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The Transmission of the Bible

What Are We Talking About?

The newest books of Scripture are almost 2,000 years old; the most ancient are around 3,500 years old. Needless to say, the original manuscripts of the Bible do not exist. All that we have today are copies of copies. Yet God has preserved His Word for us. The process of the preservation of God's Word is the study of the transmission of the Bible. Broadly, this subject covers both the transmission over time, throughout the world, and from one language to another. This lesson will focus upon the transmission of the word over time. We will also address each testament separately because there were different groups of people (the Jews and the Christians) responsible for the preservation of each text.

Old Testament Original Manuscripts: Approx. 2,000 BC to 400 BC

If we don't have the original manuscripts, how far back do our existing copies go? The oldest evidence we have of a Biblical text was discovered in excavations in Jerusalem in 1979-1980. Two amulets were found, each containing a rolled-up sheet of silver. When unrolled, a portion of the priestly benediction was found inscribed on them:

May Yahweh bless you and keep you;

May Yahweh cause His face to shine upon you and grant you peace.

This is derived from Number 6:24-26.

"The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

These amulets were dated back to the 7th century BC (around 700 BC). This is still around 700 years after from the original writing of this passage.

Why don't we have the original manuscripts? Recall that when Moses completed the writing of the Law (likely the very words later inscribed on the silver amulets), he instructed the Israelites to keep it beside the Ark of the Covenant (Deuteronomy 31:24-26). We know that the Ark and the Tabernacle of Moses' day were not static objects, but travelled around with the people. They only stopped traveling when Solomon built the temple around 830 BC. I don't believe we hear too much about the words of the Law being in the temple until the days of Josiah the King around 620 BC. Apparently, the Law was lost for several years and then rediscovered by a priest during a temple refurbishment project (2 Kings 22:8-13). This was likely to be the original manuscripts written by Moses. After that, we know that the goods of the temple were removed by the Babylonians and the temple destroyed around 587 BC. We do not know whether the original manuscript still existed, was taken, or burned at that time (2 Chronicles 36:18-19). We also know that after the temple was rebuilt around 516 BC and the temple goods restored (Ezra 5:13-15), the



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temple complex was completely renovated and enlarged by King Herod just prior to the ministry of Jesus. However, just as Jesus prophesied, the temple would be completely destroyed by the Romans (Matthew 24:2). This happened in 70 AD. There is no evidence of any original temple furniture (or the original manuscripts of any portion of Scripture) remaining after this destruction.

We also know that the Jews were very meticulous about preserving the Scriptures accurately and older manuscripts were disposed of in a respectful way so that worn copies would not be prevalent. The original works of some prophets were destroyed, even during their lifetime (see Jeremiah 36:20-32).

We therefore know very little about the original manuscripts. We do not know exactly what languages the originals were written in (Proto-Canaanite or Early Hebrew?). We also don't know what the script looked like. For example, the silver amulets do not contain spaces between the letters of the words. If some (or all) of the original manuscripts were written like this, it could result in a few confusions when translated. Consider the following examples:

GODISNOWHERE

What does this say? Did you write, "God is now here" or "God is nowhere"? Amos 6:12 is a passage that is a good example in Scripture. Remember that Hebrew is read from right to left.

אם־יחושכבקרִים

How will you divide these Hebrew letters?

כבקרִים

(with oxen)

יחוש־

(will one plow)

אם

(or)

ים

(the sea)

כבקר

(with oxen)

יחוש־

(will one plow)

אם

(or)

Look at Amos 6:12 in context. Which translation best fits the context of the passage? Here are two different translation options:

"Shall horses run upon the rock? Will one plow there with oxen? For ye have turned judgment into gall, And the fruit of righteousness into hemlock:" (KJV 1900)

"Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow the sea with oxen? But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood—" (NRSV)

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Old Testament Manuscripts: The Era of the Scribes – 500 BC to 100 BC

You are probably most familiar with the scribes of Jesus' day. They were often in league with the Pharisees and not usually in a positive way. Jesus had some very harsh things to say to them in the 23rd chapter of Matthew. The scribes of Jesus' day were the scholars, the intellectual elitists who studied the scriptures and were held in esteem for their knowledge. They were the occupational descendants of Old Testament scribes, some of which were very godly men, like Ezra (Ezra 7:6).



