

Sunday, January 20, 2019—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*  
Lesson 73 Materials & Witnesses in the Transmission of Scripture

### **Introduction**

- Having dealt with foundational aspects of transmission in Lessons 70 through 72 by considering the importance of presuppositions and how they impact one’s approach to the textual criticism we are now positioned to embark on a discussion of other basic matters related to the topic. Before laying out some principles for discerning, locating, or identifying the preserved text in history, we need to consider the following basic points regarding transmission:
  - Materials Used in Transmission
  - Witnesses to the New Testament Text
  - False Assumptions Concerning Transmission
  - Scribal Errors & Corruption
- In this Lesson we will consider the first two points: 1) Materials Used in Transmission, and 2) Witnesses to the New Testament Text

### **Materials Used in Transmission**

- Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman are coauthors of a standard textbook on New Testament textual criticism titled *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. The first chapter is devoted to discussing the “process involved in making and transcribing manuscripts” as well as the “making of ancient books.” At the outset they note the following:
  - “Until the invention of printing with moveable type in the fifteenth century, the text of the New Testament—and, indeed, the text of every ancient record—could be transmitted only by laboriously copying it letter by letter and word by word.” (Metzger & Ehrman, 3)
- While this point might be well known to most students of the New Testament, fewer have given much thought as to the materials upon which these transcriptions were made.
  - “Clay tablets, stone, bone, wood, leather, various metals, potsherds (ostraca), papyrus, and parchment (vellum) were all used in antiquity to receive writing. Among these several materials, the student of the New Testament is interested chiefly in the last two, for almost all New Testament manuscripts are made of either papyrus or parchment.” (Metzger & Ehrman, 4)
- Once again, Metzger & Ehrman give an excellent summary of the origin and production of papyrus.

- “Papyrus is an aquatic plant that grows most successfully in the still shallows of marshlands. . . its most inventive use was as a writing surface—perhaps the most influential achievement of the ancient Egyptians (c. 3000 B.C.). . . To make a sheet of papyrus, these slices were placed vertically side by side on a hard wooden plank or table with their edges slightly overlapping. On this first layer another was put horizontally with the slices running at right angles to the slices of the first layer. By pressing and beating, the two layers become one sheet, the plant’s natural juice gluing the layers firmly together; the sheet thus made was dried under pressure. Lastly, the surface was polished with some rounded objects, possibly a stone, until it became perfectly smooth. The borders were then cut in order to make them straight and to give the sheet a rectangular shape. . . the sheets usually had a maximum height of about 15 inches and a maximum breadth of about 9 inches.” (Metzger & Ehrman, 4-7)
- While papyrus was abundant, easily shaped, and cheap, it was not necessarily very durable. As we have already seen in [Lesson 68](#), Christians preferred codices over rolls/scrolls from very early in church history. Despite being brittle, Papyrus could easily be fashioned into either a scroll or a codex.
  - “Initially, papyrus books were not actually books at all. They were scrolls. And this presented some real durability problems because papyrus also wears out fairly quickly and easily. So it wasn’t too long before people began to fold the papyri in order to form “books.” But the problem with this was that the pages were a bit brittle and did not fold easily. Soon, people were cutting the folds and forming what were referred to as a “codex.” (Taylor, 90)
- In the first century, when the apostles were penning the New Testament, papyrus seems to have been the main material upon which writing was committed. It seems plausible that the original autographs of the New Testament were written on papyrus. Materially, this helps explain why none of the original autographs have survived.
- Around the fourth century (300s), the use of papyrus was replaced with parchment or vellum. According to Metzger and Ehrman, “parchment or vellum was made from the skins of cattle, sheep, goats, and antelopes, especially from the young of these animals.” (9) They further state, “the two words [parchment and vellum] are often used interchangeably, but exact writers restrict the word vellum to describe a finer, superior quality of parchment.” (9) There are functional reasons why parchment replaced the use of papyrus.
  - “. . . even though it [parchment] had a marked advantage over papyrus in its greater durability; moreover, it was better suited than papyrus for writing on both sides. It was at about the start of the fourth century A.D. that it began to take the place of papyrus in the manufacture of the best books, and the works considered worth preserving were gradually transferred from papyrus roll to parchment codex. It is in this century that the great parchment codices of the Greek Bible (the Vaticanus and the Sinaiticus . . .) were prepared; and the earliest extant parchment manuscripts of pagan works date probably from the same century. But the use of papyrus did not cease then, and papyrus manuscripts of the New Testament have been found dating from the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries.” (Metzger & Ehrman, 8)

- Scholars date Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus to the fourth century AD. If these two codices are as old as scholars claim they are, it is due in part to the material on which they are written that they have traversed the seas of time and history. Parchment is vastly more durable than papyrus.

