

7. Copies of the Word of God, Part II

Bases for Modern Translations

When translations of the Bible are made, the translators do not typically examine individual ancient manuscripts, but use collations which have already done this. These Greek/Hebrew (along with a little Aramaic) Bibles collate many manuscripts and are often heavily footnoted with mentions of textual variants, and what manuscripts contain them. The major collations of the Greek New Testament are the Textus Receptus (based loosely off of Byzantine manuscripts) and the Majority Text, which are very similar, and the Critical Text; we will examine each of these below. For the Old Testament, there is the Masoretic text, the Dead Sea scrolls, and ancient versions.

Before we get too far into this study, let's first note an interesting detail about ancient book binding. Due to the bulkiness of the materials, separate books or sections of the Bible would usually be bound separately. The fact that an ancient manuscript was never a complete New Testament, for instance, does not diminish its value in any way. In fact, even if a single bound book or collection is missing pages, which is the rule rather than the exception, this in no way diminishes the value of those pages which are found. It is quite possible that three of the most ancient complete or mostly complete Bibles receive extra textual criticism weight simply because they are complete; this, however, is a logical fallacy. Since most Bibles were bound separately, we should not be surprised to find very few ancient complete Bibles, nor does that in any way mean that there is less assurance about the correct transmission of the word of God than we get from smaller bindings, or even fragments or quotes.

However, the ancient complete bindings do give us one bit of information, which is probably had just from quotes of first or second century writers: that the books of our current New Testament were considered as canon early on, including during the life of those who had the divine inspiration of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the first century.

Families of Greek Manuscripts

There are various families of manuscripts, which are distinguished typically by their similarities. The Byzantine line, which to this day has a greater number of manuscripts but of a later date, was what was primarily available to Erasmus and the King James committee. This line of manuscripts is among the most consistent. However, recent discoveries or publications of another much older line of manuscripts, classified as "Alexandrian", and which contain some notable variants, have greatly stirred the pot of the translation debate, and made many traditionalists very nervous.

There is another family of manuscripts called Western, which we will only briefly mention here. They are prone to textual variants that are actual paraphrases, or even additional clauses or whole sentences; however, since these originated with the foolish men who authored them and had the audacity to add them, they vary from manuscript to manuscript, and can actually be weeded out. In fairness to the translators at the time of the King James, the most ancient manuscript available to them was from the fifth century and belonged to the Western line of texts; it was called the Codex Bezae, and because of its many variants, many of which have not be found in *any* other manuscript, they did not use it. It should be noted that even such corrupted manuscripts have value for textual criticism; even a liar when he speaks truth offers valuable witness when it is corroborated by others.

In an effort to try to prove that we have the unadulterated word of God, many have made all sorts of bizarre wrong arguments, which only hurt their cause. Let's cut through all the hype and see what the big deal is with these ancient manuscripts and the collations made from them, and in so doing we will come to the

conclusion that we can in fact be assured that the word of God has come down to us unadulterated, as well as other valuable conclusions.

Apart from the traditionalists, so too have those who were willing to reject tradition sometimes gone too far. In rejecting obvious error, we humans sometimes forget that will are still prone to it, and so we compound error by making a totally different false paradigm. (A good example of this is Calvinism that grew out of Catholicism.) And so it is with the translation controversy. Some latched onto and placed too much weight on the Alexandrian manuscripts when they were first widely publicized, manuscripts which are less consistent among themselves. Those who clung to one or two Alexandrian manuscripts because of their great age found themselves often arguing for renderings which good textual criticism shows to be likely incorrect, as we will see a few examples of. This brings up another important point of textual criticism: we have noted that typically the oldest manuscripts carry the most weight because they are closer to the source: however, we may find the opposite to be true in a few odd cases, as when a little used *entire* Bible (an uncommon thing) from the fourth century, for example, may have actually been little used because it was produced by a heretical group, or because it was considered a poor quality copy.

To compound our error, as we note elsewhere, the variances between manuscripts, once we winnow out the obvious errors, are actually very few, and none really consequential to any major doctrine. In other words, the debate is usually much ado about nothing! Before this claim is accused of heresy, let's add the following caveats. The word of God is important, down to the last jot and tittle, as Jesus Himself says, so, even though a few passages may be uncertain, this does not mean that whether they are inspired is unimportant. However, some have falsely argued that these relatively few doubtful passages are critical to establishing certain fundamental doctrines, such as the passage we've already considered in I John 5:7b-8a, which some claim is essential to the doctrine of the trinity. The circular folly of this line of false reasoning should not bear explaining, but apparently for some it does: a doctrine does not need to be true because we have long believed it, but because it is actually found in the word of God. And most (if not all) fundamental doctrines are established by multiple passages. Although certain doctrines may have some truth shown by other passages, such as those for our example which relate to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, we may be found to have a false conception of the doctrine as a whole because we have long interpreted and developed it from a spurious passage! But in the case of a scribal error for which we have very little evidence to determine which rendering is correct, as in the case of whether Solomon had 4,000 chariots or 40,000 (I Kings 4:26; II Chronicle 9:25), will I be able to stand in judgement and tell God that I'm not culpable for my rebellion because of a few minor facts that could not be ascertained? Certainly not! (And it is quite possible that the facts regarding many variants can be determined by several methods, including by looking at ancient versions.) So saying that we truly have all things pertaining to life and godliness *and* that any uncertainties are inconsequential is not intended to discount any passage of Scripture. This is merely a restatement of what God has said: His word is preserved, and if we fail to ascertain which textual variant is correct, then it is either truly inconsequential, or it is a failure on our part, not God's!

Apart from most of the translation debate being about nothing, or specious arguments, the problem is compounded when there are so few people who engage in the debate who are almost entirely uneducated both about the translation debate itself, and the larger picture of what really matters when it comes to translation. This chapter will ground the student in understanding the issues which are quite frankly difficult to find good resources on just by searching. For there is no greater source for error than when we try to research the greatest truths. Just try doing a search on the topic of how to be saved, and see how many conflicting and blatantly wrong answers you get, even among the majority if not all of the top search rankings. The vast majority of people do not even know what the translation controversy is about, and that applies to those who engage in it; otherwise, there would be much less controversy.

The Most Famous Ancient Manuscripts

There are a few very old complete or at least mostly complete manuscripts which will often be mentioned in the study of textual criticism and even in bible footnotes for particular variants. The Bible student should at least be familiar with them; we will also reference some of these elsewhere.

One of the manuscripts that was known at the time of Erasmus and the later King James Committee was the Vatican manuscript (the “Codex Vaticanus”), yet it was not available to them. Its tremendous value lies partly in that it dates from the 4th century. Although scholars were allowed to copy tiny samples of it, a complete copying or open access to scholars was not given until the end of the 19th century! One scholar was even banned for trying to smuggle out 20 hand-copied pages!

In fact, we will see that widespread access to many manuscripts occurred at the same time that the contents of the Vatican manuscript was finally published, simply because of the advent of the technology of photography, which allowed quick and relatively inexpensive copying. The high cost of access to actual manuscripts before facsimile technologies were available is why Erasmus had six manuscripts, and later scholars of the 17th and 18th centuries, sometimes with wealthy sponsorship, had access to just dozens. This is one of the greatest reasons that modern textual criticism has a firmer footing in our time than ever before, along with the advent of electronic data storage and analysis.

We also learn from this all too common example of guarding ancient manuscripts that the Devil finds any way he can to prevent people access to the word of God, even and especially among those who call themselves Christians. Many denominations have done far more to prevent people access to the word of God than this example of blocking access to a particular manuscript simply by teaching that the study and interpretation of Scripture should be left to those who are qualified, and the laity should so refrain, and trust their spiritual leaders; this is in stark contrast to the Scriptures we have observed that show the importance of knowing Scripture, by reading Scripture directly, for all followers of God. And let’s not knock the Catholic church exclusively for this practice, for many Protestant denominations have made the word of God the purview of the “pastor”.

The Vatican manuscript is of high quality and considered to be one of the most important nearly complete Bibles. Although it is missing pages (e.g., all of the New testament after Hebrews 9:14 is gone), it shows us that the Bible we now have has faithfully been copied since the 300s. We will consider a few of its most important variants below.

Another very important manuscript is the Sinaitic. It was “discovered” in a monastery in the mid 1800s near Mount Sinai, and was copied by about three scribes around the middle of the fourth century, making it the oldest complete New Testament in existence that has yet been discovered. It is very similar to the Vatican manuscript. But it also includes the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas, which are apocryphal.

