

# The Bible: What it is and How we got it

RCF Academy

Lesson 9: Textual Criticism

# Textual Criticism

- Definition
  - The science and art that seeks to determine the most reliable reading of the biblical text.
- Why Textual Criticism?
  - The church has always dealt with a variety of manuscripts
  - God preserves his word through historical means

# Textual Criticism

- Variants

- Estimated non-spelling textual variants between Greek manuscripts = 500,000
- Timothy Paul Jones
  - “The study concluded that there are probably about half a million nonspelling differences among our Greek New Testament manuscripts. Every qualification in that sentence is important. This estimate does not include variants from non-Greek manuscripts or from the quotations of early church writers. Nor does it include what must be a vast quantity of trivial spelling differences. Finally, it estimates differences between manuscripts rather than differences from the original text, since that original is usually what is up for debate in the first place.”
- Majority of variants do not affect reading
  - John 3:3 which literally reads, “Answered, the Jesus and said to him.”
- All variants do not affect doctrine taught
  - “In every case in which two or more options remain possible, every possible option simply reinforces truths that are already clearly present in the writings of that particular author and in the New Testament as a whole; there is no point at which any of the possible options would require readers to rethink an essential belief about Jesus or to doubt the historical integrity of the New Testament.”

# Textual Criticism

- Variants
  - Many manuscripts bolsters confidence in having true reading
  - Scribes were dedicated to the integrity of the text
- Materials
  - Stone and Clay
  - Papyrus
  - Leather
  - Parchment
  - Paper
- Palimpsest “rescaped”
  - Document erased from material and rewritten on. Original document can be recovered through infrared

# Textual Criticism

- Events of loss
  - Decay
    - Old materials, bugs, weather
  - Conquest
    - Babylonian invasion, Crusades
  - Malicious intent
    - Persecution, heretics
  - Financial gain
    - Tearing manuscripts apart to sell them individually

# Textual Criticism

- Writing
  - Old Testament
    - Paleo-Hebrew (most ancient)
    - Square script (3rd or 4th century BC)
    - Aramaic (from Babylonian Captivity)
    - Classical Hebrew (10th century BC - 130 AD)
  - New Testament
    - Greek Caps
    - Uncial Letters (1st to 6th century AD)
    - Cursive (3rd to 9th century AD)
    - Miniscule letters (8th century AD)

# Textual Criticism

- Main Sources
  - Old Testament
    - Silver Amulets (Oldest texts, Num 6:22-27)
    - Samaritan Pentateuch (500 - 400 BC)
    - Dead Sea Scrolls
      - Found in 1947
      - Dated between 250 BD - 50 AD
    - Nash Papyrus
    - Septuagint
      - Codex Vaticanus
      - Codex Sinaiticus
      - Codex Alexandrinus

# Textual Criticism

- Main Sources
  - New Testament
    - Chester Beatty Collection (200 - 250 AD)
    - John Rylands Library (2nd Century AD)
    - Codex Ephraemi
      - Was scripture that was erased for sermons to be written
  - Textual Families
    - Alexandrian family
    - Caesarean family
    - Western family
    - Byzantine family



# Textual Criticism

- How are they found?
  - Uncatalogued in libraries
  - In caves
  - Buried
  - Hidden in other literature
- Principles for Textual Criticism
  - Manuscripts must be weighed
  - Determine which readings would most likely give rise to others
  - The more distinctive reading is usually preservable
  - The shorter reading is generally favored
  - Determine which reading is most appropriate to context

# Textual Criticism

- Principles for TC
  - Weighing manuscripts
    - Dates of manuscripts
      - Early do not always mean more reliable!
      - Scribes could have copied earlier manuscripts
      - Scribes could have known the history of an error
      - Scribes kept the errors and added commentary
        - “1 (1100's), at the end of John 21 (where it inserts the pericope adulterae):”The chapter about the adulteress: in the Gospel according to John, this does not appear in the majority of copies; nor is it commented upon by the divine fathers whose interpretations have been preserved—specifically, by John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria; nor is it taken up by Theodore of Mopsuestia and the others. For this reason, it was not kept in place where it is found in a few copies, at the beginning of the 86th chapter [according to Eusebius], following, ‘Search and see that a prophet does not arise out of Galilee.’”
    - Content
    - Size

# Textual Criticism

- Scribes

- Sopherim “Scribes” (500 BC - 100 AD)
- Tannaim “to hand down/study/teach” (20 - 200 AD)
  - Only parchment made from clean animals were allowed
  - 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
  - The page was first to be lined, from which the letters were to be suspended
  - The ink was to be black, prepared according to a specific recipe
  - No word or letter was to be written from memory
  - There was to be the space of a hair between each consonant and the space of a small consonant between each word
  - The scribe must wash himself entirely and be in full Jewish dress before beginning to copy the scroll
  - He could not write the name Yahweh with a newly dipped brush, nor take notice of anyone, even a king, while writing this sacred name
- Amoraim “expositors” (200 - 500 AD)

# Textual Criticism

- Scribes

- Masoretes (500 - 1000 AD)

- Special points

- “Some say, ‘Why are the dots used?’ Ezra said, ‘If Elijah should come and ask me why I accept that reading, I can point out that I have dotted the letters in questions (to show they are suspect), but if he should tell me that the reading is correct, I can remove the dots’”

- Perpetual Qere

- Early Christians

- “The fact that Christian papyri...all exhibit the influence of documentary and literary styles indicates scribes who were either comfortable with and experienced in both styles or trained in more general styles of writing that could be adapted in rather simple ways to different tasks; it seems to me that the latter scenario is more likely since had these scribes had extensive training in literary book hand, their hands would have manifested this training.”
    - “It is easy to assume that, prior to Constantine, Christians must have been deprived, short-staffed, and without access to capable scribes. This idea seems to fit with our understanding of the fledgling church in that era. Nevertheless, an investigation of the actual manuscripts reveals a more nuanced picture that involves scribes of a variety of skills and training, but definitely including many who were capable.”
    - Scriptoriums

# Textual Criticism

- Scribal Mistakes

- Mistaken letters
  - This is typical of Hebrew characters in which some of the letters can appear very similar. The sacred name is often confused in the NT when it is abbreviated.
- Homophony
  - Substitution of similar sounding words
  - Isaiah 9:2 כִּי, “not” was used instead of לֵי “to him”. The readings are “Thou hast multiplied the nation, and NOT increased the joy” vs. “and increased THEIR joy” [joy to him]. They both sound like “low” which can cause confusion on the part of the scribe hearing this read in a scriptorium.
- Haplography
  - Omission of a letter or word usually due to a similar letter or word in context.
- Dittography
  - Letter or word that has been written twice rather than once
- Metathesis
  - Reversal in order of two letters or words
- Fusion
  - Incorrect word division that results in two words joined as one
  - Leviticus 16:8 displays in some manuscripts the word “Azazel”, but the original readings show that it is a combination of two words which actually say “goat of departure”
- Fission
  - Incorrect word division that results in one word written as two
- Homoioteleuton
  - An omission caused by two words or phrases that end similarly
- Homoiarchton
  - An omission caused by two words or phrases that begin similarly

# Textual Criticism

- Scribal additions/corrections

- Rare or unusual usages or words
- Euphemistic changes
  - “Shame” replaces “Baal” 1 Chronicles 8:33
- Additions and/or glosses
  - for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.]”  
John 5:4 NASB1995
- Modernizations
  - Grammatical, spelling, and pronunciation
- Theological clarity
  - Luke 2:41,43 was changed from “his parents” to “Joseph and Mary” in order to clarify that Jesus was virgin born