

SESSION FOUR

*TEXTUAL CRITICISM
AND VARIANTS*

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I. INTRODUCTION TO TEXTUAL CRITICISM

A. Textual Criticism Defined

1. The study of the copies of any handwritten document whose original is unknown or no longer exists for the primary purpose of the exact wording of the original ¹³⁹
2. The practice of reconstruction of the copies ¹⁴⁰
3. Textual criticism provides assurance that the Bible available today accurately reflects what the Apostles and their associates wrote in the NT and what the prophets and holy men wrote in the OT.
4. Not a process of criticizing the Bible, but rather reconstruct the original

B. The Goals of Textual Criticism

1. Primary goal of New Testament textual criticism—like all other literature — must be the recovery of the wording of the autographic text or to know the content of the originals.
2. Secondary goal is to better understand the ancient church at various times and places. ¹⁴¹
 - a. Educational to see what was considered their authoritative Scripture
 - b. Changes to the text in various places and time provide insights into scribal intentions.
 - c. Preferred manuscripts develop over time (i.e. Latin Vulgate, KJV) and reflect cultural shifts.
 - d. Non-canonical manuscripts and other writings emerge that help clarify New Testament manuscripts.

¹³⁹ Daniel Wallace, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Credo Courses, 2013, 15:35.

¹⁴⁰ Jonathan Morrow, *Questioning the Bible: 11 Major Challenges to the Bible's Authority*, Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014, 94.

C. **Fundamental Questions Regarding Textual Criticism** ¹⁴²

1. How many manuscripts are available to examine?
2. How early are the manuscripts to be examined?
3. How important are the textual variants contained within the available manuscripts?

D. **Necessity of Textual Criticism**

1. Manuscript differences exist, but can be understood.
 - a. Six to ten differences per chapter exist among the two closest early NT manuscripts. (Multiply that by 260 NT chapters—over 2000 differences among these manuscripts).
2. Many manuscripts seldom agree with each other resulting in a sizeable number of differences.
3. The originals are non-existent and manuscripts differ— explanation and understanding is required.
5. Explains any challenges by skeptics that mistakes or errors are in the Bible
6. If we still had the originals, textual criticism would be unnecessary.
7. If all copies (manuscripts) were exactly the same, textual criticism would be unnecessary.

II. **DEFINING THE ORIGINAL TEXT**

A. **Original text**—the final text when it is dispatched from the author to its recipients; the last form of the text under control by the author. ¹⁴³

B. **Synonyms for the original text**

1. Autographic text; Autographa; Autographs
2. Ausgang text

¹⁴¹ Wallace, 30:22.

¹⁴² Morrow, 95.

¹⁴³ Wallace, 12:25.

3. Exit text
4. Urtext

C. Rejected definitions of the original text

1. Predecessor text form (working draft)—the form of the text before it was published; the working text of the author
2. Canonical text form—the form of the text when the book was considered as Scripture... i.e. Mark 16:9-20... Did the early church consider Mark canonical only if they included those verses OR only if they excluded those verses? Was it the book itself even though textual variants were unresolved?
3. Interpretive text form—the form of the text unique to a given locale with interpretative alterations until the time of the printing press

D. Frequency of the original text in other ancient documents

1. Ancient originals mostly non-existent
 - a. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address—only five early copies
 - b. Non-Literature—a few original types remain
 1. Letters between a husband and wife
 2. Son writes to his dad about the battlefield

III. MATERIAL AND METHODS IN MAKING ANCIENT BOOKS

A. General Considerations

1. Stone – Clay – Wood/Wax – Metals – Ostraca – Papyrus – Parchment -- Paper

B. Papyrus

1. Plants unique to Egypt
2. Formed earliest manuscripts of New Testament (2nd-8th centuries)
3. Propensity to decay limits existing papyri.