### Witnesses to the New Testament Text

- According to Metzger and Ehrman’s textbook, “three classes of witnesses are available for ascertaining the text of the New Testament; they are Greek manuscripts, the ancient translations into other languages, and the quotations from the New Testament made by the early ecclesiastical writers [church fathers].” (Metzger & Ehrman, 52)
- As of the 4<sup>th</sup> Edition of *The Text of the New Testament* printed in 2005, there were “approximately 5,700 Greek manuscripts” containing all or part of the New Testament. (Metzger & Ehrman, 52) More recent works such as Dr. Jim Taylor’s *In Defense of the Textus Receptus* published in 2016 list the total number of extant Greek MSS at 5,814. The higher number given by Taylor more than a decade later makes sense given that MSS finds no doubt occurred in the intermittent ten-year time frame.
- Greek MSS are usually broken down into the following three categories: 1) papyri, 2) majuscules or uncials, and 3) minuscules, according to Metzger and Ehrman. As the name suggests, the papyri are fragmentary Greek MSS written on papyrus whereas the majuscules and minuscules were written on parchment in either all upper-case letters (majuscules/uncials) or all lower-case letters (minuscules/cursives).
- When speaking about Greek MSS, textual critics frequently refer to text-types or text-families. This terminology is used to group together MSS containing similar characteristic readings.
  - “Basically, a text-type or text-family refers to a grouping of manuscripts that share common readings or characteristics that distinguish them from other text-types. Some manuscripts belong to more than one text-type, for they have one kind of text in the Gospels, and a different kind of text in Paul’s writings or in the general Epistles. The lines between the various text-types that have been identified are often blurry. But in general, scholars have identified at least three, and probably four, “text-types” in the New Testament. They are:
    - The Alexandrian text-type, found in most papyri, and in the great uncial codices  $\aleph$  and B.
    - The Western text-type, found both in Greek manuscripts and in translations into other languages, especially Latin.
    - The Byzantine text-type, found in the vast majority of later uncial and minuscule manuscripts.
    - The Caesarean text-type, disputed by some, found in  $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$  and “Family 1.

As one can see from the names, these text-types are tied to geographic locations. The Alexandrian is thought to originate in, or at least to have been predominant in, the area around Alexandria, Egypt, where early church fathers such as Origen, Clement, and later Athanasius flourished. The Byzantine text-type is found consistently in the area around Byzantium, or Constantinople, and the Western of course, refers to the Western half of the Roman Empire (though this one is a little less specific in nature, examples of this type defy precise geographical location).” (White, 43)

- Contemporary disagreements between King James and Modern Version advocates are really a debate over which text-type one is going to give the highest weight in transmitting the text. The Byzantine text-type represents the vast majority of extant Greek MSS when compared numerically with the Alexandrian text-type. The witnesses of the Alexandrian text-type are older than those in the Byzantine tradition and are consequently viewed as closer to the originals and therefore more accurate by modern textual critics. James R. White sums up the situation in the following comments from *The King James Only Controversy*:

- “The two “ends” of the spectrum, so to speak, are the Alexandrian and the Byzantine. The Alexandrian is more “concise,” while the Byzantine is the “full” text.” What does this mean? Most scholars today (in opposition to KJV Only advocates) would see the Alexandrian text-type as representing an earlier, and hence more accurate, form of text than the Byzantine text-type. Most believe the Byzantine represents a later period in which readings from other text-types were put together (“conflated”) into the readings in the Byzantine text. This is not to say the Byzantine does not contain some distinctive readings that are quite ancient, but that the readings that are unique to the text-type are generally secondary or later readings. Since the Byzantine comes from a later period (the earliest texts are almost all Alexandrian in nature, not Byzantine), it is “fuller” in the sense that it not only contains conflations of the other text-types, but it gives evidence of what can be called the “expansion of piety.” That is, additions have been made to the text that flow from a desire to protect and reverence divine truths [In other words it was corrupted by orthodox scribes.] . . . The Byzantine text-type represents the vast majority of the Greek manuscripts we have available to us today.” (White, 43-44)