And lastly, we will consider the Alexandrian manuscript (not to be confused with the traditions of collations called the Alexandrian text), which is mostly complete, having lost some of its pages. It was brought to England a mere decade and a half after the King James Version was first translated, and it was the first of these ancient nearly complete codexes to be “discovered”, or at least to be publicized. Its revelation and the “discovery” of these and other ancient manuscripts ushered in a new era of textual criticism, and added fuel to the fire of the translation controversy.

There are a few notable characteristics of the Alexandrian manuscript to observe. It is the only one of the ancient manuscripts to include I Clement and part of II Clement; these books are appended at the end of the New Testament. Another matter of note is that these large compilations of necessity were taken from multiple manuscripts, since, as we have noted, most ancient Bibles were usually bound separately due to size. The Alexandrian text in the letters to the churches, for example, appears to come from manuscripts that were of very high quality, while that of the gospels seems to come from manuscripts that were of lower quality.

Textus Receptus

The Textus Receptus saw its beginning with one of the most well-known Bible scholars, Erasmus, a Dutch Catholic priest (1466-1536) and contemporary of Martin Luther during the beginning of what would be

the Protestant Reformation. He relied heavily on the Latin Vulgate, and in fact made a Latin version of the Bible, a version which he actually believed to be superior to the original Greek! Yet he included the original Greek for comparison purposes, and to really attempt to harmonize the two, and so the first “modern” major printing-press-printed popular Greek New Testament was born, as what was basically a Latin interlinear Bible. In earlier editions he lacked a complete Greek manuscript of Revelation, so he simply provided the Greek by translating the Latin of the last few verses of that book; he corrected this in a much later edition. His first edition contained many typographical errors due to a rush to get it to print, most of which were corrected in later editions, but not all. He also deferred heavily to renderings in the Vulgate and quotations from the so called “church fathers”, rather than the Greek manuscripts; he did this to such an extent that there are couple of thousand variants between his works, based almost entirely off of a few Byzantine manuscripts, and later, higher quality collations of the Byzantine manuscripts as whole. Although Erasmus had studied many Greek manuscripts throughout Europe, and used a total of eight manuscripts, he had only six available to him in Basel where he worked, dating from the 12th century and later, and only one came from outside the Byzantine tradition. He used the older ones the least because of their supposed “erratic” text; he also totally ignored some older and better manuscripts that he had access to. Due to these factors, his work is considered by many modern scholars as lacking in quality.

The first two editions of Erasmus’ Latin/Greek collation of a handful of manuscripts and the early editions of the Vulgate did not include I John 5:7b-8a, which is not found in any Greek Manuscripts until after 1,000 years after Christ; it is reported that Erasmus, after being pressured to include it, said that if someone could produce a single Greek manuscript with the passage in it, that he would include it in a later edition. Whether he actually said this is moot; he would have certainly felt political pressure from the Catholic church, who at the time favored the passage as an explicit statement of their doctrine regarding the trinity. Although including the passage was horrible textual criticism, someone did in fact produce such a manuscript, written in 1520, and so the 3rd edition included it.

Erasmus’ work was borrowed by many, with many later revisions, but often relying on him and even outright copying him. The rather presumptuous term of Textus Receptus, “the received text”, was actually coined in a work published in 1633, in which it was claimed that the text was not only received by “all”, but that there were no errors in it, which was an obvious falsehood to any scholar. Yet this attitude continues to this day for the collation and for versions which were based off of it; and any detail which would show even a slight error, no matter how true, is rejected as patently false by many who defend these translations and the Received Text. It would appear that people are so in need to find absolutes that they reject all manner of truth, even to the point of the ignorance of imagining that Jesus spoke in the English of the King James (and I’m not even making that up, sadly). In fact, the tradition of “having the right version” continued with the King James itself, as it came to be called by the rather ostentatious name “the Authorized Version”.

Just as in the first century when it did not take long for people to reject the word of God for man-made doctrines (Galatians 1:6), so too it did not take long for the vitriol of those who cling to particular man-made texts rather than the word of God itself to manifest itself after the Textus Receptus became blessed by men as holy, or even as inspired. To name one example in the early 18th century, John Mills published a textual collation of 82 Greek manuscripts, and was immediately lambasted for his painstaking count of 30,000 textual variants, by Daniel Whitby, who even claimed that the original autographs were identical to the Textus Receptus. Some have even attempted revisionist histories to trace the Textus Receptus back to the apostles themselves.

The Textus Receptus was the basis used by Martin Luther for his German translation, as well as several other European translations, including the King James (1611), probably Tyndale (1526), and the Spanish Reina Valera (1569, 1602).

Focusing on God’s Word and Not Tradition

The first widely known efforts to totally break with the Textus Receptus and to try to use older manuscripts began with such men as Karl Lachmann (1793-1851). One of the first largely used non-Textus Receptus collations was produced by Westcott and Hort (1881), and it relies heavily on one ancient manuscript in particular, the Codex Vaticanus, at least for the Gospels. As one might expect, their work continues to be repudiated to this day as even heretical; they are accused of relying excessively on a few Alexandrian manuscripts, probably not entirely without justification. Out of their efforts grew the Nestle-Aland collations, often called the Critical Text, which take into consideration the Alexandrian branch of manuscripts, which includes the Codex Vaticanus, as well as the Byzantine manuscripts; in fact, the continually updated Nestle-Aland collation, which has had more than two dozen editions, is essentially the culmination of centuries of good Biblical scholarship based on the bulk of available manuscripts, which is a far cry from the few that were used as the beginnings of the Textus Receptus, which was little altered because of a devotion to the idol of tradition, even in the face of good textual evidence to the contrary. The Nestle-Aland collation has been unjustly criticized as being based on the Westcott and Hort; how ironic that the accusation from traditionalists is a false accusation of traditionalism. But in truth, the Critical Text is based on the actual manuscripts, and sound textual criticism of them, which is what good Bible scholarship should be based on.

The Alexandrian Line of Manuscripts

More “modern” scholarship, such as Westcott and Hort’s, particularly of the late 19th and 20th century, has put much emphasis on the more recently publicized/discovered Alexandrian manuscripts, which tend to be much older than the Byzantine, though fewer in number. But they are not without their pitfalls. We will examine their value, and why we should not depend on them at the expense of others, as truly modern Biblical scholarship has learned to do.

The Majority Text

Sometimes you will see references in Bible translations to the Majority Text, which is essentially a much needed update to the Textus Receptus based on better scholarship and older manuscripts, as well as a much greater number of manuscripts, which are essentially the Byzantine manuscripts; yet many of those manuscripts are late dated, and none are older than the fifth century. The Majority Text thankfully removes those variants of the Textus Receptus which are not supported by the older manuscripts.

The primary philosophy of the Majority Text is evident in the name. It considers the greater part of all the manuscripts, and tends to side with the majority. The great weakness in this approach should be readily evident with just a little bit of thought when considering illustration 6-3. Most of the manuscripts we have fall centuries after the originals. Why let their renderings have far greater weight, due to their high number, than the earlier ones, which is what siding with the majority will result in? If you’d like a visual representation of just how much greater weight they’d hold, just look at the chart again, and the size of the bell curve to the right where the later, much greater count of manuscripts reside. If we wanted to use an average that was as true as possible to the original autographs, then an exponential weighted average would actually make sense, one which puts exponentially more weight on earlier manuscripts and virtually nothing on manuscripts that fall after a few centuries.

The Critical Text, after centuries of unnecessarily weak textual criticism, and flawed collations, finally begins to do what makes the most sense. It puts greater weight on the older manuscripts, although not slavishly in every case of a variant, as there is sometimes good reason to be cautious of even some of these renderings in the earliest of manuscripts, examples of which are covered elsewhere in this chapter, especially variants that the “big three” (covered below) of the ancient manuscripts are not unanimous on.

Even with the earlier flawed textual criticism of the bulk of the centuries since Christ, the word of God was still available to the people. None of the spurious renderings preserved for all that time out of ignorance or devotion to the god of tradition should have affected doctrines that would cost a soul its salvation, although some of those spurious passages were twisted to mean all sorts of things that they did not. Far more damage

came from false translations (examples of which are covered elsewhere) than from false renderings of the collations in the original languages. In other words, God's blueprint for His eternal kingdom, preserved in His word, has always been available, and is just as eternal.