4. Method: Beat fibers; soak in water for 7-14 days; longer the soak the darker and more elegant papyrus becomes

C. Parchment

1. Animal skin; very fine parchment is velum
2. Dates from late 2nd -16th century
3. Vast majority of our existing manuscripts
4. Most durable
5. Method: Rigorous process of drying and stretching—hair side (darker)—flesh side (lighter).
6. Characteristics
 - a. Thin vs. Ultra-thin—almost translucent (i.e. like Bible paper)
 - b. Parchment—Holes often present (from stretching)
 - c. Velum—Finest parchment had no holes
 - d. Velum is usually bleached lighter
 - e. For both: scribe would mix egg whites to cover and protect the text.
 - f. Exposed hair follicles indicate animal type and location (deer, sheep, goat).
 1. Codex Sinaiticus would have required 350 sheep.
 2. Palimpsests developed due to cost and required number of animals.
 - g. Rats ate animal skin and evidence noted on existing manuscripts

D. Paper

1. Chinese invented paper and brought it to Egypt.
2. Dates from 9th -16th century

3. Paper manuscripts discovered in storage room in St. Catherine monastery in Sinai Egypt
4. Least durable
 - a. Worms eat wood and paper.
 - b. Water damage often present
 - c. Manuscripts may exhibit worm holes or water damage.

IV. TEXTUAL VARIANTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. Textual Variants Defined

1. Any location in the text where at least one manuscript being studied deviates from the source text (vorlage) or that there is not uniformity of wording ¹⁴⁴
2. The deviation may be a letter, word, spelling, phrase, or sentence difference.
3. Regardless of how many manuscripts share the same variance (one or 100), it still only counts as one variant. ¹⁴⁵

B. Counting Textual Variants

1. If we had only one manuscript there would be no variances—it can't disagree with itself, but there is no assurance that it goes back to the original—regardless of age. Two manuscripts can be compared.
2. Example of proper counting of variants (John 4:1)
 - a. “When Jesus knew...” or “When the Lord knew...”
 - b. *Jesus knew*—Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus
 - c. *The Lord knew*—Bezae, Washingtonianus
 - d. A single textual variant—*Jesus* or *the Lord*
 - e. If there are 100 manuscripts that each contain this difference, it counts as only one variant. The number of manuscripts does not matter.

¹⁴⁴ Morrow, 98.

¹⁴⁵ Wallace, 23:59.

3. Incorrect counting of variants
 - a. It is *not* the [difference noted] x [number of manuscripts].
 - b. Number of manuscripts is *almost* completely irrelevant. There must be at least one manuscript that disagrees with another. It's not the number of manuscripts that count, but the change in wording.¹⁴⁶

C. Number of Textual Variants

1. Best estimate: 400K textual variants in the New Testament (300K-500K)¹⁴⁷ (138,162 words in Greek NT)¹⁴⁸
2. Out of about 500 pages in the Greek New Testament, the manuscript variations represent only about half of a page.¹⁴⁹
3. "No two manuscripts are exactly alike."¹⁵⁰
4. We have more textual variants than we have words in the Greek New Testament—2.5 variants for every word.
5. The reason we have a lot of textual variances is because we have a lot of manuscripts.¹⁵¹
6. 400K variants improves the chance of establishing the exact wording of the original NT text.¹⁵²
7. Variants explain other variants; that's how we can explain the original text.¹⁵³

◆ *INSIGHT*

- Only 60 Greek manuscripts cover the whole NT.¹⁵⁶
- Ave. Greek NT manuscript is ~ 450 pages—most have gaps.¹⁵⁷
- Each Greek NT (~140K words)¹⁵⁸
 - Majority Text (TR)—141K word
 - Nestle-Aland Text (UBS)—138, 162 words.
- NT manuscripts grew *only* 2% over 1400 years.¹⁵⁹

Existing New Testament Manuscripts

5,824	Greek New Testaments. ^{154 155} Gospels (2000) Paul's letters (800-850) Acts and Catholic letters (650) Revelation (325)	5-10K	Syriac, Georgian, Gothic, Armenian, Aramaic, Hebrew, Old Slavonic, Arabic
		3-4K	Coptic
>10K	Latin	20-25K	New Testament Manuscripts

¹⁴⁶ Wallace, 12:51.