- King James advocate Dr. Thomas Holland states the following in his book *Crowned with Glory: The Bible from Ancient Text to Authorized Version*:

- “The Byzantine Text. The name is derived from the Byzantine Empire, as it is the type of text copied by Byzantine monks. There are more manuscripts of this text-type than of the other three combined. This line of manuscripts reflect the Greek Textus Receptus that was used to produce the King James Version. It is also known as the Traditional Text or the Syrian Text.

The Alexandrian Text. The name refers to Alexandria, Egypt where scribes prepared most of these texts. Most contemporary versions are derived from this textual line. The three most important manuscripts that reflect this text-type are Alexandrinus (also known as Codex A, fifth century), Sinaiticus (also known as Codex Alpha, fourth century), and Vaticanus (also known as Codex B, fourth century).” (Holland, 9)

- Once again, both sides of the Bible version debate are dealing with the same set of textual data, yet they come to very different conclusions, why? Because of how their governing presuppositions cause them to approach the text. That is why we spent so much time covering those points in the last few lessons.

### *Papyri*

- Before the 1930s the papyri were wholly unknown to textual critics. This of course means that when Westcott and Hort printed their famous critical edition of the Greek New Testament in 1881 they did so without an awareness of the papyri. There are two important collections of papyri that were discovered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: 1) Chester Beatty Papyri were first announced in 1931 and 2) The Bodmer Papyri were discovered in Egypt in 1952.
  - “The Chester Beatty papyri and the Bodmer papyri are important not only for their age, but also for the length and character of their text. . . The “great” papyri should be introduced to students from the start because they are just as important, and in many ways more important, than the great uncial manuscripts of the New Testament.” (Aland, 57-58)
- While largely fragmentary in their witness, textual critics value the papyri because they predate the three great Alexandrian codices noted above and are reflective of the state of the text in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries.
- Dr. Floyd Nolan Jones provides the following statistical breakdown of the papyri:
  - “We have 88 Greek papyri manuscripts [This number might be a bit dated now.]. The papyri are of newspaper type quality, usually rolled but sometimes in book form. Most papyri consist of small fragments and thus do not exhibit much text. Of the 88, only an estimated thirteen (15%) support Vaticanus B and Sinaiticus Aleph which are the two foremost manuscripts supporting the above mentioned radical new Greek text; about seventy-five (c.85%) support the Greek Received Text upon which the King James was founded.” (Jones, 50)
- In 1984, Harry A. Sturz published an important book titled *The Byzantine Text-Type & New Testament Textual Criticism* in which he proved the presence of distinctly Byzantine readings in the papyri. For now, we will limit ourselves to one summative quote from Sturz’s book:
  - “Numerous distinctly Byzantine readings now proved early would seem to reverse the burden of proof. Instead of assuming that characteristically Byzantine readings are late, it may be more logical and more in accord with the facts to assume that they are early. The burden of proof now appears to rest on whoever claims that a Byzantine reading is late. Furthermore, making textual decisions on the basis of how three or four “old” uncials read should be abandoned because they do not give a complete picture of the second century traditions.” (Sturz, 65)