Despite great advances over the past century or so in winnowing out a great number of the relatively small fraction of variants that remained uncertain (more on that below), present scholarship is still growing, mainly regarding the Old Testament, as the Dead Sea Scrolls, which are often heavily fragmented and still being cataloged, continue to be studied. And who knows whether there will be another such discovery some day?

What Text?

We should here note a few caveats regarding the textual lines. First of all, some of the names are misleading, for they are named for geographic places which some of their manuscripts came from, but manuscripts which fall into the Alexandrian family, for example, are found elsewhere besides Egypt and the rest of North Africa; and of course Byzantine manuscripts are not confined to the East or the regions which were traditionally Greek Orthodox, as the western Catholic church can attest. Secondly, it's hard to defend the Byzantine line of Medieval manuscripts as superior to the Alexandrian ones; reason would suggest that a consensus of the much older Alexandrian manuscripts would be more true to the original text. A common argument against this is a theory that the Alexandrian line was based on a few heretical manuscripts, but variants peculiar to the Alexandrian family cannot be rejected out of hand simply by attributing them to heretical traditions of the "Christian" sects of Alexandria (a major center of Greek culture), who were influenced heavily by Greek philosophy, especially when those variants are supported by Syriac and Latin translations, which were in most cases most likely translated from manuscripts found in Italy and Syria, not Alexandria.

It is beyond the scope of this book and the expertise of the author as well as the need of most Bible students to venture too much deeper into concepts of textual criticism. There are entire doctorate programs which study the matter. And just as we leave it to the linguistic experts to give us trustworthy lexicons, so we can leave most of textual criticism to the experts in that field. Suffice it to say here that the vast majority of professional textual critics today do not defend the Majority Text as superior to the Critical Text, nor reject the Alexandrian line as frequently probative of the contents of the original autographs.

The Great Translation Debate

So now that we better understand the underlying original language manuscript lines and collations that translators use as the basis for our modern versions, we can make more educated decisions, even before engaging in profitable word studies, about what renderings are good, and even what versions are good. We can avoid the hype of this debate, which so often wanders off into irrelevant matters that are mainly predicated upon ignorance, and often circular, specious, and non sequitur arguments. The subject of translations themselves will be covered more in the next chapter.

We can also now at least have a basic understanding of what all the variant footnotes in our Bibles are referring to. For although most modern translations are pigeon-holed as coming from a certain "textual tradition", a great many will contain footnotes or bracketed renderings which point to which of the collations provide the renderings. In other words, just because you are using a particular translation does not mean that you are locked into a single collation or textual line.

To illustrate this, I will examine one copy of a New King James that I possess as an example, but you can do this same analysis by reading the prefacing notes in pretty much any decent modern translation. The New King James was born out of traditions of men which extend even as far back as the earliest English translations, such as John Wycliffe's, which was hand copied before printing presses. Yet even this New King James breaks from tradition in many cases where it matters. Let's consider a few. After giving much credence to "great" traditions of English translations, the writers of the preface admit to breaking from traditions in

deference and respect for the evidence of the actual word of God. Regarding the Old Testament, after explaining the origin of the Masoretic text, it is admitted that doubtful renderings are clarified by looking at the Dead Sea scrolls, and ancient versions such as the Septuagint and Vulgate. It even admits to deviating from the King James renderings where modern scholarship warrants it. Regarding the New Testament, the New King James is based on the KJV, which is based on the Textus Receptus, right? This particular Bible, which is not an exception to this rule of most modern translations, admits that where the Textus Receptus is “weak” in light of modern Biblical scholarship, there are marginal notes to indicate it. In fact, the marginal notes indicate variants from both the Majority and Alexandrian Texts! So much for being afraid of missing something in a variant that might have been improperly removed, and this is not even a study Bible.

In fact, even though the modern translations which are so criticized for not including the textual variants which the King James in most cases unjustifiably *included*, even these “evil” translations will often either include the variant in a footnote, or actually bracket the variant into the text itself! And most people don’t even notice the brackets when they’re reading the Bible, or notice the footnote that tells what manuscript tradition it comes from; and there is typically no mention of the hateful word “spurious”.

In other words, even though much criticism is leveled against many translations because they are based on such-and-such “heretical” Greek collation, yet most modern translations simply cannot be pigeon-holed that way. One irony in this debate is that the textual collations are for the vast majority of their text identical; in other words, they almost totally agree! Furthermore, a single translation is often hated as particularly heretical because it leaves out a particular disputed variant which is supposedly so important for a particular doctrine to be established, yet the other modern translations which make the *same* omission (or bracket the passage), are not so singled out, due to ignorance of the state of modern scholarship. The traditionalists might have a point if many of the passages that are often deemed as spurious were only rejected by certain denominations because they contained a particularly disfavored doctrine, but such is not the case; most variants are doctrinally insignificant; so the debate is not typically based on doctrinal biases, except for the bias on the part of traditionalists! (Although there are some who give too much bias toward newly found, older manuscripts, like certain Alexandrian manuscripts, as we’ve observed.) In other words, most of the translation debate is over things that are doctrinally insignificant! The irony is compounded when those who reject modern translations because they supposedly disrespect the word of God by omitting even some variants cling to an older translation that does far more to disrespect God’s word by including variants which come from traditions of men rather than good textual evidence; who then is the greater disrespector of God’s word? In other words, improper inclusion is as bad as improper exclusion: there is no “safe”, “conservative”, extreme to side with. Yet there is another sad element to this debate which is almost never mentioned, yet which should probably be mentioned first: in all this arguing over what is mostly nothing, not only is there disunity in the body of Christ, which is sinful, but there is also lost in the wrangling those considerations which truly matter when considering the quality of modern translations.

What’s more important than deciding which variant is correct? One such consideration which will be developed more in the next chapter is how loose a translation is. Some modern translations do a really sorry job in all too many passages of rendering what the word of God says and venture into paraphrase. (Note, paraphrase is not wrong per se; teachers do it all the time to explain a passage; but a book that paraphrases the word of God should clearly be labeled as such, and not as the words of God.) Yet if we are bickering over whether a particular translation comes from the “correct” textual tradition, we fail to point this more important matter out. Another large issue that is too often lost when we argue over minutia are the few places where false doctrine bias creeps into translations, which will also be developed in the next chapter.

Variant Considerations

Now that we have a general idea of where our Bible comes from, it is time for a profitable introduction to textual variants, to help us see how they are not an obstacle to knowing that we have the complete will of God, as God promises (I Peter 1:25). This is truly a study that will surprise many Bible students, and even may make some uncomfortable. You will never read these passages the same again. But getting out of one's comfort zone is the only way to grow. We will cover only a few of the major variants in depth. But first, let's consider the nature of variants.

How Many Differences Matter?

Most variants are easily recognizable as such, and the correct rendering readily apparent, much like the all too common typo of today. In fact, typos usually are nonsensical, meaning they would not usually alter the understanding of a passage, except to make it unintelligible. Even the rare error that would change the meaning of a passage is often recognizable as not what was intended (for example, leaving out "not"). In other words, an error that would actually change the meaning of the text is a minority (most errors being inconsequential to meaning) of a minority (an error that changes the meaning but is obviously an error). It is only a fraction of a fraction of the variants, then, which leave some doubt as to the passage's meaning; however, the vast majority of these can be eliminated by merely comparing a *few* other manuscripts. Now we're down to a fraction of a fraction of a fraction. Yet these can be winnowed down yet again to another fraction, because the only variants that give us trouble are those which appear in the first couple of centuries after Christ. Any later variants can be eliminated by consulting the earliest manuscripts. So the hundreds of thousands of variants the skeptic points to as evidence that we don't have the word of God? They are mostly identifiable typos in later manuscripts, which are not even at issue or a problem!

The few variants that remain after this winnowing are small in number, and most do not even affect a major doctrine, probably none! We'll consider more on this when we look at the variants. We have taken literally tens of thousands of errors, which the skeptic loves to point at, and seen past them to the true word of God with little investigation in only but a few cases. Below we'll consider the majority of the most important cases, at least of the New Testament, to see that there is no cause for concern, and that we can usually determine what the correct rendering is with a little study. But first, let's examine nature to see how God can affect proper copying of something far greater in complexity than a mere collection of books.

