

Lesson 6: Textual Criticism and Inerrancy

1. Textual Criticism

Textual criticism is the art and science of reconstructing the original text of Scripture. A text critic examines all available manuscripts, identifies variants, and determines which readings best reflect the autographs. Looking at the oldest manuscripts, the majority manuscripts, early translations, and early quotations all help to assure the original reading.

History of Textual Criticism

Textual Transmission of the Old Testament

- Jewish scribes (later the Masoretes) copied the Old Testament with extreme care.

Jerome and the Latin Vulgate

- Around AD 382, Jerome was commissioned to translate the Bible into Latin, called the Vulgate.
- Jerome used the Hebrew OT (instead of the Greek Septuagint) for greater accuracy, making him an early textual critic.
- For the next 1,000 years, the Vulgate became the official Bible of the Roman Church.
- Since the Vulgate was considered authoritative, little effort was made in the Middle Ages to study Hebrew and Greek manuscripts for textual accuracy.

The Printing Press and the Greek New Testament

- In 1455, Johannes Gutenberg's printing press revolutionized the preservation and spread of texts.
- Scholars began to compare Greek manuscripts rather than relying solely on the Latin Vulgate.
- Erasmus (1516) produced the first printed Greek New Testament, using a handful of manuscripts.

The Reformation and Renewed Interest in the Original Texts

- Then like Luther, Calvin, Tyndale emphasized *sola Scriptura*—Scripture alone as the authority.
- This fueled interest in returning to the original languages of the Bible.
- This encouraged Bible translation into the vernacular languages, requiring careful work with Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.

Understanding Variants

- Variants: differences between manuscripts; could be as minor as spelling or as major as omitted verses. 99.9% are non-threatening to the reading.

Unintentional Errors

- Spelling errors, Copying errors, especially when it was not the first language of the copyist
- Rhodes, Rhoads, Roads... Rhoades
TOU HAVE WON \$1,000, \$OU HAVE WON \$1,000, YOU HAVE ONE \$1,000
- MISSEDDWORDDIVISIONS, PAULISNOWHERE
- Accidental omissions. Letters, words, sentences

Intentional Errors

- Grammatical corrections: ain't, isn't, is not
- Clarification: the Lord, the Lord Jesus, The Lord Christ Jesus
- Historical or geographical clarifications: stay in the city... stay in the city of Jerusalem

2. The Authority and Inerrancy of Scripture

The doctrine of the authority and inerrancy of Scripture:

- Because Scripture is God-breathed, it is wholly true in everything it affirms in the original autographs and functions with the authority of God's own words.

The God of Truth

- **2 Timothy 3:16** – "All Scripture is breathed out by God."
- **2 Peter 1:21** – Men wrote as they were "carried along by the Holy Spirit."

Jesus' View of Scripture

- Jesus and His disciples treated the Old Testament with **absolute trust**.
- Jesus himself declared Scripture fulfilled in His life, death, and resurrection.
- He trusted its tense, context, and historical reality. Scripture is not only doctrinally true, but factually precise where it intends to be.

Main Points of the Chicago Inerrancy Conference (1978)

- 1. God, being Himself Truth, inspired Scripture** — the Scriptures originate in God's truthfulness.
- 2. Thus Scripture has divine authority** — it must be believed, obeyed, and embraced.
- 3. The Holy Spirit authenticates and illumines the Scriptures to believers.**
- 4. Scripture is infallible in all it teaches** — theological, historical, and scientific matters.
- 5. If inerrancy is denied, the authority of Scripture is impaired and that brings serious loss to individual believers and the Church**

3. The Bible as God's Word

- **Fulfilled prophecies**
- **Archeology** - thousands of archeology finds support the Bible
- **Manuscript evidence** - the careful OT copies show they believed it was God's Word immediately. The many NT copies show they believed it was God's Word immediately.
- **Eyewitness collaboration** - the prophets and Jesus were not in hiding or speaking privately.
- **Historical accuracy** - the events and places recorded are not fanciful mythology but true to their time.
- **Spiritual Authenticity** - all the writers agree and do not contradict each other and they are being inspired by the same God.

How the Bible differs from other religious writings.

- The Book of Mormon and the Quran have no fulfilled prophecy
- The Book of Mormon and the Quran are inconsistent with archeology.
- Manuscript evidence: Quran
 - Muhammad was illiterate; Muslims often claim this proves his revelations were divine.
 - For 20+ years, Muhammad proclaimed revelations from Allah.
 - At his death in AD 632, there was no written Quran—only oral recitations and scattered verses on leaves, bones, etc.
 - After Muhammad, disputes arose as Muslims recited variant versions of his sayings.
 - Many who memorized portions of the Quran died in battles, threatening the preservation of the text.
 - Around AD 652 (≈20 years later), Caliph Uthman ordered an "official" Qur'an compiled by Zayd ibn Thabit, Muhammad's associate.
 - Uthman distributed five official copies across the empire.
 - He commanded that all other versions and fragments (bones, leaves, notes) be burned.
 - The Quran we have today is based only on this controlled, edited, and enforced version.
 - At best, Islam can claim the Quran preserves the words approved by the third caliph, not necessarily Muhammad's originals.
- Manuscript evidence: Book of Mormon
 - According to Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon was originally engraved on golden plates, which he received in 1827 from an angel named Moroni, whom Smith identified as a resurrected former inhabitant of the American continent. Smith said he translated the original text of the plates into English, and that a portion of the text was written on the plates in what he termed reformed Egyptian.
 - Plates given to Joseph Smith were never witnessed - they were lost
- The Book of Mormon and the Quran have one writer to verify - not many witnesses
- The Book of Mormon and the Quran are not historically accurate.
 - Quran claims Mary is the sister of Aaron and claims that Pharaoh's body was preserved after drowning and claims Jesus was not crucified but raised to God, while a substitute was killed in his place.
 - The Book of Mormon claims cities, animals, and people that have never existed in the Americas during that time given.
- Spiritual Authenticity
 - The Book of Mormon and the Quran both recite and plagiarize the Bible and seek to add to the Scriptures their own words.

Trust it – in doctrine, promises, and daily life.

Submit to it – even when culture or personal feelings disagree.

Proclaim it with confidence – knowing it is God's Word.

Defend it – against claims that reduce its authority.