One of the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found

The Old Testament scribes (like Ezra) were not only students of God's Word; they were also preservers and reproducers of God's Word. Some of the work of the scribes from 500 BC to 100 AD is still in existence today. They are the oldest manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible that are known. Some of their Old Testament manuscripts were found within caves in the West Bank of Israel between 1946 and 1952, and are known as the "Dead Sea Scrolls".



Psalm 19 found in the Dead Sea Scrolls

It was believed that the scribes of this time period enhanced the texts in some ways to improve their readability and minimize the possibility of mistranslating them over time.

Recall that before the codex (book form) was developed, everyone used scrolls. If you had a number of scrolls, it could sometimes be difficult to know which one came first so that they could be read in order. One way they preserved the order of specific scrolls was to begin a subsequent scroll with the last words of the previous scroll (or vice versa). That may account for the repetition of a passage between the end of 2 Chronicles and the beginning of Ezra.

These scribes also developed the Hebrew vowels, *he* (ה), *yod* (י), and *waw* (ו). By using vowels, they reduced the possibility of mistranslation.

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Old Testament Manuscripts: Standardized Old Testament Text – 100 BC to 100 AD

The Journey from Texts to Translations captures the events of this time period well:

It appears that during the first century a strong movement emerged in Judaism to establish a standardized text of the Hebrew Bible. There is a significant difference between the varied textual traditions found at Qumran dating between the third and first centuries B.C. and the minimal deviations in the Hebrew texts from Masada (just prior to A.D. 73), the caves at Nahal Hever (late first century) and Wadi Murrabaat (written before the Bar Kochba revolt of 132-135). Thus sometime between these periods the text must have been standardized. This standardized text was dependent upon the earlier traditions that were available to the Jewish scribes at that time, but variants and differences in the text were removed. Once this standardization of the text took place, scribes were meticulous to ensure that the Hebrew text did not become corrupted.¹



A view of Masada from the air

This was the time period of Jesus Christ and would have been the text He was familiar with and quoted freely. We can have strong confidence that the text existing at this time was reliable because Jesus claimed its reliability.

Matthew 5:18 - "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (KJV 1900)

The jot is a reference to the Hebrew vowel, *yod* (י), added by scribes of Ezra's day. The tittle was a reference to the smallest serif used on the letters. Jesus not only authenticates the text of His day, but also the efforts made by the scribes (500 BC to 100AD) to prevent the mistranslation of Scripture.

Old Testament Manuscripts: Tannaim and Amoraim – 100 AD to 500 AD

The next generation of scribes (100 AD to 500 AD) was the Tannaim (Repeaters) and the Amoraim (Expositors). The Tannaim developed very strict rules for copying the Old Testament text for use in synagogues (local Jewish assemblies). The Amoraim were expositors who explained the scriptures in their writings. The Amoraim realized that there were some minor errors in the text that needed to be corrected. These corrections were noted in either a Masorah (an explanatory note beside the text) or

¹ Wegner, Paul D. (1999). *The Journey from Texts to Translations, The Origin and Development of the Bible*,. Grand Rapids: Baker Books. (JTT) p169.

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within the text itself. Many of these notes are retained in the most authoritative modern copy of the Hebrew Old Testament, the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.

The rules developed by the Amoraim were very strict and showed not only their devotion to accuracy, but also a reverence for God. Some of these rules were noted in the Journey from Texts to Translations.

1. Only parchments made from clean animals were allowed; these were to be joined together with thread from clean animals.
2. Each written column of the scroll was to have no fewer than forty-eight and no more than sixty lines whose breadth must consist of thirty letters.
3. The page was first to be lined, from which the letters were to be suspended.
4. The ink was to be black, prepared according to a specific recipe.
5. No word or letter was to be written from memory.
6. There was to be the space of a hair between consonant and the space of a small consonant between each word, as well as several other spacing rules.
7. The scribe must wash himself entirely and be in full Jewish dress before beginning to copy the scroll.
8. He could not write the name *Yahweh* (Jehovah) with a newly dipped brush, nor take notice of anyone, even a king, while writing this sacred name.²



Old Testament Manuscripts: The Masoretes – 500 AD to 1000 AD

Probably the most well-known preservers and copyists of the Old Testament are the Masoretes. The Jewish text we have today is the result of their diligent labors. They produced what is called, “The Masoretic Text”. The Masoretes counted about everything that could be counted, including the number of letters in a book.