¹⁴⁷ Wallace, 12:03.

¹⁴⁸ Morrow, 98.

¹⁴⁹ Got Questions . <https://www.gotquestions.org/Codex-Sinaiticus-Vaticanus.html>.

¹⁵⁰ Wallace, 2:46.

¹⁵¹ Wallace, 5:30.

¹⁵² Wallace, 12:59.

¹⁵³ Wallace, 12:14.

¹⁵⁴ Wallace, 14:03-14:45.

¹⁵⁵ The Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung (INTF, Münster, Germany) maintains the authoritative catalog, the Kurzgefasste Liste. <https://ntvnr.uni-muenster.de/liste>.

INSIGHT

*“We could reproduce the words of the New Testament based on the writings of the church fathers... many, many times over.”*¹⁶⁰

D. Nature of Textual Variants

1. Nature dictates importance, not just the number.
2. Are they meaningful and viable?
 - a. Meaningful—changes the meaning of the text
 - b. Viable— sufficient pedigree to potentially represent the wording of the original (i.e. may be found in one important manuscript but no other manuscripts, therefore, implausible)
3. Four Groups of Textual variances
 - a. Not meaningful, but viable
 1. Spelling differences—most common textual variance
 - a. > 70% of all textual variances
 - b. It does not affect our theology.
 - c. Examples: John or Johnn or Jon
 2. Word order differences
 - a. Jesus loves Paul; Jesus Paul Loves; Loves Paul Jesus, Paul loves Jesus. Greek would read it only one way—Jesus loves Paul.
 - b. It does not affect the essential meaning.
 3. Proper names
 - a. Article used before the name
 - b. Example in Luke 2: the Joseph and the Mary went looking for the Jesus; “The” occurs 20K times in Greek NT—most common word.¹⁶¹
 - c. Alternative phrases or combinations
 1. Joseph and the Mary were looking for the Jesus.
 2. The Joseph and Mary were looking for Jesus.
 - d. More than 1200 ways (variances) to say John loves Mary in Greek; four hundred variances per word without any change in meaning.
 - b. Meaningful, but not viable (spelling differences, word order) (poor chance of being authentic)
 - c. Not meaningful or viable
 - d. Meaningful and viable

¹⁶⁰ Wallace, 18:11.

¹⁶¹ Wallace, 8:08.

1. 1/4th of 1% of all textual variances ¹⁶²
 2. Good chance of being authentic
 3. Examples: Romans 8:2; Phil. 1:14 (see below)
4. First 3 groups: >99% of all textual variances fit this category and make no difference at all.

V. EMERGENCE OF LOCAL TEXT FORMS

A. Text-Type Defined

1. Group of manuscripts that have a pattern of readings seen in that group of manuscripts that are different from a pattern of reading seen in other manuscripts (i.e. local originals)
2. Characteristic of a specific geographical region
3. Contains distinctive readings due to theological tendencies, scribal habits, and transmission environments that can be traced to different regions

B. Four different text types

1. Alexandrian (Alexandria, Egypt)
 - a. Most accurate copying center in the ancient world
 - b. Classical texts produced in Alexandria
 - c. Earliest manuscripts (2nd -4th centuries)
 - d. Careful tradition; most reliable and closest to the original due to minimal scribal expansion or doctrinal alteration
 - e. Most popular until 9th century
 - f. Concise and difficult
 - g. Examples: P75, Vaticanus, Sinaiticus
 - h. Basis of most modern critical editions
 - i. Nestle-Aland (United Bible Societies) critical editions are based largely on Alexandrian manuscripts.

"I don't care if we have 400K or 400M textual variants. What counts is the nature of the variance. 99% effect nothing." ¹⁶³

– Daniel Wallace

¹⁶² Wallace, 21:45.

¹⁶³ Wallace, 14:41.