Another Divine Message Preserved in Earthly Copies

There is another message that God has preserved which is exponentially longer than the Bible itself. The Bible only goes back three and a half millennia (not counting Job, the date of which is unknown and could very well be extremely ancient); however, this other message is not just one very long message, but millions. Each one has been faithfully copied since the time of Adam and Eve, and continues to be transmitted with extreme precision; when errors occur, which they do, they are quickly removed; or, for the few that are not removed, they are easily recognized as aberrant and kept to a small percentage of all current copies. All of this is done through totally natural processes, and without the help of intelligence, save the Great Intelligence that designed natural processes. Just one of these messages contains more data than the most (if not all) detailed designs man has ever concocted. These messages are the extremely long codes of DNA found in every living creature on Earth.

Maybe you've never thought of DNA as a message from God. But DNA is actually a code, written by God, that is the amazing blueprint and construction sequence to build every living creature. If you've ever considered how amazing God's creation is, especially that of living creatures, then you can only imagine how amazing the code is behind every living creature, a code that even the most educated modern scientists still

struggle to decipher. Someone might argue that DNA is not in fact a message to us, but that would not change the fact that it is in fact a code that God has preserved for thousands of years, making it a great example to show that God can preserve a far shorter copy of His message in the Bible. It might also be argued that the ancients could not have understood DNA coding itself, and therefore DNA is not a useful evidence form God, since it wasn't known from the beginning; this line of thought is wrong for several reasons, but the only thing we will note here is that the ancients, although not knowledgeable of DNA, saw DNA's effects (Romans 1:20). And so the wonders of God were just as wonderful for them, for they saw the wondrous creatures that God's wondrous code built. And besides, we know how corrupt people become when they have ample blessings from God, such as those we have in the highly technological world we live in, where sin is spreading like a cancer across society; and for the time of Noah to be so corrupt so as to require washing clean the entire face of the Earth, who is to say that they were not extremely technologically advanced, enough to know of DNA? Perhaps they didn't, but perhaps they did.

Let us note one more thing about DNA. Besides being exponentially longer and complex than the Bible, it has been preserved throughout time. With the Bible, we have the luxury of being able to compare thousands of manuscripts against each other, hundreds of which are very ancient. But with DNA, errors are corrected by comparing only two copies at once, and only the latest copies at that! Yet this method functions to keep DNA pure enough so that the vast majority of living creatures are whole enough to function just fine. In this sense, our ability to ensure the Bible is and has been copied faithfully down through time is exponentially more statistically sound than the method God chose for DNA, which continues to carry the same messages it had even three days *before* Adam and Eve were created. We, then, can be sure that it is perfectly feasible to preserve the words of a collection of books for only 3,500 years, the time since Moses penned the first five books of the Old Testament. And who knows whether the tremendous advances of our time were not intended by God to ensure that His word will be amply preserved for millennia to come.

A Glimpse into the Study of Variants

There are many different types of scribal errors, many of which have to do with the way the eyes are deceived, and there are even names for each type of error. These are not covered in this book, but are mentioned for those who wish further study on textual criticism. Many of these errors are easily recognizable because of the way they are made, and thus easily eliminated as spurious. Let's consider one type of scribal error which produced yet another, oddly enough.

The case of Luke 3:36 bears special mentioning. In some New Testament manuscripts, an extra "Cainan" in the lineage of Christ was added to the wrong line ending, as it fell at the end of a line. This is an obvious error, easy for a scribe to make. However, this same error was added in some later editions of the Septuagint in the lineage listed in Genesis! (Genesis 11:12)

[illustration 6-4: Duplicated Cainan at the end of a line.]

Willful Errors

So far we have noted that most errors in the copies of Scripture were not intentional at all. These are the vast majority of errors. But what about the minority that were intentional? For people since the beginning have always wanted to change the word of God, including Satan himself (Genesis 3:1). Surely God would need a lot of providence and/or miracles to keep evil people's grubby hands off His holy

Correct rendering of Luke 3:36

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Incorrect rendering of Luke 3:36 due to copyist error.

ΤΟΥΣΑΡΟΥΧΤΟΥΡΑΓΑΥΤΟΥΦΑΛΕΓΤΟΥΕΒΕΡΤΟΥΣΑΛΑΤΟΥΚΑΙΝΑΝ
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word. Or would He? Let's see just how hard changing God's books can be.

In the days before the printing press, each copy of the books of the Bible had to be made by hand, an expensive proposition; books were not nearly as cheap as they are now: just imagine the expense of paying a highly skilled person for all the hundreds of hours it would take to copy a Bible, plus the cost of materials! And the Bible throughout history has more often than not been bound in multiple volumes due to its size before the use of modern, strong, thin paper and the printing press, making the possibility of a ubiquitous human revision even more daunting. In the early days of the church, copies of all the Bible books spread quickly into every corner of the globe (e.g., I Thessalonians 5:27; Colossians 1:6; 4:16; Matthew 24:14;), in a time when travel was much more expensive, dangerous (e.g., II Corinthians 11:25), and slower than now. So, both logistically and economically, for someone to willfully change the word of God was simply not possible; someone might could make several copies of a corrupted version, with much invested in it, but they could not fill the world with them, since the correct copies were already well distributed and in the possession of all Christians. Even less feasible would be any attempt to collect uncorrupted copies or alter them on a mass scale.

In fact, if someone were to have some small degree of success at corrupting Scripture, the more success they would have, the greater the knowledge of it would spread, and the more people would know that theirs was a corruption; we would then know to exclude it. Most apostate religious groups will not be so bold as to try to tamper with the word of God. They may twist it and flat out deny it, but actually trying to physically alter the written word is a tiny percentage of human attempts to contradict God. So keep this in mind as we consider a few examples of when this actually happened. To find such incidents, we need not look back far into history, only a few hundred years; for although those that had even a little bit of success are rare occurrences, attempts to corrupt copies of the Bible have been happening pretty much continually since God wrote it and it began to be copied. And yet we still have ancient manuscripts to prove that they have all failed.

Martin Luther, although widely respected among many who call themselves Christians, made one such attempt to alter the word of God. His was not an attempt to alter the original-language manuscripts, but a liberty he took in translating Romans 3:28 into his own language. He inserted the word "only" with the word "faith", since he did not put much stock in the writings of James on the necessity for obedience, or Paul's, either, for that matter; he even publically admitted this and taught it. However, the fact that he did this is easily discoverable, nor did His translation ever become widely used or accepted: Lutherans who use his translation are a small group today. Plus, anyone who studies the original Greek, as anyone can now with a free online interlinear Bible or lexicon, can see what Luther added. Nor was Luther so brave as to remove all the passages that necessitate obedience (e.g., from Paul himself, Luther's favorite author: e.g., Acts 22:16, Romans 1:5; 16:26; I Corinthians 15:2; etc.), and so his addition is glaringly seen, and in a tiny minority of the versions of the Bible available in the world today, nor are most people likely to read it, since it is in German. This failure to corrupt the Scripture was even more glaring in light of the fact that the printing press was coming to widespread use at the time, bringing down the cost of printing significantly. We will, however, give Luther credit for being one of the pioneers to buck the powers-that-were and make the word of God accessible in the language of the common people. Nor was Luther the first to mistranslate that passage willfully, for theological backlashes against the Catholic doctrines of forgiveness by works had been going on for some time, even to the point of claiming faith alone was sufficient for salvation.

The Jehovah's Witnesses are probably the most notable and successful group to get the highest number of copies of blatant error published inside a translation of God's holy word, The New World Translation. Yet the whole world knows what they have done, and virtually all of the other sects of those calling themselves Christians, even many of the most accepting of other denominations and creeds, consider them heretics. No one else buys their translation, which is all they published, not an actual Greek and Hebrew Bible, which we still have, uncorrupted. Although the Mormons claimed to have additional revelation, they published theirs in separate books, and left the Bible itself alone, even while it contradicted their supposed "latter day" revelation; Islam, too, claims that the Bible was originally given by God, and later corrupted, so Muhammad's revelation was also an addendum, so to speak, and not a systemic attempt to alter the Bible itself, so the Bible was also left

to contradict his supposed revelation; so what the Jehovah's Witnesses succeeded at was probably one of the greatest alterations of the text known to man, having printed hundreds of millions of copies, and is therefore the best study for seeing that even their success is not enough to make the word of God inaccessible to the world today.