### *Majuscules/Uncials*

- As stated above, majuscules also known as uncials were written in all capital letters on parchment. Famous MSS in this category include the following: 1) Codex Vaticanus 4<sup>th</sup> century, 2) Codex Sinaiticus 4<sup>th</sup> century allegedly, 3) Codex Alexandrinus 5<sup>th</sup> century, 4) Codex Ephraemi 5<sup>th</sup> century, 5) Codex Bezae 5<sup>th</sup> century.
- In the absence of the papyri, these are the principal MSS that were utilized by Westcott and Hort to produce their critical edition in 1881.
- Once again, Floyd Nolan Jones provides the following statistical breakdown of the uncials:
  - “We have 267 Greek Uncials (text written in capital letters also called “majuscules,” designated as MSS), none of which is complete. Pages, chapters, and even books are missing. Of course some are in much better condition than others. Only nine of these support the Westcott-Hort critical text upon which the new radical Greek text was based (merely 3%) whereas 258 (97%) support the Greek Received Text.” (Jones, 50)
- Phillip Kayser and Wilbur Pickering are coauthors of a booklet titled *Has God Indeed Said? The Preservation of the Text of the New Testament*. In this work Kayser and Pickering discuss the modern United Bible Societies (USB) text and its reliance upon uncial MSS of the Alexandrian text-type:
  - “. . . they usually gave primary weight to one Greek manuscript (B, known as Vaticanus) even when every other Egyptian and Byzantine manuscript supports a different reading. Though there are 5,262 Greek manuscripts currently extant, and tens of thousands of early versions, the following manuscripts carried the most weight in the UBS Text:
    - 90% of the time these editors based their reading on the primary weight of only one Greek manuscript: Vaticanus (B). In practical terms, this manuscript is the authority.
    - Another 7% of the time their disagreement with the Majority Text is based on a reading from Sinaiticus (Ⲛ). We have already seen that Sinaiticus disagrees with Vaticanus well over 3000 times in the Gospels alone. This shows that one or both of these manuscripts are highly unreliable.
    - 2.5% of the time, their distinctive reading is based on Alexandrinus (A).
    - Less than half a percent of the time the readings of modern versions are based on other Alexandrian manuscripts when one or more of them disagree with the previous three. (There are about 200 Alexandrian manuscripts.)” (Kayser & Pickering, 4)

### *Minuscules/Cursive*

- These lower-case MSS comprise the majority witnesses of the Byzantine text-type. As already noted, these MSS are not as old as the uncial codices listed above and are therefore viewed as secondary witnesses to the New Testament text by modern textual critics. Consider the words of the following famous 19<sup>th</sup> century textual critics regarding the Byzantine Text and the Textus Receptus.
  - 1831—Karl Lachmann published his Greek New Testament which was the first to completely lay aside the Textus Receptus. Regarding which Lachmann stated:
    - “Down with the late text of the Textus Receptus, and back to the early fourth-century church.” (Porter, 17)
  - 1851, December 29-30—in a letter to Rev. John Ellerton, Hort calls the Textus Receptus “villainous” and “vile.”
    - “Think of that vile Textus Receptus leaning entirely on late MSS; it is a blessing there are such early ones.” (Hort, *Life and Letters Vol. I*, 211)
  - 1853, April 19—in a letter to Rev. John Ellerton, Hort announces his joint plan with Westcott to edit a Greek NT based upon material provided by Lachmann and Tischendorf.
    - “He and I are going to edit a Greek text of the N. T. some two or three years hence, if possible. Lachmann and Tischendorf will supply rich materials, but not nearly enough; and we hope to do a good deal with the Oriental versions. Our object is to supply clergymen generally, schools, etc., with a portable Gk. Test., which shall not be **disfigured with Byzantine corruptions.**” (Hort, *Life and Letters Vol. I*, 250)
- In terms of the minuscules Dr. Jones states:
  - “There are 2,764 Greek cursive manuscripts (written in small letters, designated by “mss”), often called “minuscules.” Thus most of the Greek witnesses to the true text of the New Testament are the Greek cursives. Merely twenty-three (1%) sustain the W-H readings which are the Greek foundation of nearly all the modern translations while 2,741 (99%) uphold the Received Text.” (Jones 50-51)

### *Ancient Versions*

- Ancient versions comprise another witness to the New Testament text. From very early in church history the scriptures were being translated into the vernacular languages of the people. Paying attention to the readings contained in these versions reveals what type of text was being translated. While the surviving version evidence is not as clear cut as some might hope, there is strong evidence that Byzantine MSS existed and served as the textual basis for vernacular translations of the New Testament from very early in church history. Some prominent ancient

versions include but are not limited to the following: Old Syriac, Peshitta, Old Latin, Latin Vulgate, Coptic, Gothic, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, Old Slavonic, Arabic, and Anglo Saxon.

