49&site=INTF&image=30002/0/1550/10/552>). However, even on the basis only of its presence in the Latin Vulgate, without realizing that he had Greek support for it, he concludes that the reading “In Isaiah the prophets” is the true reading. He explains that the reading “in the prophets” arose because scribes who felt the tension of the fact that Mark actually quoted from two prophets, but only mentioned Isaiah were embarrassed by the difficulty, and so “fixed” the text.<sup>8</sup> Erasmus notes that, “The true reading [‘In Isaiah the prophet’], which was read by Jerome in his work, ‘Libro De Optimo Genre Interpretandi,’ was apparently altered by scribes working hard who were embarrassed that there were actually two witnesses from the prophets mixed together.” He goes on to explain that the first part of the quotation clearly comes from Malachi 3, not Isaiah. His explanation (in his 1516 edition) is simply that Mark had a simple memory lapse. He held to the view (common in that time) that Matthew had written first, and that Mark had used Matthew. He points out that Matthew 4 had read “Isaiah the prophet,” but had only quoted from Isaiah. Mark added the part from Malachi, but simply forgot, by a simple lapse of the memory (“*memoria lapsum*”) to change the statement that said, “In Isaiah the prophet.”

Erasmus was later critiqued for his claim that Mark had suffered a memory lapse which had caused an error, and so in his later editions, he altered his explanation. He still maintained that Mark had originally written, “In Isaiah the prophet,” and that scribes had later changed the text to read, “In the prophets.” But now he suggested that perhaps Mark only mentioned Isaiah because he was the most famous of the two prophets he was quoting here. The editor of the ASD volume (the modern printing of Erasmus’ Annotations) explains in a note on Erasmus’ annotation on Mark 1:2, “Erasmus’ view, that the evangelists suffered a slip of memory was criticized by many; this explains alterations to the text in B, C and E.” In either case, Erasmus continued to think that the reading of the Latin Vulgate (In Isaiah the prophet) was the original one, however one explained why Mark wrote this, and why scribes changed the reading to “In the prophets.” He continued to print the text as he had, and simply explained in his annotations, which he expected every reader of his text to consult, why he thought it mistaken. His 1527 edition of the text, comparing the common Latin Vulgate, his own Latin translation, and the Greek text he used to substantiate it, can be seen here [http://www.e-rara.ch/bau\\_1/content/pageview/838606](http://www.e-rara.ch/bau_1/content/pageview/838606). At the end of the day, Erasmus left in the text a reading that he was convinced was not original, as he often did. But he expected that the reader would read his annotation, and decide for himself which reading was the original. Had Erasmus looked more closely at even the few Greek manuscripts he had access to, he would have realized that there was Greek support also for the reading that he thought original on the basis of the Latin Vulgate, and probably would have printed the text as “In Isaiah the prophet.” But in any case, he made clear in his annotation which reading he thought original.

## Stephanus

By 1550, a few more Greek manuscripts were being used. So, when Stephanus produced his Greek text, he employed 16 Greek manuscripts. Only a few of these had the Gospels in them.

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<sup>8</sup> See the brief explanation in Krans, Jan, “Beyond What Is Written: Erasmus And Beza As Textual Critics,” pg. 284-285, esp. fns. 56-63.

Thus, he reproduces the text of Erasmus here, writing “in the prophets” in the text, but noting in the margin that there is some doubt about whether that is the original reading, since some Greek manuscripts have “in Isaiah the Prophet” instead. He lists only two manuscripts which have Isaiah as their reading (if I’ve understood his apparatus at this point). He doesn’t comment on which form he thinks original, but usually his procedure was to simply print the text of Erasmus in his text (though he made exceptions), and to explain via his apparatus where he disagreed with it.



A few years later, Theodore Beza came along. He would produce 10 new editions of the NT (each of which can be viewed here <http://vuntblog.blogspot.com/2012/11/bezas-new-testament-editions-online.html> ). Like Erasmus, he was very little concerned with the Greek text. The primary purpose of his text was also to produce his own revision of the Latin Vulgate, and to propose a better Latin translation (his own). Thus, like Erasmus in his 1527 edition (see at the link above), he published his text in three columns. His own Latin translation had the most important place in the center column. The Latin Vulgate he was revising held the next position in the right-hand column, and the Greek text (which mostly was just a reprint of Erasmus, though making a few hundred changes at points) in the left column.



In Beza’s first edition, he likewise printed the text of Mark 1:2 as Erasmus had left it. But he, like Erasmus, attached a lengthy note to the text, in which he explained that there was uncertainty about which form of the text was the original one. Here is his text in Mark 1:2 (viewable in full here [http://www.e-rara.ch/gep\\_g/content/pageview/2025265](http://www.e-rara.ch/gep_g/content/pageview/2025265)) with the beginning of his lengthy footnote on the textual variant below the passage (the note is continued on the following page). However, unlike Erasmus, who had preferred the “harder reading,” Beza believed the “easier reading” or the reading “In the prophets” to be the original one. He seems more careful with noting that there is Greek manuscript support for both (though it is clear that he is only repeating

information from the apparatus of Stephanus rather than actually consulting Greek manuscripts). He notes that two manuscripts have the other reading.