- j. Modern texts
 - 1. ESV (English Standard Version)
 - 2. NIV (New International Version)
 - 3. NASB (New American Standard Bible)
 - 4. NRSV (New Revised Standard Version)
 - 5. CSB (Christian Standard Bible)
 - 6. NET
 - 7. Not KJV, NKJV

- 2. Western text (Roman, N. Africa)
 - a. 2nd – 5th centuries
 - b. Early fathers quote the western text form.
 - c. Very widespread
 - d. No official edition
 - e. Not a careful tradition, but its early— must take this in consideration
 - f. Tendency to expand, rephrase, or paraphrase and therefore not considered as close to the original
 - g. Not considered the most reliable for establishing the original Greek
 - h. Relatively few manuscripts (used to create the Vulgate)
 - i. “love of paraphrase”
 - j. Used to translate Latin Vulgate

- 3. Byzantine text (Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey and Greece)
 - a. Later text form: none before the 4th century. (late 3rd – 9th Century); no church fathers who used Byzantine text before the 4th century; most popular by 9th C
 - b. Heavily edited and uniform
 - c. Polished and harmonized
 - d. Very liturgical text form, used in churches
 - e. Byzantine manuscripts were more numerous and accessible during the Renaissance/Reformation.

- h. Ninety percent of all Greek NT manuscripts are Byzantine and come from the 9th century or later.
- i. Earliest Byzantine manuscripts with Paul's letters in 9th C
- j. Examples: Textus Receptus; late manuscripts
- k. Versions
 - 1. KJV (King James Version)
 - 2. NKJV (New King James Version)
 - 3. MEV (Modern English Version)
- 4. Caesarean text (Israel)
 - a. Hypothesized textual tradition
 - b. Mixed features that don't fit well into other types.
 - c. Almost completely absorbed by the Byzantines

C. Examples of Text Types in Scripture

- 1. Luke 24:53- "they were in the temple blessing God."
 - a. Alexandrian texts: say "blessing God."
 - b. Western texts: say "praising God."
 - c. Byzantine texts: say "blessing and praising God." It conflates the text since it came later than Alexandrian and Western texts and suggests it is a secondary text form.

VI. SCRIBAL CORRUPTION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEXT

A. Unintentional corruption

- 1. Vast majority of errors
- 2. Easiest to detect
- 3. Scribes did not know they were creating errors.
- 4. Types of unintentional errors
 - a. Sight
 - b. Memory
 - 1. Responsible for the substitution of synonyms, transposition of words and letters and the assimilation of one passage to another ¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Wallace, 27:29.

- c. Hearing
 - 1. Reading was usually out loud.
 - 2. Scribe would look at the text, read it out loud, remember it, and write it. If read or remembered incorrectly, writing would be incorrect. Hearing for himself was important.
- d. Judgment
 - 1. Marginal notes—questions such as, “Did the scribe mean to put notes as a verse or to be a commentary?” (if in doubt you don’t leave it out. You put it in the text).
 - 2. Example: John 5:3-5 KJV... impotent folks... vs 3b and 4... scribes saw a marginal note... the angels stirred up the waters... so the scribe put that in the text... If that is true... then the principle... God helps those who help themselves comes out! Questionable principle, but it is in the King James (29:25)
 - 3. Example: John 3:13 KJV... Is Jesus talking or is John narrating?...” The son of man is still in heaven...” ... or did a scribe put in... “He is still in heaven right now”?
- e. Fatigue
 - 1. After six hours of copying text, anyone is prone to making nonsense changes to the text.
- f. Carelessness
 - 1. Scribe confused letters—Most are capital (magistral) letters since all of NT manuscripts through the 8th century were capital letters.
 - 2. Most of these types of errors originated prior to the minuscule (small letters) manuscripts (Metzger, 6:34)
 - 3. Original NT manuscripts were probably not written in capital letters, but rather in cursive letters.
 - 4. Broad rule: When someone is writing to someone in greater authority, they write in magistral script (capital letters). When writing to lesser authority they use cursive script.
 - 5. What kind of script would Paul use when writing to his churches? If he wanted to show humility he may use magistral script (i.e. Philemon). If he was upset (i.e. Galatians, 2nd Corinthians), he may have used cursive.¹⁶⁵
 - 6. Metathesis (transposition of letters)—switches order of letters, words, or phrases. (i.e. codex Bazo— transposes nine words)

¹⁶⁵ Wallace, 14:40.