The Jehovah's Witnesses did use a group to translate the Bible, which reduces the risk of doctrinal error being inserted if it is ecumenical, but these were all hand-picked people, kept anonymous, who toed the line of Witness doctrine, hardly an ecumenical group, which have been used to make most wide-spread, accurate translations of the Bible used today. Regarding their alterations, first of all, the Bible teaches that anyone who comes claiming to have revelation but does not confess Jesus is the antiChrist (I John 4:1-3); one way they do this is by denying Christ's eternal nature. Any Greek scholar or even a lay person who reads an interlinear New Testament can see plainly that the correct translation is that Jesus "was God" in John 1:1, as it has been understood for the last 2,000 years. Jehovah's Witnesses deny the deity of Christ, so they render it that He is "a" god. They claim that Jesus is a created being, contradicting John's teaching that Jesus is eternal (1:2), so they insert the word "other", not found in the Greek, into Colossians 1:16, that would clearly teach that Jesus created all things. They also deny the existence of hell, so their version does not use the word "hell" to translate any of the Hebrew or Greek words used for hell (e.g., Matthew 5:29). They also deny that Jesus was crucified on a cross, but on a stake, so they simply refuse to translated the Greek word for cross.

During the tumultuous years leading up to the protestant reformation, the Catholics attempted to confirm a much earlier alteration of the Bible by way of addendums, at the council of Trent, which sat from the year 1545 to 1563. Theirs was a counter-reformation movement, political in nature, a struggle that true prophets never had to worry about for God's word to be disseminated or preserved. These books, which most of the rest of Christendom recognize as apocryphal, get their own section in the chapter "God's Media and Books". Here we will merely ask the pertinent questions that should show the folly of their inclusion: if these books were from God, why did they need to be pronounce so again, after over a millennium and a half after they were written? Why did Jesus and the inspired New Testament writers, who quoted extensively from the Old Testament, never make a single quote from the Apocrypha? And why is a council of men determining what goes into the Bible, when the rest of the Bible was not so established? It should be noted here that prior heretical groups accepted the Apocrypha, as we've discussed with the Septuagint, which goes back before Christ; yet ancient error is no less error for being ancient.

So what then can we conclude by looking at man's best attempts to corrupt Scripture? Even if God were not actively involved in the world and upholding all things by the word of His power and preserving His eternal kingdom and word (which He is: Hebrews 1:3), it is still possible to preserve a collection of documents, because mere men cannot have enough power to change enough copies around the globe, especially for a collection of books as ubiquitous as the Bible. And this has been the case since the books were first penned, as when Paul would write letters, and send copies to congregations around the world; many apostates in the congregations that received his letters would have no doubt loved to corrupt them, but by then it was already too late, for copies were being sent to other congregations. Notice too, that none of the changes mentioned in this section were to the actual manuscripts in the original language, and even commonly used translations today still try to inject human doctrine biases, both of which are addressed in other sections.

Variant Examples

This Bible is Missing Verses!

Now we come to some actual textual variants. This is not a comprehensive list, but it is enough to understand their nature, and to see that no information has been lost.

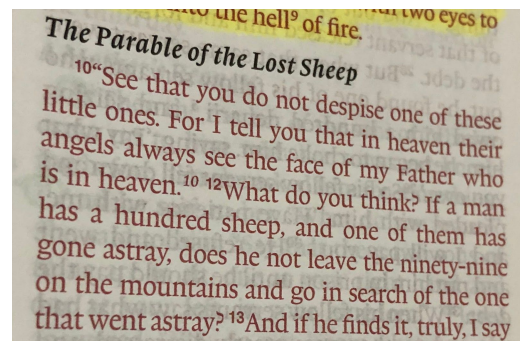
Many, though not all, variants are cases that consider whether a particular passage is spurious, all but two of which are very short. We will consider several of the short ones, but both of the long ones here, which every serious Bible student should know.

Now perhaps the Bible student can see why this lengthy chapter might be necessary to fully answer the questions, “why is this translation of the Bible missing verses?” The simple answer for most cases? They never should have been put in the Bible to begin with.

Naturally, one can probably imagine why this subject doesn’t come up often. This is sometimes the result of traditionalists still carrying around a King James Version who want to justify its use. This subject is also uncomfortable for probably most teachers who feel inadequately prepared to teach the subject; this too need not be the case. And maybe some more studied Christians who perhaps have leadership roles in the body do not think that the average Christian should know about these things, that they are too weak to handle them; if that is the case, then education needs to start as soon as possible, because if they are too weak to handle them, we can rest assured that Satan will try to take advantage of it.

Finding missing verses, such as during public readings when someone attempts to follow along from a different version, can be especially appalling to those who did not know that this was the case, and who have been taught their whole life that they had the unadulterated, undisputed, inerrant word of God in their hands. It’s even sadder that the reason for such differences is seldom taught in Bible classes, and even shied away from as controversial; what subject is more controversial than religion, but are we not commanded to teach the word of God above all else? Perhaps saddest is that most teachers are simply not knowledgeable about these things either. And there is irony in the fact that those who argue for the use of archaic language translations with spurious passages say they should continue to be used so that everyone can follow the same version; it would be better to have different and mostly accurate and understandable renderings of the same scriptures than a single translation that uses archaic language, favors traditions of men, and deviates from the word of God itself, often by adding to it!

[illustration 6-5: Where is verse 11? Image credit to Rachel Russell]



Old Testament Variants

Naturally, Old Testament variants do not arise out of the Greek New Testament debate, so perhaps they are the most palatable to start off with. First we’ll look at simple ones, where the correct rendering is easy to distinguish. These are also good examples because they show that even when there is a deficiency of ancient manuscripts that have the correct rendering that we can still probably know what the correct rendering is.

The following are scribal errors in the Masoretic text. One blatantly obvious scribal error is where the number of Solomon’s stalls of horses and chariots is rendered in one place as 40,000, and in another as 4,000 (I Kings 4:26; II Chronicle 9:25), an error which is nearly as easy to make as writing an extra zero when writing a large number today. Yet 4,000 seems the more likely rendering relative to the size of Solomon’s forces, especially considering that these same passages consistently give the count of his horsemen: 12,000; plus, some Septuagint manuscripts have 4,000 instead of 40,000 in I Kings 4:26, confirming this rendering, so no information has actually been lost, even though it appears that the wayward pen of an ancient scribe irrevocably corrupted the text. Another interesting numerical copyist error appears in II Kings 24:8, which says that Jehoiachin was 18 when he began to reign; yet II Chronicles 36:9 says that he was eight years old; this is easily cleared up by the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint, which confirm that II Chronicles 36:9 originally stated that he was 18 when he began to reign; reason also would suggest that eight was not correct, since Scripture confirms that he was a grown man, for he only reigned 3 months, and did many evil deeds and

conducted military campaigns which would have been impossible for an eight-year-old (Ezekiel 19:5-9; II Kings 24:9); once again, the difference between 18 and eight is only one character different in Hebrew, as in English, so this is easily determined as a scribal error, and most modern translations provide the correct rendering by referring to the the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint. II Samuel 15:7 also contains an unreasonable copyist error, saying that Absalom was stealing the hearts of Israel for 40 years before he requested that his father king David let him go up to Hebron; yet this is obviously wrong since David's entire reign only lasted for 40 years; the correct rendering of four is found in the the ancient Syriac and Septuagint versions, and even confirmed by Josephus.

So far we have looked at minor, easily detectable numerical errors in the Old Testament. This is not to say that all discrepancies are minor, but most are. Let's look at what is considered by many to be a significant variant in Deuteronomy 32:8. The context is Moses' farewell song, and Moses mentions the dividing of the nations, which appears to be a reference to the dividing of the Earth from Babel, as explained in Genesis 10 and 11. The passage states that the count of the nations was 70, according to the sons of Israel, which corresponds to the number of Israel's family when they went down into Egypt (Deuteronomy 10:22). However, none of these conclusions are explicitly stated, so we could be mistaken about these details. In other words, what dividing of the nations is Moses talking about? Was it at the tower of Babel or otherwise? And was Moses talking about the number of Jacob's family when they went down into Egypt? (Genesis 46:27) He is not explicit, but it seems likely that he is referring to these facts found elsewhere in his revelation.