The Masoretes also aided the pronunciation of the text by adding vowel points and accents. The vowel points provided clear instruction on the pronunciation of the word.



The Masoretic vowel points are in red; the accents are in blue.

The accents provide guidance on how to chant the sacred texts in synagogue worship. Many of the vowel point additions remain in Modern Hebrew writing.

The Masoretes also added new masorahs (scribal notations) to guard the text from error and provided some corrections.

² JTT, 170.

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One correction noted by the Masoretes is to Judges 18:30. Their notation has made it into most modern English translations. The difference is between the names Moses and Manasseh. While the names are significantly different in English, there is only one consonant difference in Hebrew:

Moses (משה)

Manasseh (מנשה)

Read the context of Judges 18:30 and determine which name better fits the context.

“And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land.” (KJV 1900)

“And the people of Dan set up the carved image for themselves, and Jonathan the son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land.” (ESV)

The Masoretes believed that someone inserted the additional Hebrew letter *nun* into the name to spare Moses the embarrassment of having a prodigal relative. Therefore, they suspended the “nun” slightly above the text and made a notation about the likely discrepancy.

The Masoretes also changed the vowel pointing on the name of God, *Yahweh*, to the vowel pointings of the word, *Adonai*, meaning Lord. This was to point out to the reader that the name of the God should not be pronounced but rather the word *Lord* read instead. This change is preserved in nearly every English translation of the Bible. Typically, you will find *Yahweh* replaced by the LORD in small caps.

“Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.””
(ESV)

Genesis 2:18

Because of how pervasive the Masoretic text is, no one really knows how the name of God was originally pronounced. There are no vowel markings that preserve that information for us.

Old Testament Manuscripts: The Modern Text – 1000 AD to present day

The Masoretes were so disciplined in their copying efforts that their texts continued to be regarded as the gold standard, even into the age of the printing press. It wasn’t until 1488 that the first complete Hebrew Bible was printed.

The Hebrew Bible was divided into chapters in the 13th century by Stephen Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury in England. A Jewish rabbi adjusted some of the chapter divisions to better reflect the flow of the Hebrew text. Therefore, some Jewish versions of the Bible have different chapter divisions than Christian Old Testaments. Verse divisions occurred around 900 AD and were marked by a large colon.

The most current edition of the Masoretic text is the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, produced by a group of international scholars in 1977. They used what they believed to be the best of the Masoretic texts as their source and included several notations where questionable readings exist.

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New Testament Transmission: Basic Principles

As we think about the original New Testament manuscripts, there are three points that will help us frame our thoughts.

First, recognize that the initial transmission of the New Testament gospels was oral (by word of mouth). The Twelve Apostles were qualified for their office because they were personal witnesses of the ministry of Jesus and continued with Him from the time of John the Baptist through the crucifixion and were witnesses of His resurrection (Acts 1:21-22). Their ministry was accompanied by the miraculous signs of an apostle, verifying the legitimacy of their message (2 Cor. 12:12). It appears that the writings attributed to some of the Twelve Apostles occurred later in their ministries, not early on.

Luke's gospel says as much in its introduction:

"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught." (NASB95)

Luke 1:1-4

Luke was not an eyewitness of Christ, but was a convert from the ministry of the apostles. What Luke knew about Jesus was "handed down" to him by the eyewitnesses (2 Peter 1:16, 1 John 1:1-4). It is clear that his gospel was not written during the ministry of Christ, but sometime after the ministry of Christ. Luke's writings were influenced directly by the apostles.

Luke also considered the account he was writing to be the "exact truth". The passage of time between the ministry of Christ and the recording of the gospels was not an obstacle to the recording of an accurate and reliable historical account. Remember that Jesus promised His apostles that the Holy Spirit would help them retain an accurate memory of what had already been spoken (John 14:26). As Luke leaned upon the accounts of the apostles in writing his gospel, he was aided by the Holy Spirit.