7. Categories of mistakes
 - a. Is it an addition, omission, substitution, or transposition?
 - b. Is it a total rewrite? (Codex Beza). Compare to P75 where scribe writes one letter or two at a time resulting in very few transpositions.

B. Intentional errors

1. Seven categories
 - a. Spelling
 - b. Grammar
 1. Scribe may change because they think the grammar was changed by a previous scribe.
 2. Tendency to conform the grammar of the Greek to better Greek
 3. Byzantine scribes would correct the grammar of these manuscripts to conform to a higher register of Greek (attic Greek—Greek that existed in its golden era up until the time Alexander the Great conquered the world).
 - c. Harmonization
 1. Correction of apparent discrepancies
 2. Especially prevalent in the Gospels
 - a. All Gospel manuscripts of any substantial length have harmonizations ¹⁶⁶ (evidence that scribes had a high view of Scripture and were orthodox).
 - b. Common when quoting from the OT as most scribes did not know Hebrew
 3. Scribes understood the “near” context of the writing, but not the broad argument by the author.
 4. OT quotations would be conformed to the Septuagint—the form the scribes knew.
 5. Contextual parallels—something in the immediate context where the scribe wants to conform to what was said earlier in the text

◆ *INSIGHT*

Does the scribe's knowledge of Greek change things? Some would say those who didn't know Greek were less likely to change anything because they did not know how.

¹⁶⁶ Wallace, 11:10.

- d. Conflations
 1. Combination of two readings to make a new reading
 2. Example: Luke 24:53
 - “they were continual in the temple blessing God”
 - “they were continual in the temple praising God”?
 - “they were continual in the temple blessing and praising God”

- e. Explanatory glosses
 1. To clarify the text—not trying to change the meaning, but add enriching material for clarification
 2. Example: Marks 6-8
 - a. Scribes add the name of Jesus.
 3. Example: Ephesians 4:9
 - a. “He ascended...” or “he *first* also descended.”

- f. Doctrinal motivated changes.
 1. No cardinal doctrines have been affected.
 2. Example: Rom 8:1, “No condemnation if we are in Christ Jesus. (21:08). Later there was an addition *and you are not to walk according to the flesh...*”

- g. Addition of enriching material
 1. A phrase here and there
 2. Western text of Acts has 8% more material than the Alexandrian text of Acts (equivalent to three extra chapters) (94% agreement between them all).
 3. “Amen” added to the end of every NT book

*“Scribes who thought were more dangerous than those who wished to be faithful in copying what laid before them. Many of the alterations which may be classified as intentional were no doubt introduced in good faith by copyists who believed that they were correcting an error or in facility of language which had previously crept into the sacred text and needed to be rectified.”*¹⁶⁷

– Bruce Metzger

¹⁶⁷ Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th Edition, 2005, 131.

VII. FAMOUS TEXTUAL PROBLEMS

A. Foundational questions to answer

1. Are the textual problems authentic?
2. Do any textual problems affect any doctrines?

B. Examples of textual problems ¹⁶⁸

1. Mark 16:9-20
 - a. Long or intermediate endings to Mark
 - b. Eusebius and Jerome knew of essentially no Greek manuscripts with either of these endings.
 - c. Several manuscripts contain marginal comments noting that earlier Greek manuscripts lacked this ending.
 - d. Internal evidence suggests both endings are of secondary nature (vocabulary, style, and syntax are non-Markan).
 - e. All of these reasons suggest that scribes added these longer endings (either to enrich the material or to soften the abrupt ending).
 - f. Reasons for an abrupt ending
 1. Mark intentionally stopped at verse 8 (most likely explanation).
 2. Mark was never completed.
 3. The last leaf of the manuscript was lost before copying.
2. John 7:53 – 8:11
 - a. Woman caught in adultery (pericope adulterae)
 - b. Absent in the earliest and best manuscripts. (Codex Sinaiticus, Vaticanus (4th C) and P66 and P75 (3rd century))
 - c. Scholars unanimously believe it was not in the original John.
 - d. Viewed as a “floating” text in numerous manuscripts where it appears in different locations (after John 7:36, John 21:25, John 8:12, Luke 21:38, or Luke 24:53)
 - e. Almost all early manuscripts of the Alexandrian text-form omit the passage.