One theory to explain Deuteronomy 10:22 is that the Masoretic text and later Septuagint manuscripts were corrupted to say "children of Israel" to render it more friendly toward Christian doctrine that Jesus was the Son of God; another theory claims that one alternative rendering of some Septuagint manuscripts, "sons of God", appears to be polytheistic. (There is also a third rendering among ancient translations, "angels/messengers of God".) However, all of these concerns are unfounded with just a little bit of understanding of Biblical doctrine. First of all, the Septuagint renders many passages interpretively; in other words, sometimes it ventures into paraphrase, or worse, which is a shame. However, let's assume for a moment that the correct rendering is "sons of God." Jesus' lineage is traced in the book of Luke all the way back to Adam, and then to God Himself. When we get to Seth, he is described as "son of Adam", then Adam is described as "son of God" (Luke 3:38). In fact, the way the Hebrews used the expression, a son is any descendant, whether a grandson, or even further down the line. Jesus is said to be the son of David. Therefore, everyone in that line is a son of God. In fact, the whole human race are sons of God by physical lineage (Acts 17:28), and God calls us all to adoption to become not only spiritual sons of God, but also siblings of Christ Himself (Hebrews 2:11; Romans 8:29; Mark 3:34). Thus the children of Israel were sons of God, sent by God, and messengers of God.

Let's here end this brief section on Old Testament variants with a few final important facts regarding how the Old Testament has come to us. These are just a tiny sampling of the variants in the Old Testament. The New Testament variant analysis below will be much more comprehensive. The Masoretic text has been found to be particularly faulty in certain books, such as Samuel and Job, causing us to need to rely on the Dead Sea Scrolls, but especially on ancient versions of the Septuagint. Also, the Septuagint was not a static thing, but there were many versions of it which did not appear to become mostly static until the time of Jerome, the 4th century AD. During those intervening years, it became closer and closer to the Masoretic Text. Likewise, based on versions and other evidence, the Masoretic text is virtually unchanged since the second century AD, but before then it saw many more variants. There have been speculations by humanist scholars that the Old Testament was originally orally handed down; however, the Bible itself states that it began as written documents, which is confirmed by many archeological evidences. There is much more depth to textual criticism of the Old Testament than the scope of this one chapter, so we have only scratched the surface. And finally, it should be noted that the the Old Testament, when we consider the ancient Dead Sea Scrolls and versions, has a much higher variant count which are decidedly much more difficult to winnow through than the ones of the New Testament; nevertheless, we still have the word of God well preserved, like a faded and damaged

photograph with an image that can still be clearly seen in virtually all of its details, especially when we consider the number of confirming quotes in the better preserved New Testament of the Old.

New Testament Variants

Just so the Bible student can see how little is contested, we will cover below virtually all the major differences between the two major Greek collations. Note that the Majority text almost always has the same information as the Critical Text, but with additional passages which were deemed spurious in light of modern scholarship in the Critical Text.

Note one thing about a few of these: they are not spurious omissions from the Bible itself, merely from the passage at hand. In other words, they are Scripture which has been placed in another spot. For instance, in the case of Mark 9:43-49, the phrase “Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” is likely spurious for verse 44; however, this expression is found in verse 49 (also in Isaiah 66:24), and is therefore Scripture, just placed in the wrong spot by a wayward scribe, who duplicated a line. Below are noted several of the examples where variants merely crept in from one gospel into another.

Other sections which are not supported by the best of the textual evidence, and which are probably spurious, express something that is taught in other portions of Scripture, even in the passage at hand. For instance, in the case of Matthew 5:44 (see list below), blessing those who curse you involves doing good to those who hate you, and people who persecute may very well spitefully use you.

This is probably a sufficient level of detail of textual variants for most Bible students. However, for those rare cases where a marginal note intrigues the student, or for those who just want to do deeper studies, there are free online resources that will provide that extra depth. Some such resources provide a list of all textual variants, with lists of all manuscripts which contain each. Note too that the below lists do not include the differences between the Majority and the Received Texts, which is not really relevant, unless someone has been inculcated with the teaching that a translation based off the Received Text is superior.

The validity of all of the following variants will not be analyzed. They certainly offer a great deal of further study suggestions. The reader may be tempted to skip over some of the following. However, it would behoove every Bible student not only to read them, but to try to learn them all. As a minister, teacher, and writer, I have found myself quoting some of the following which are likely spurious; those who teach will receive a stricter judgement (James 3:1), so they should grow in knowledge about such things, and tread carefully in what they say that God says.

One more note: the Critical Text is not perfect any more than any other collation, and may be based on sometimes too “conservative” criticism. Just because it omits a passage does not mean that it does not belong. A few of the ones marked as omitted in the Critical Text below are actually included there but marked as a later addition to the manuscripts, oddly enough. We will consider a special case of the Critical Text’s omissions when we note the longest, most significant variant in the entire Bible below: Mark 16:9-20.

If you don’t care to use a sometimes cumbersome interlinear Bible, use the New King James to get most Majority Text readings, and an English Standard Version or New American Standard for the Critical Text.

Cases in which information is not omitted, but is different or extra in the Critical text from the Majority/Received Texts:

- Matthew 8:38: Region of the Gadarenes, not Gergesenes.
- Matthew 24:36 This is one of the few cases in which the Critical Text contains more, in bold: But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, **nor the Son**, but the Father only.
- Matthew 27:16 Another case where the Critical Text contains more: At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called [**Jesus**] Barabbas.
- Mark 10:24b The Critical text has Jesus say “how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!”, while the Majority says “how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!”.

- Luke 2:14 The Majority Text says: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"; the Critical says: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."
- John 1:18 The Critical Text says "only begotten God" instead of Son, which is quite possible a scribal error in the CT, since "Son" would appear to make more sense. This variant most likely occurred because the two words look almost the same when the Greek letters are close together.
- John 6:69 The Critical Text refers to Jesus as "the Holy One of God" instead of "the Son of the living God."
- 1 Cor 9:20 The following bold passage is found in the Critical text, possibly omitted by a scribe because the doctrine made some spiritually uneducated Jews uncomfortable: and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, **though not being myself under the law that I might win those who are under the law.**
- 1 Cor 14:38 The Majority Text says, "But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant." The Critical Text says "But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized."
- 1 Tim 3:16 is an interesting and very similar variant. The Majority says: "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory." The Critical Text says, with differences underlined: "By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."
- Hebrews 10:34 In the Majority, this passage says that they had compassion "on me in my chains"; the Critical says "on the prisoners".
- 1 Peter 2:2 As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby **unto salvation.**
- 1 John 3:1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! **And we are.** Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.
- Jude 22-23 The Majority Text reads: "And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh." The Critical Text says: "And on some have compassion, who are doubting; but others save, pulling them out of the fire, **and on some have mercy with fear** hating even the garment defiled by the flesh."
- Revelation 22:14 The Majority text says: "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city." The Critical Text reads: "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city."

Scriptures in the Masoretic/Received Texts, but omitted from the Critical Text. The omitted portion is in bold. The correct citation is given for many misplaced passages.

- Matthew 5:44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, **do good to those who hate you**, and pray for those who **spitefully use you and** persecute you. (cf. Luke 6:27-28)
- Matthew 6:13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. **For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**
- Matthew 17:21 **However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.** (cf. Mark 9:29)
- Matthew 18:11 **For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.** (cf. Luke 19:10)
- Matthew 20:16 So the last will be first, and the first last. **For many are called, but few chosen.** (cf. Matthew 22:14)
- Matthew 20:22, 23 But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, **and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized**

with?” They said to Him, “We are able.” So He said to them, “You will indeed drink My cup, **and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with;** but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father. (cf. Mark 10:38, 39)

- Matthew 23:14 **Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.** (cf. Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47)
- Matthew 24:36 This is my blood of the **new** covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (cf. Luke 22:20)
- Mark 2:16 Why is He eating **and drinking** with tax collectors and sinners? (cf. possibly Matthew 11:19)
- Mark 6:11 And whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them. **Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!** (cf. Matthew 10:15)
- Mark 7:8 For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—**the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.** (cf. a similar quote from Matthew 23:26)
- Mark 7:16 **If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!** (This expression is found multiple times in the gospels, including in the nearby Mark 4:23; also cf. Luke 8:8)
- Mark 9:43-49 This line appears duplicated in verse 44 from 49: **Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched.**
- Mark 9:49 For everyone will be seasoned with fire, **and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt.**
- Mark 11:26 **But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.** (cf. Matthew 18:21-22)
- Mark 14:19 And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, “Is it I?” **And another said, “Is it I?”** (cf. Matthew 26:25)
- Mark 15:28 **So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And He was numbered with the transgressors.** (cf. Luke 22:37)
- Mark 16:9-20 Omitted in the critical text. See separate analysis below.
- Luke 1:28 And having come in, the angel said to her, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; **blessed are you among women!**” (cf. v. 42)
- Luke 4:4 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man does not live by bread alone. **But by every word of God.**’” (It’s kind of ironic that the correct location for this quote is in the same chapter and verse of Matthew.)
- Luke 9:55-56 But He turned and rebuked them, **and said, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.”** And they went to another village. (This passage is not found in the earliest manuscripts: P45 and P75, dated around 250 and 200 CE, and in Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, Ephraemi Rescriptus, from the 4th and 5th centuries.)
- Luke 11:2-4 So He said to them, “When you pray, say: Our Father **in heaven**, Holy be Your name. Your kingdom come. **Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.** Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, **But deliver us from the evil one.**” (Matthew 6:9-13)
- Luke 11:11 If a son asks **for bread** from any father among you, **will he give him a stone? Or if he asks** for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? (Matthew 7:9-11)
- Luke 22:43-44 **Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood**

falling down to the ground. (This passage has mixed support among the most ancient manuscripts; in many of the ones where it is included, it is marked with an asterisk or obeli as having some doubt.)