The second thing we need to understand is that there is a distinction between the transmission of the Old Testament to the Jews and the transmission of the New Testament to the Lord's churches. During the entire time period that the Old Testament was being recorded (with the exception of the Book of Job), there was a God-ordained central body that was intended to recognize and uphold God's Word. The Aaronic priesthood was responsible for maintaining the Ark and most likely, the Word of God (Deuteronomy 31:24-26). Even after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, the Jews remained very organized and settled upon a specific text (Masoretic) that they believe to be inspired and there remains very few words that are debated.

Things happened very differently with the New Testament. The New Testament was not written during a time of stability for the Lord's churches, but rather a time of transience and persecution. While they

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all have apostolic ties, the Apostles were not writing from a centralized location with trained scribes issuing authorized copies. They were writing while on the road or in prison. Their letters were intended to be immediately copied and shared with other believers and churches. Although there was a period in church history when the Church at Jerusalem served as a mother to many of the newer churches (Acts 15:1-2), the prominence and resources of the Jerusalem church likely waned as they were persecuted, further scattered, and faced severe poverty (1 Cor. 16:1-3). In fact, there is debate as to whether the Book of Revelation was written shortly before or after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD.

Rather than having a single, organized government or entity over all the churches, the New Testament model is a local and independent church, each being equal before God (Revelation 1:20). When questions arose over any differences between manuscripts, there was no body of authority that could resolve the question for every church. Copies of scripture proliferated throughout the world as the gospel message went forth. In fact, we find that many of the existing Greek manuscripts are organized into “families”. For example, we can trace certain characteristics of texts (specific readings or common errors) that are found in all texts from a certain area. This implies that many churches in a certain area copied from the same earlier copy and therefore had a lot in common with their other local sister churches. This is the basis for different Greek families of Bible texts.

We live in a unique age, with so much information available to us on this subject and multiple translations to choose from. Historically, most churches were just happy to have a copy of the Bible; much less debate over which copy or translation was the most accurate. Each congregation has to sift through this issue with the help of God. Fortunately, God’s Spirit is our guide and desires purity in the churches, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). We can therefore expect that there remains healthy discussion and debate over which manuscripts best reflect the original writings handed down by the apostles and prophets.

Finally, remember that we are living in the New Testament age. We are closer to the writing of these documents and the understanding of these issues than we are to the recording and recognition of the Old Testament canon and final evaluation of the manuscripts. We will discover in this and the following study that much has occurred over the years in transmitting the original text and then in translating it into other languages. Remember that we are a part of this process. In another 100 years, many of the issues that people debate today may be resolved. No doubt, new issues will arise. Recognize that even though change has occurred over the years, one goal must remain the same: to know and obey the Word of God. If that is our heart, the Lord will lead us to truth!

New Testament Manuscripts: Pre 100 AD

To my knowledge, we do not know the exact dating of the writing of any book of the New Testament. We do however believe they were written from around 49 to 95 AD, a span of almost 50 years. Many believe the book of Galatians to be the first recorded book of the New Testament. There is almost

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universal agreement that Revelation was the last, although the dating of Revelation is contested, usually based upon your interpretation of the prophesies of the book.³

Although there are very old fragments of New Testament writings dated back to the second century (100-199 AD), there are no known original autographs in existence. What do we know about the originals? We know that they were often carried by messengers from the author to their intended destination (Colossians 4:7-9). Sometimes, the actual author was not the writer of the letter or book, but rather dictated it to a scribe who wrote the original letter (Romans 16:22).

Honestly, even if a complete papyrus was found dating back to the time of the original writing, it would be difficult to know if it was the original or a copy. The original writings were likely copied for distribution as soon as they were received (Colossians 4:16). Also, no early Christian literature makes reference to the existence or location of the original New Testament writings. Apparently, possessing the original was not a significant issue to them. They must have had confidence in the copies they possessed.

A significant distinction between the transmission of the Old and New Testament was the probable use of amateur scribes to copy the texts. The Jews had entire groups within their religion devoted to transmitting the texts throughout history (i.e. scribes, Tannaim, Amoraim, and Masorettes). This was their passion and occupation. Recall that they had meticulously counted every line, word, and even letter within books and used a painstaking quality control process.