But Beza eventually changed his mind. When he realized that Majuscule 05 (an early Greek manuscript that Erasmus did not have access to or use, which has a generally Western text, and which Beza preferred far more often than he should have) had the reading, “In Isaiah the prophets,” he became convinced that the Vulgate reading was the original reading. Perhaps reading Erasmus annotation helped convince him as well. Thus, in his 1582 edition, (Mark 1:2 can be viewed here [http://www.e-rara.ch/gep\\_g/content/pageview/4478058](http://www.e-rara.ch/gep_g/content/pageview/4478058)), he expressed his opinion that, “If there were some room for conjecture here, it would seem probable to me that the old reading ‘in the prophet Isaiah’ is genuine and that the place from Malachi, which crept from the margin into the text, is repeated here from Matt. 11:10. Therefore it occurred that ‘in the prophets’ was written here. This opinion is confirmed by the fact that only Isaiah’s testimony is cited at Matt. 3:3 as well as Luke 3:4 and John 1:15, where they discuss the beginning of John’s

ministry.”<sup>9</sup> Krans explains, “Beza now accepts Erasmus’ ‘modern’ insight that the reading...[in the prophets] is a scribal accommodation, but he does not follow his [Erasmus] that Mark allows himself some imprecision by naming only Isaiah as the most renowned prophet. Instead, he offers a conjecture, which comprises three or four stages.”<sup>10</sup> Beza thought that Mark had only quoted from Isaiah, and that his text had originally read, “In Isaiah the prophet” which would then be natural. But he thought that some later scribes had put the phrase from Malachi in the margin as a cross reference from Matt. 11:10. A yet later scribe had accidentally moved the phrase from Malachi from the margin into the text, thinking no doubt that it represented a textual variant. But this scribe (or yet another still later scribe) had then changed the wording to “in the prophets” so that there was no conflict with the fact that the text now mentions two prophets but only names one. Beza makes this suggestion with zero manuscript support, solely on the basis of conjecture. He agrees with Erasmus that the text originally read, “In Isaiah the prophet” but seemed to want to come up with an explanation for how that could be, and one that didn’t leave open the possibility that Mark had a “slip of memory” as Erasmus had suggested. However, Beza, like Erasmus, now left in the text a form of the text that he didn’t think was original.

## KJV Revisers

And this is how the text came into the KJV, and most English translations of that day. From Tyndale on, most English translations simply printed some form of the Greek text found in the actual text. They paid very little attention to the notes that were underneath the text. In 1604, the group of men charged by King James with crafting a revision of the 1602 Bishop’s Bible went about their work, and for the most part, they simply left the text the way it had been in the Bishop’s Bible. They made many changes as well though, and they did regularly consult a handful of Greek texts, so in a sense one can call their revision a new translation. The two Greek texts which they most commonly employed were the 1598 edition of Beza and the 3rd edition of Erasmus. They didn’t follow either text exactly, and thus ended up creating a new eclectic form of the Greek text, which they never bothered printing. But they paid very little attention to the textual notes that were underneath and after the text in their Greek New Testaments. In fact, KJV translator John Bois comments at one point in his notes on the translation work, “Read the Greek Scholia!” He was frustrated that they so regularly ignored the textual data, and just worked with the text as printed, even though the editors who printed the text had acknowledged below it that the true reading was the one in their notes, not the one in their texts. The translators probably cared little. They were under specific orders from Archbishop Bancroft not to place marginal notes in the KJV, as there had been in the Geneva. The King’s reason for this demand was that the Geneva notes had suggested that the King could be disobeyed if his commands went contrary to God’s, but King James was a firm believer in the Divine Right of Kings - He alone spoke for God. And of course, every one of the KJV translators, as members of the Church of England, believed that the King was the true head of the Church. Thus, they translated the text just as the Bishop’s Bible had at this point, and didn’t leave so much as a marginal note to explain that the form of the text was actually in question among textual scholars. And thus the KJV Bible reads, “In the prophets.”

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<sup>9</sup> I have printed the translation Krans gives of his note, though translating the Greek into English. “Beyond What is Written,” pg. 285.

<sup>10</sup> Krans, “Beyond What Is Written,” pg. 285. See his entire discussion on pg. 284-286.

## Conclusion

The rise of modern translations that read, “In Isaiah the prophets” isn’t an example of some liberal new agenda to change the text of Scripture. Modern translations that have a marginal note that explains that some manuscripts read differently aren’t evil, or even wrong. The reading “In Isaiah the prophet” was the one accepted by most of the textual scholarship that preceded the KJV, and would probably have been the reading of the KJV had Erasmus paid more attention to the few Greek manuscripts he had at his disposal. It’s the reading accepted as original by most of modern scholarship as well. But there is some doubt about which form of the text is the original. Thus, the best thing one could do, whichever form one accepts, is to print a marginal note explaining that there is some doubt, just as Erasmus and Beza did almost 100 years before the KJV was printed. For myself, I think the data as set out above makes it likely that “In Isaiah the prophet” was the original reading. But others will see the data differently and disagree. This isn’t a problem, until one turns the issue into a theological one, rather than a textual one, and slanders anyone who disagrees with them. That is simply wrong. Further, one needs to represent opposing positions honestly. No one has the right to come along to a text like this (or any other text) and claim that “every translation except the KJV is based only on two manuscripts.” That’s a statement of either culpable ignorance, or blatant dishonesty, as even a brief glance at the chart above reveals. God is honored by truth, not malicious slander.

And certainly no one can come along and claim that the KJV alone should be used, because it alone “doesn’t have an error” at Mark 1:2. If a different form of the text is an “error” in a modern version, then, as we noted above, Matt. 27:9 is exactly the same “error” in the KJV, and it too must be abandoned. Such rhetoric is silly. The truth is, good scholars sometimes disagree. Textual data is sometimes less than certain. This isn’t evil - it’s just reality. God is honored when we deal honestly with that rather than write maliciously anyone who disagrees with us.

I hope that can be a help.