- Luke 23:17 **(for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast)** (This passage has mixed support among the most ancient manuscripts; in the Vaticanus, it appears in a different location, after verse 19.)
- Luke 23:34 **Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”** And they divided His garments and cast lots. (This passage is notably missing from many of the most ancient manuscripts, including from the Alexandrian, Western, and Byzantine lines; the most ancient manuscripts which include it come almost entirely from the Western line.)
- John 5:3-4 In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, **waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.** (This appears to be one of the most fantastical and intentional scribal additions, that began as two separate ones, 3b and 4, and were later joined. It is not supported by the earliest manuscripts.)
- John 7:53-8:11 Omitted entirely in the Critical text. See extended analysis below.
- John 8:59 Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, **going through the midst of them, and so passed by.** (cf. Luke 4:30)
- Acts 2:30 Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, **according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit** [seat one] on his throne
- Acts 13:42 So when **the Jews** [they] went **out of the synagogue, the Gentiles** [they] begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.
- Acts 15:24 Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, **saying, “You must be circumcised and keep the law”**—to whom we gave no such commandment. (cf. vv. 1, 5)
- Acts 18:21 but took leave of them, saying, **“I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I** will return again to you, God willing.” And he sailed from Ephesus. (This was probably added as an attempt to explain why Paul went to Jerusalem; however, Scripture would suggest that the actual reason was that it was God’s will that He appear before kings and the emperor.)
- Acts 23:9 Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees’ party arose and protested, saying, “We find no evil in this man; **but** [what] if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, **let us not fight against God.**” (cf. 5:39)
- Acts 28:29 **And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.**
- Rom 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, **who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.** (cf. v. 5)
- Rom 10:15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who **preach the gospel of peace, Who** bring glad tidings of good things!” (Both of these renderings agree with what Isaiah 52:7 actually says; it may be that a scribe, intentionally or not, inserted more of the detail from the Old Testament passage.)
- Rom 11:6 And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. **But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.** (A scribe needed an espresso at this point: the second phrase was added with the words “work” and “grace” simply juxtaposed.)
- Rom 14:6 He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and **he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it.** He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

- Rom 16:24 **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.**
- 1 Cor 6:20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body **and in your spirit, which are God's.**
- 1 Cor 11:24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “**Take, eat;** this is My body which is **broken** for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”
- Gal 3:1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you **that you should not obey the truth**, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?
- Eph 5:30 For we are members of His body, **of His flesh and of His bones.**
- Php 3:16 Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same **rule, let us be of the same mind.**
- 1 Tim 6:5 useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. **From such withdraw yourself.**
- 1 Peter 4:14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. **On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.**
- 2 Peter 1:21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but **holy** men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.
- 1 John 4:3 and every spirit that does not confess **that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh** is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.
- 1 John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, **and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.**
- Jude 25 is an interesting variant, with additions in both collations. The Majority Text reads, “To God our Savior, **Who alone is wise**, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, **Both** now and forever. Amen.” The Critical Text says “To **the only** God our Savior, **through Jesus Christ our Lord**, **Be glory and majesty**, Dominion and power, **Before all time**, now and forever. Amen.”

Major Variants

We will now consider two of the largest and most important variants of the New Testament (as well as a short one that's considered important) whose inclusion or exclusion has more at stake than the tiny wording differences we've considered in any of the variants so far. But as we study these, bear in mind that these are the largest and most significant variants. In other words, the vast majority of the New Testament is totally undisputed as preserved the way God originally wrote it. Also note that these two passages may be highly controversial, especially the account of the adulterous woman, because many of us have heard sermons based on these passages all our lives. But we must always be willing to search for truth, even if it conflicts with what we've always heard, and even when it makes us uncomfortable.

Another important point to remember is that variants must of necessity be ancient. Any alterations that occurred later can now be completely ruled out based on the ancient text manuscripts which we now have. We should appreciate this great blessing, that only the errors of the earliest copiests can cast any doubt on these relatively short portions of Scripture. And because these variants appeared so early, it is entirely possible that they actually happened, even if they are uninspired and/or did not appear in the original autograph. But it is also possible that they, being so early, were inspired, just not in the original work where they now find themselves, as is the case of some Old Testament writings (e.g., it is entirely possible that Joshua, by the Spirit, wrote Joshua 24:29-31; but it is also possible that another prophet penned it, or even a substantial part of that book; however, we do know that Joshua wrote some, cf. v. 26).

The Account of the Woman Caught in Adultery: John 7:53—8:11

This portion of Scripture is found in the Byzantine line of manuscripts, which were made remarkably uniform, compared to the other textual families. Older manuscripts, such as the Alexandrian ones, although they are often inconsistent among themselves, confirm and agree with the vast majority of the Byzantine line; however, they do not contain this passage. The few older manuscripts that do contain it place it in various places, some directly after John 7:36, and others after John 21:25. It was therefore most likely inserted by a scribe, possibly deemed important because it was an account passed down orally, and may have actually happened and be depicted fairly if not completely accurately in this account. However, textual evidence strongly confirms that it was not part of the original autograph of John's gospel.

There is some internal evidence that suggest that it does not belong; however, first let us note that this so called "internal" evidence is far weaker than the evidence of the ancient manuscripts. This account does not fit and actually breaks up the flow of the text, which is fairly strong evidence that at the least it was not originally in that location. There are also 13 Greek words not used in the rest of the book of John, and he never uses the expression "the scribes" elsewhere, although it is found in this section in 8:3. However, this type of analysis begins to get on shaky ground: for what other sections of the same length of John or any other Bible book contain as many words that do not appear elsewhere in the same book? Such an analysis would seem fitting before we rely too heavily on such word counting, and we should probably never rely too much on it at all anyway.

Acts 8:37

This disputed passage really belongs in the section of short variants. But because it is considered by some Christians to be *the* key passage for establishing the doctrine of confessing Christ before immersion, it will be given special attention. But let us begin this analysis by admitting that whether a passage is spurious has nothing to do with whether it establishes a doctrine that we want. It is God's original, uncorrupted words which establish doctrine. And the need for confession of Christ in order to be a penitent believer is made amply clear in multiple Scriptures, not just when we first obey the good news, but for all our lives (e.g., Matthew 10:33.)

Due to the textual evidence, Philip's request for the eunuch's confession is not only omitted from the Critical Text, but even more significantly is omitted from the Majority Text, which agrees with the Textus Receptus three times as often as the Critical Text, often unjustifiably. This verse's chief witnesses are the Western line of manuscripts, which we've already noted are prone to additions. It is not found in any of the "big three" of the ancient manuscripts (The Alexandrian, Vatican, and Sinaitic), or in any extant manuscript dated before the 5th century. To be fair though, we should note that it appears to have been known in the 2nd century, for it appears to be quoted by Irenaeus (180 AD) and Cyprian (250 AD); however, despite this early date, the fact that it was probably considered spurious even then by not being included in the extant manuscripts of theirs and following centuries is strong evidence against its inclusion from witnesses so close to Christ and the other inspired disciples.