During the New Testament times, the number of churches was constantly growing and they didn't have printing presses, Amazon, or CBD.⁴ They didn't have centralized libraries either where original manuscripts and copies could be kept and preserved. Even if they did, the libraries or church sanctuaries would be a target for persecution. Along with the Jewish persecution since the days of Christ, the Roman government began targeting Christians around 64 AD during the reign of Nero and continued under Domitian (from around 81-96 AD).

Evidence from the early 300's AD indicates a professional scribe was very well paid.

When prose works were copied, a line called a stichos, having sixteen (or sometimes fifteen) syllables, was frequently used as a measure for determining the market price of a manuscript. A price fixing edict issued in A.D. 301 by the Emperor Diocletian set the wages of scribes at the rate of 25 denarii for 100 lines in writing of first quality, and of 20 denarii for the same number of lines in writing of the second quality (what the difference was between the qualities of writing is not mentioned)... the cost of producing one complete Bible, such as codex Sinaiticus, would have come to about 30,000 denarii – a sizeable sum not withstanding steadily rising inflation.⁵

³ Many of an Amillennial/Preterist conviction date Revelation prior to the conquest of Jerusalem by Rome in 70 AD. Premillennialists typically date Revelation to around 95 AD.

⁴ Christian Book Distributors (CBD)

⁵ *JTT*, 206.

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A Roman legionary was paid a stipend of 750 denarii per year in addition to room and board in the early 200's AD. Even if inflation caused the rate to rise to 1,000 denarii per year by 301 AD, it would take 30 years of a Roman legionary's stipend to pay for one hand copied Bible. While it is not possible to get a clear cost estimate for the scribal work, we can easily assume that the cost of a professionally copied Bible was probably cost prohibitive to most congregations. Thus, they would likely rely on the work of less experienced (and therefore less expensive) scribes or volunteer church members to do most of the copy work.

Though the church members likely made great efforts to be accurate, they would not have the skills, resources, or time to do professional-quality work. Because churches were growing and spreading, speed may have been a higher priority than accuracy.

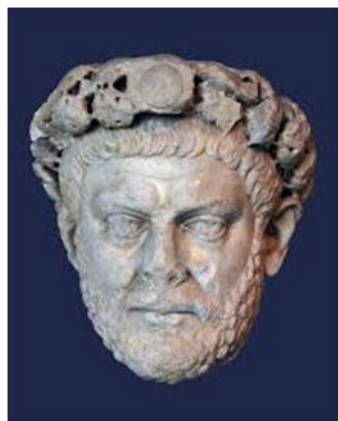
New Testament: Post 100 AD

After the close of the first century (post 99 AD), we begin to see a shift away from papyrus scrolls to the use of more durable velum or parchment paper, collected in a codex (a book format). Paul's second letter to Timothy even implies that Paul was familiar with parchment books.

"The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments."

2 Timothy 4:13

Parchments were originally dressed animal skins and were more expensive than traditional papyrus. Also, it is interesting to note that the oldest surviving New Testament manuscript fragments are printed on both front and back, indicating that they were part of a codex.



Emperor Diocletian

The early copies of Christian scripture came under the focused attack of the Roman Emperor Diocletian. In 303 AD, he ordered all sacred Christian scriptures to be burned. In addition, Christian places of worship were to be destroyed and Christians were forbidden from congregating. This was part of Rome's last, largest, and bloodiest official persecution of Christians.⁶ It lasted until 311 AD with the issue of the Edict of Milan, which declared freedom of worship for citizens of the Roman Empire. Needless to say, the persecutions likely resulted in the destruction of many (though not all) copies of Scripture and may be one of the many reasons why so few ancient copies survive to this day.

In an amazing turn, Constantine was able to seize control over a divided Roman government and declared Christianity to be the national religion of Rome. Constantine requested noted church historian Eusebius to print 50 new copies of the Bible for use by churches in Constantinople. As Christianity became accepted and commonplace, the primary

⁶ Wikipedia Article on Diocletian: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diocletian>

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responsibility of copying manuscripts fell to professional clergy, also known as monks. This practice continued for many years.