¹⁶⁸ See NET Bible footnote explanations.

- f. Most Western (D only) and Byzantine text-forms include the passage (contained in 5th century Codices (Bezae, Alexandrinus, Ephraemi Rescriptus, Washingtonianus).
 - g. Internal evidence (style, grammar, vocabulary) suggests non-Johannine origin (some believe Lukan); however, strong arguments in favor on internal basis.
 - h. Weight of evidence goes with the external evidence of manuscripts.
3. Romans 8:2
- a. “For the law of spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.” (ESV)
 - b. Most manuscripts have “me” instead of “you.” Other manuscripts have “us.” This is a meaningful and viable variant.
 - c. What did Paul really mean? “Us” is probably not authentic, but we struggle with this verse. Difference is *meth* or *seth* in Greek.
4. Philippians 1:14
- a. “and most of the brothers and sisters, having confidence in the Lord because of my imprisonment, now more than ever dare to speak *the word* fearlessly.” (NET). What word do they speak Paul? Give us clarity.
 - b. Our best manuscripts (Alexandrian) add “of God” after “word.”
 - c. Other manuscripts have “of the Lord” after “word” (these are western manuscripts—not our best, but are earlier that don’t have either one (meaning “of God” or “of the Lord”))
 - d. Omission is hard to explain (either intentional or unintentional).
5. 1 John 5:7-8. (Trinitarian Formula or Comma Johanneum)
- a. Found in the KJV; absent in most others
 - b. Not an argument against the Trinity (plenty of evidence), but rather, just not authentic
- ⁷ For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. ⁸ And

there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. (KJV)

⁷ For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. (ESV)

- c. Absent in the First and Second editions of Erasmus
- d. Luther used 2nd edition of Erasmus (1519) in his German translation. No German translations contain this verse; an Inter-English problem.
- e. Erasmus did not believe this verse was original; absent in Greek manuscripts he used.
- f. Erasmus added in 3rd edition (1522) due to pressure from the church and the sudden appearance of a Greek manuscript that contained the verse (Codex Montfortianus, 1519; Oxford). Critics claim the Trinity was invented because of this verse.
- g. Found today in only nine late Greek manuscripts

VIII. SUMMARY

- A. New Testament textual criticism is the study of the available manuscripts whose original no longer exists for the primary purpose of reproducing the exact wording of the original.
- B. The original text or autographa is the final text when it is dispatched from the author to its recipients— the last form of the text under control by the author
- C. The three common materials used for writing in the past were papyrus, parchment, and paper.
- D. There are 400K textual variances recorded in the New Testament manuscripts.
- E. Local text forms emerged which serve as the basis of our existing manuscripts. These include the Alexandrian, Western, and Byzantine forms.

- F. Scribes change the text – unintentionally, which is the most common type of change, and intentionally. Most intentional changes were due to piety or desire for clarification and a major criterion for determining the original wording.

IX. STUDY QUESTIONS

- A. Open the Gospel of Mark to chapter 1. Now copy this chapter by hand. Could you do it without any mistakes? How long did it take? How would it be to copy the entire book of Mark?

- B. Explain how textual criticism differs from the “telephone” game.

- C. Most scholars believe there are over 400,000 textual variants in the New Testament. Is this large number a good or bad reflection of these manuscripts? Explain your answer.

- D. List the four different text forms. What are their differences? Why is it important to understand each of these forms?

- E. How would you explain what happened to the ending of Mark?