- Romans 16:25-26

### *Patristic Quotations*

- “Besides textual evidence derived from New Testament Greek manuscripts and from early versions, the textual critic has available the numerous scriptural quotations included in the commentaries, sermons, and other treatises written by early church fathers. Indeed, so extensive are these citations that if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament.” (Metzger & Ehrman, 126)
- “The New Testament quotations found in the writings of the Church Fathers constitute yet another source of information concerning the history of the New Testament text. Some of the most important Fathers, for the purpose of textual criticism, are as follows: the three Western Fathers, Irenaeus (c. 180), Tertullian (150-200), Cyprian (200-258); the Alexandrian Fathers, Clement (c. 200), Origen (182-251); the Fathers who lived in Antioch and in Asia Minor, essentially Chrysostom (345-407). Another very important early Christians writer was Tatian, who about 170 A.D. composed a harmony of the Four Gospels called the Diatessaron. This had wide circulation in Syria and has been preserved in two Arabic manuscripts and various other sources.” (Hills, 120)

### *Lectionaries*

- When one considers the data pertaining to lectionaries as a witness to the New Testament text it is curious why Metzger and Ehrman left them out of this listing of Greek attestation. Regarding the Greek lectionaries Floyd Nolen Jones stated:
  - “We also have 2,143 Greek lectionaries (from a Latin root meaning “to read,” manuscripts containing Scripture lessons which were read publicly in the church from at least AD 400 until the time of the invention of printing). All (100%) of them support the Received Text which underlies the King James Bible. This gives us a total of 5,262 Greek witnesses to the true text of the New Testament of which 5,217 or ninety-nine percent are in agreement. This group dates from the fifth century on. The remainder not only disagree with the 99% majority—but disagree among themselves. Nonetheless, these few have controlled the camp of academia for the past one hundred years.” (Jones, 51)

### **Conclusion**

- All of this highlights what Edward F. Hills meant in the following quotation from Lesson 70:
  - “Thus there are two methods of New Testament textual criticism, the consistently Christian method and the naturalistic method. These two methods deal with the same materials, the same Greek manuscripts, the same translations and biblical quotations, but

they interpret those materials differently. The consistently Christian method interprets the materials of New Testament textual criticism in accordance with the doctrines of the divine inspiration and providential preservation of the Scriptures. The naturalistic method interprets the same materials in accordance with its own doctrine that the New Testament is nothing more than a human book.” (Hills, 3)

- How one uses the above data to arrive at an understanding of what the New Testament is, or ought to be, is completely dependent upon their presuppositions and the resultant approach to textual criticism. Put another way, the Biblical presupposition that God promised to preserve His word leads to one evaluation of the data whereas the use of neutral or naturalistic presuppositions leads to a completely different evaluation and understanding of the data and consequently the text.
- To illustrate this point, please consider the following chart presented by Kayser and Pickering along with the accompanying quotes.
  - “The following chart (from Floyd Nolan Jones’ book) illustrates the degree of conformity that four types of manuscript (papyri fragments, uncials, cursives and lectionaries) have to either the Majority Text or to Sinaiticus and Vaticanus (the primary text underlying most modern translations).

	<b>Total # of MSS</b>	<b>Support N &amp; B</b>	<b>Support Majority</b>
Papyri	88	13 (15%)	75 (85%)
Uncials (all caps)	267	9 (3%)	258 (97%)
Cursives	2764	23 (1%)	2741(99%)
Lectionaries	2143	0	2143 (100%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>5262</b>		<b>5217 (99%)</b>

This chart shows that the Majority Text is truly majority. The Majority Text is also equally old to the supposed “oldest and best” referred to in the ancient versions. It also represents the widest geographic distribution: across Greece, Asia Minor, Constantinople, Syria, Africa, Gaul, Southern Italy, Sicily, England, and Ireland. In contrast, the text that modern versions are based on is found in Egypt, a place that had no letters sent to it, but where most of the early heresies originated.” (Kayser & Pickering, 4-5)

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