New Testament Texts: What are the Differences?

There are a lot more New Testament manuscripts than Old Testament manuscripts. With all of these different copies, it shouldn't surprise us that there are some differences. Which manuscript is correct and which one is incorrect? How do we know?

Before we discuss this important topic, let's talk about the types of differences we see. [The Journey from Texts to Translations](#) makes a very important statement:

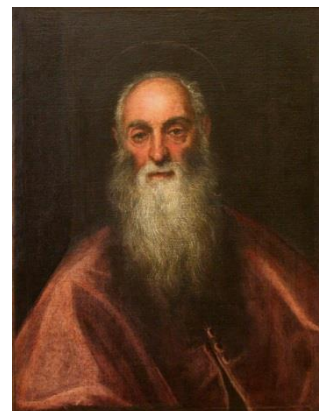
It is important near the beginning of our discussion on New Testament textual criticism to note that the verbal agreement between various New Testament manuscripts is closer than between many English translations of the New Testament and that the actual number of variants in the New Testament is small (approximately 10 percent), none of which affect any matter of doctrine. The greatest number of variants are differences or errors in spelling. (For example, the author of Codex Vaticanus spells "John" with only one n instead of the common spelling with two... This type of variant makes no difference in the meaning of the text.⁷

Even though most New Testament texts do not have variants among the different sources, the few that do create a significant challenge for those trying to determine which text is correct. Jerome (347-420 AD) was a Catholic priest, theologian, and historian. He is best known for his translation of the Bible in Latin. As he labored on his translation, he lamented that "there are almost as many different translations as there are manuscripts."



Johann Bengel

Although his Latin translation contained scribal errors (unknown to him), it became the gold standard and was virtually uncontested by other translations for 1,000 years.



Jerome

Johann Bengel (1687-1752 AD) was a Lutheran pastor and Greek scholar who became very distraught over the sheer number of manuscripts that existed. He gave himself to studying the manuscripts to try and determine which ones best represented the original manuscripts.

His work showed that there were far fewer variants than originally thought, and no variant affected any article of evangelical doctrine. Bengel was the first scholar to divide the manuscripts into groups and weigh them rather than assuming they were all of equal value.⁸

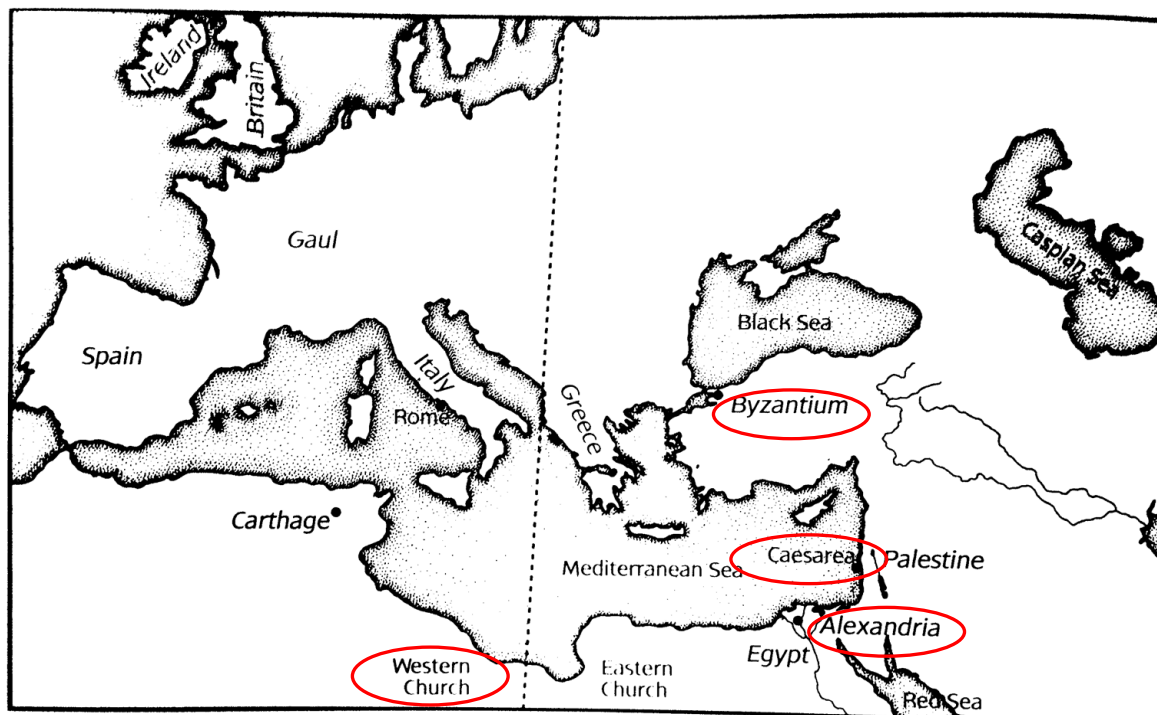
⁷ *JTT*, 213.