The fact that the eunuch believed was evident when he asked to obey the gospel after Philip "preached Jesus to him". In Acts 2:37 and 38 we find the first gospel sermon, and the same manifestation of belief by the people's willingness to obey the gospel, which itself is a confession by action. Although confession must be verbal (Romans 10:9), it is far more important that it be expressed by actions, as Peter learned to do after failing to confess Christ (Luke 22:54-62; John 21:15-17). And the commands to let Christ be manifest when we speak the oracles of God are all through Scripture (I Peter 4:11).

This passage was probably inserted due to an affinity for liturgy, a desire which continues till today, especially in the religions that grew out of the culture of the Latin West which produced this variant, but also among the strictest sects today who, like the Pharisees, know that they understand the oracles of God in a world full of those who think they follow God's law but don't.

The End of Mark: 16:9-20

The end of Mark poses a much more difficult problem: this highly debated conundrum has strong evidence for both sides. Let's consider them.

First, let's look at the evidence against the end of Mark. Once again, we are looking at a passage that is included in the vast majority of later manuscripts, yet it is missing from two of the most ancient ones, the Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, which we've studied. Two fourth-century scholars, Eusebius and Jerome, both indicated in their writings that many Greek manuscripts available to them did not contain it. There is internal evidence against its inclusion also, although perhaps not quite as powerful as the variant of John 7:53-8:11. There is an abrupt transition between verses 8 and 9 of Mark 16, and several words and expressions are found there not found anywhere else in Mark, such as the title "Lord Jesus". Mary Magdalene is also introduced in this passage, even though Mark had spoken of her earlier (15:40, 47, 16:1). It's been suggested that a scribe felt that Mark was missing something, since it abruptly ends, so they added an ending similar to the other gospels, although this is mere speculation.

What about the evidence *for* this ending of Mark? We've noted that Eusebius and Jerome noted that it was a variant even in the 4th century; yet that shows it existed even then, and Jerome even included it in the Vulgate. In fact, Irenaeus (AD 130-202) quotes from verse 19, indicating it was not only available in the second century, but respected then by at least some scholars as well. Other early witnesses to reference it include the Diatessaron, an early harmony of the gospels (c. 160-175), and Justin Martyr (100-165). We've also noted that Codex Vaticanus does not contain it; however, there were several blank columns left in it at the end of Mark as if there may have been some debate about whether to include it. Even stronger evidence for inclusion is found in the Alexandrian manuscript, which is nearly as old as these other two of the "big three" of the most famous ancient manuscripts. And although the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus are great witnesses due to their age, they also have many textual variants between themselves which are known to be erroneous, and sometimes one or the other of them will agree with the Alexandrian. This ending also appears in many others of the most ancient manuscripts, as well as ancient versions. It could simply be the case that an early manuscript lost its last page, and was so copied, and thus produced this whole argument. And although most of the other textual variants that involved addition or omission are mostly agreed as spurious by textual critics, the end of Mark is highly debated among scholars, because of the quantity of evidence for its inclusion.

How much does the end of Mark's inclusion or exclusion matter (besides the consideration of the fact that the word of God is holy)? The disputed end of Mark does not contain any additional information not found in the other gospels, so if it was inserted, it was most likely not due to doctrinal bias. We've already established that no new information is presented, so we know that none of it is false; and it is even possible that the information was provided by an inspired person other than Mark, since the gift of prophecy was available for the large part of the first century; there appears to be some examples of this in Old Testament books. (E.g., while it's possible that the account of Moses' death in the end of Deuteronomy was written by him ahead of time, it's quite possible that God simply inspired another man to record it; the Psalms are the most prolific example of compilations from multiple authors.) It could have even come from another document written by Mark. Or maybe, and actually very possibly, it was always a part of Mark.

Chapter 7 Understanding Check and Reinforcement

1. If you wanted to see a Greek New Testament, or Hebrew Old Testament, what is the type of book called that you would look at?
2. What are the major manuscript families? What are the characteristics of each?
3. List a few reasons why an older manuscript may not always be more reliable than later ones.
4. The argument is often made that a spurious passage belongs in the Bible because it establishes an important doctrine, with no appeal to the actual textual evidence. How is this circular reasoning?

5. Do any of the doubted variants affect a major doctrine?
6. What are the “big three” of the Alexandrian line? List a few facts about them.
7. Which of the “big three” of the Alexandrian line was known during the time of the King James committee? Why did they not use it?
8. Which of the “big three” was first widely known, and began the great controversy that overturned centuries of tradition that had held that certain collations were totally inerrant?
9. Besides the cheapening of writing paper, what single technology before computers catapulted textual criticism to exponentially greater quality?
10. What was the main purpose of Erasmus’ collation? How many manuscripts did he use to make it? Why were they of poor quality? How did he even deviate from them?
11. What did Erasmus’ collation come to be called, after he and others published several editions, which mostly clung to tradition rather than engaging in good textual criticism? How does the name given this collation reflect their attitude about its accuracy? How is this ironic?
12. Why do some people feel a need to find a collation or version of the Bible that is inerrant? Why is this zeal not only unnecessary and impossible but counterproductive?
13. Why was it three centuries later when the first non-Textus Receptus collations finally began to be available?
14. What was a probably justified criticism against the Westcott and Hort collation? What is an untrue accusation against the Nestle-Aland collation? What is ironic and even hypocritical about the position of those who made this accusation? What did the textual line based off of the Nestle-Aland come to be called?
15. What family of manuscripts is the Majority Text line based on? Why is it far superior to the Textus Receptus, even though it is based on the same family of manuscripts? What is the Majority Text’s weakness? How is it “bad statistics”? What would have been the approach that made more sense?
16. How can the names of the textual lines misleading?
17. While some variants largely peculiar to the Alexandrian line can be excluded, especially when they are not corroborated well within that line, when can they be confirmed? What other evidences support this latter group, even when they are not supported well by the Byzantine line?
18. If you are reading a “traditionalist” version of the Bible based on a certain collation, how are you not necessarily locked into that collation if there are footnotes? How does the New King James deviate from the Textus Receptus?
19. How do the non-KJV modern versions often even show deference to passages which have long been held as Scripture, yet are probably spurious?
20. Why is the debate over the textual lines mostly insignificant?
21. Why is the following fact evidence of focusing on the wrong thing: the translation debate tends to mention verses that are left out of modern translation, but seldom mentions actual doctrinal bias in both traditional and modern translations.
22. Explain this statement: “most variants are inconsequential: the only ones that give us trouble are a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of a fraction.” Explain what the majority of the inconsequential errors are in each of those four levels.
23. How is DNA an example of God preserving great amounts of information using totally natural means? Why does God probably not require miracles (as is argued by some) to preserve a textual line of manuscripts of the Bible? How is knowing we have the correct rendering actually exponentially statistically easier with copies of Scripture than the methods DNA uses to winnow out errors?
24. How did an extra “Cainan” get added into the lineage of Christ in Luke 3? How do we know this was an error, and what caused it? How do we know it was added into the Septuagint at a late date?
25. Why were willful scribal errors difficult to copy to an extent that would make them hard to weed out even millennia later?

26. Why did hand copying, with its higher variant count, actually make preserving the word of God far easier than if the original autographs had been copied once by being typed up with a word processor, then had that copy, with any errors, reproduced efficiently and in great quantity via modern printers?
27. What was probably the greatest success story of printing the greatest numbers of corruptions in a version of Scripture? How does even this success fail to make God's word inaccessible? What are some serious heresies added in the New World Translation?
28. List some heretical groups attempts to corrupt Scripture by way of addendum, and how their attempts are glaringly of human origin.
29. We have stated that the Masoretic text is fairly accurate. But list some errors that are in it which we can most likely determine the correct rendering of. What are some other sources which shed light on correct rendering in some of these cases, other than reason? What does it say for the need for constant study if such errors can persist even into many modern translations of the Bible?
30. How are many of the variants of the gospels not spurious to the Bible, but only to the passage at hand? Find and list four such additions to the gospels, and cite the passage from which they originate.
31. Cite an example of language which is probably spurious, but which is taught somewhere in Scripture.
32. Cite two examples of spurious passages which were simply duplicated in the same chapter.
33. Cite two examples of a passage that has very little support among the most ancient manuscripts, and is marked as doubtful by some of the ones that do include it, or included in another location.
34. The Alexandrian line is often criticized for lack of uniformity. However, how can this actually be an advantage?
35. What is the greatest textual evidence against the account of the woman taken in adultery in John 7:53-8:11?
36. Cite examples from the Old Testament written by more than one inspired man.
37. What is the greatest/oldest textual evidence for the inclusion of Mark 16:9-20?