⁸ *JTT*, 215.

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Those who have studied the various Greek texts have been able to segregate them into “families” of texts that bear strong resemblance in the few passages that are different. These families include the Alexandrian, Caesarean, Western, and Byzantine texts. Their names are derived from the locations in which they were predominant.



We do not ultimately know where each family came from, just that texts from these distinct areas were all very similar in the 10% in which they differ from other families. The earliest translations of the Greek New Testament into other languages were in Syriac, Latin, and Coptic.

Substantial portions of the New Testament in the Syriac language appeared no later than the middle of the second century A.D. (150's AD) The Syriac translation from this period on the whole follows the Western text-type, but it occasionally has readings of the Caesarian type.

Many spoke Latin during these early times in the western Mediterranean regions, including North Africa and Italy. The earliest Latin translation came into existence around A.D. 150, and clearly followed Greek manuscripts of the Western family.

The earliest Coptic translation came about A.D. 200 in the land of Egypt. Manuscripts of this kind fall predominantly in line with the Alexandrian family of readings.

So the ancient versions reflect three text-types that had arisen by the end of the second century A.D.⁹

⁹ Thomas, Robert L. (2000). *How to Choose a Bible Version: An Introductory Guide to English Translations*, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications Ltd. (How to Choose a Bible Version) p58.

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By the third century, early church leaders also quoted from various families based upon where they lived. Tertullian (North Africa), Irenaeus (Asia Minor, Italy, Gaul), and Tatian (Syria) used the Western family of texts. Clement of Alexandria usually quotes the Alexandrian family. Origen, who moved to Caesarea later in his life, chose readings belonging to the Caesarean family after he moved there.

No early Byzantine manuscripts exist, but they became very prevalent in later years. The Byzantine manuscripts start appearing in the fourth century (300's AD) and then became prolific. When the capital of the Roman Empire moved to Asia Minor (the Byzantine area) in the fourth century, the only Greek manuscripts being mass-produced may have come from the area where the Byzantine text was prominent.

When Erasmus edited the first printed Greek New Testament when he translated his New Testament, in the early sixteenth century, the only manuscripts available to him were late ones of a Byzantine type. Tyndale depended on this Greek New Testament when he translated his New Testament, the first to be translated from Greek to English. Hence, it was inevitable that Tyndale's work carried this family resemblance.¹⁰

From Tyndale's time until the late nineteenth century, every English Bible depended upon Erasmus' Greek New Testament and thus the Byzantine manuscripts (including the King James Version). After more of the ancient manuscripts were discovered and an eclectic text was created,¹¹ most new Bible translations depend upon a weighing of all the families, with somewhat of a leaning towards the Alexandrian family. This is one of the primary drivers for the differences people note between older and newer English versions of the New Testament. The diagram to the right is adapted and updated from the Thompson Chain Reference Study Bible. It is a great way of seeing how the various English versions lean upon the different Greek texts. Remember, the differences are only 10% of the text.

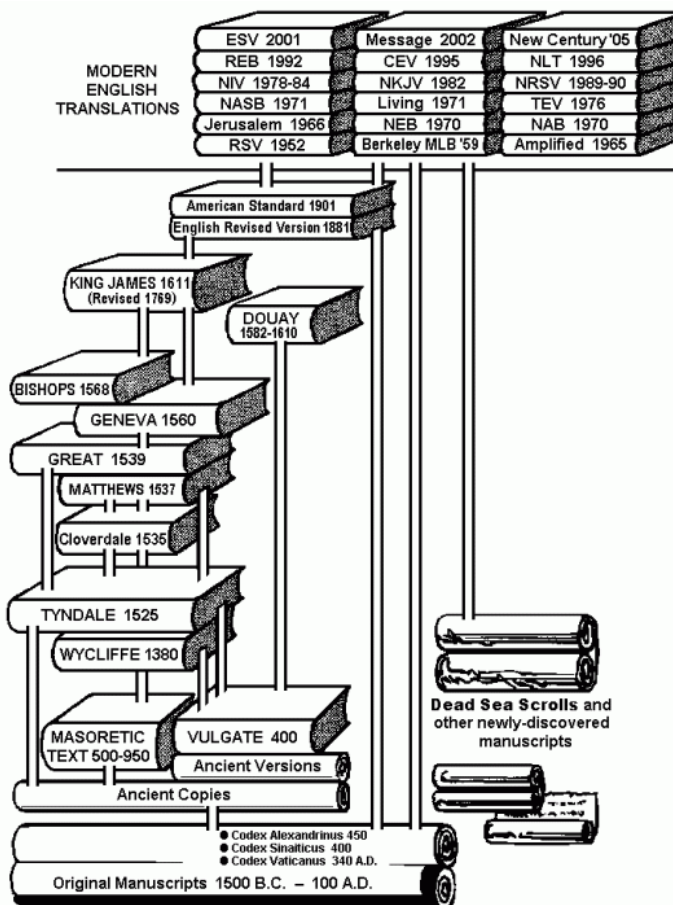


Chart adapted and updated from Thompson Chain Reference Study Bible by David Ahl, Nov. 2010, www.BibleStudyMen.com

¹⁰ *How to Choose a Bible Version*, p60-61.

¹¹ An eclectic text is created by pulling what is considered to be the most reliable texts from the various families into one version that is thought to be more wholly reliable than any one family alone. The process of determining which text is more likely the original is called Textual Criticism.

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To close, let me provide one example comparing the various families in portions of Luke 11:2-4. The “correct” reading is based upon the opinion of current Greek textual scholars.

“Correct” Reading	Support “Correct” Reading	Support “Incorrect” Reading
‘Father’	Alexandrian	Western, Caesarean, Byzantine
‘Your kingdom come’	Alexandrian, Caesarean, Byzantine	Western
‘sins’	Alexandrian, Caesarean, Byzantine	Western
‘Lead us not into temptation’	Alexandrian	Western, Caesarean, Byzantine

The New American Standard Bible (NASB) is based upon the eclectic text. You will see the difference when it is compared to the King James Version (KJV), based upon the Byzantine family alone.

“...Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.”

Luke 11:2-4 (NASB)

*“...Our Father **which art in heaven**, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. **Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth**. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; **but deliver us from evil.**”*

Luke 11:2-4 (KJV)

Obviously, the KJV includes additional portions of the Lord’s Prayer not contained in the NASB. Why? Well, the oldest Greek manuscripts found do not contain the extra words. It is thought that they were added by a scribe at some point and then copied forward. If these extra words were not part of the original text, where did they come from? Consider Matthew 6:9-13 from the NASB.

“...Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

Matthew 6:9-13 (NASB)

Notice that the NASB’s version of Matthew 6:9-13 is more consistent with what you are used to if you read the KJV. Compare Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4 and notice the differences, even in the KJV. If the original text in Luke 11:2-4 did not originally contain all the words found in the KJV, why were they added? Perhaps a scribe thought it better to make the prayer more closely resemble Matthew 6:9-13, or perhaps they started copying the Lord’s Prayer from memory and used the Matthew 6:9-13 text.

Consider it from another point of view. What if the original text did contain all the words we see in the KJV. Why would a scribe eliminate portions of Luke 11:2-4? If indeed they wanted to alter the Lord’s Prayer, why didn’t they do it in Matthew 6:9-13 too? Ultimately, scholars felt it was more likely that a scribe was trying to make the passages complement than to remove words. This reasoning, in addition to the older age of the Alexandrian texts, leads scholars to weight them more heavily.