

Transmission

After the original biblical text was penned by the authors (or by the secretary of the author, cf. Romans 16:22), it was copied for the purpose of circulating the writing to God's people. This process of copying is known as transmission.

The Languages of the Bible

The languages of the biblical text were the languages that were widely used by intended audience of the writing. But beyond this, the biblical languages were well suited for the communication that God delivered to His people and for His purposes.

1. Hebrew

The Old Testament is largely biographical in nature. Hebrew was the primary language of the Old Testament and was useful to portray these stories through its vividness and its ability to carry emotion.

As a more pictorial language, Hebrew allows the greater development of the biblical characters. The Old Testament poetry communicates the heart of the nation of Israel in a way Greek could not. Thus the Old Testament is as much received by the heart through feeling as it by the mind through feeling. Some of this is difficult to carry into our English text. While the information can be communicated in Greek, its depth is unique to Hebrew.

2. Greek

Greek was the language of the New Testament. This occurred because Common Greek (Koine) was the language of the people of the Roman Empire. If the Word of God was to be proclaimed to all the nations (Luke 24:47), it needed to be in a language that the people would understand.

Greek also served God's communication well since it is a more technical language than Hebrew. The Greek language was useful for communicating the more exact theological truth of the New Testament. What was generally expressed in the Old Testament Hebrew text, became precisely formulated in the New Testament Greek text.

Greek was well suited for evangelistic purposes. Not only was it wide-spread in its use but it enabled the truth of God to contend with the false teachings of the philosophies of its day and to protect God's truth throughout the church age.

3. Aramaic

Part of the Old Testament was written in Aramaic. Aramaic was the local language of Palestine and found in much of Syria during the time of Jesus.

Aramaic was the common language throughout the Near East, until the time of Alexander the Great. A large part of Daniel (2:4b-7:28) was written in this language. Two portions of Ezra (4:8-6:18; 7:12-26) were also written originally in Aramaic.

Valley Bible Church Theology Studies

Jesus and His disciples spoke Aramaic. Certain Aramaic words and phrases appear in the New Testament, such as *abba* (Mark 14:36); *Cephas*; *Maranatha* (1 Corinthians 16:22) and *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* (Matthew 27:46). Some have suggested that the Gospels were originally written in Aramaic, but there is no objective evidence to support this view. All ancient Gospel manuscripts were in Greek or a translation from Greek.

The problem of transmission

As the church spread, more and more copies of the Bible were made. We have over 5,400 handwritten copies of parts or the whole of the Greek New Testament. We will look only at the New Testament in order to describe the problems that arise in the transmission, or copying process.

In the fourth century, when Christianity received official sanction from the State, commercial book manufacturers hired trained scribes, Christian and non-Christian, to make mass copies of the New Testament. They were well paid and well equipped, in contrast to those earlier copiers who served as a labor of love for God's Word. To ensure accuracy, a corrector was hired to proof read each copy.

In spite of the effort of those that loved God's Word and cared for its exact duplication and in spite of the hiring of professionals, the copiers did not make exact copies. The copies do not all agree with each other. In fact, few (if any) copies are precisely identical.

Differences in New Testament Greek manuscripts are the result of errors in copying. While there are an estimated 10,000 places in the New Testament where there are textual variants, the significant variants are surprisingly few. These errors fall into two categories, unintentional and intentional errors.

1. Unintentional Errors

One reason errors in copying occurred accidentally was that the copier mistook the words he saw. This occurred simply missing words or omitting letters or by repeating words. An example of repetition is Matthew 27:17, which some manuscripts read as "Whom do you want me to release for you, (Jesus) Barabbas or Jesus?" Letters or words were also transposed, misspelled or abbreviated. Since the earliest copies had all the letters in capitals with no spaces between them, on occasion the words could be wrongly divided.

Another cause of copying error was in hearing the text wrongly. These occurred when many copiers were together listening to a text being read and then recording what they heard.

One common problem was caused by the familiarity that the copiers had with the Scripture. They would accidentally make the phrase they were copying conform to a phrase that they had remembered from another place in the Bible. This happened mostly with the Gospel accounts, where the narrative stories are similar but not identical. Another example of the error due to memory is Ephesians 5:9, which many manuscripts render "the fruit of the Spirit" rather than "the fruit of light."

Finally, there were errors of judgment. As with all handwritten material, the reader must decipher words that were written by another person. The scribe may have mistakenly assumed a word based on his judgment of the handwriting.

Valley Bible Church Theology Studies

2. Intentional Errors

Most copiers of the Bible believed strongly in the teachings of the church. There was undoubtedly a desire on the part of some to do more than reproduce the Bible. Some changes were done to more clearly reflect orthodox beliefs. Examples of this doctrinal bias can be found in 1 John 5:7-8 (King James Version) and in John 1:18 which was copied as "only begotten son" instead of "only begotten God" (KJV and NKJV).

The words of J. Harold Greenlee are appropriate in light of our desire for correct teaching, "no Christian doctrine, however, hangs on a debatable text; and the student of the New Testament must beware of wanting his text to be more orthodox or doctrinally stronger than is the inspired original."

Another problem occurred when copiers sought to harmonize passages with each other. An example of this seen in changes to the Lord's prayer in Luke 11:2-4 so that it agreed with Matthew 6:9-13. Also, Old Testament quotes were enlarged in some manuscripts to conform to the Septuagint (LXX).

At other times grammatical changes were made in order to attempt to improve the text. Liturgical changes were made to cause the Scripture to conform to what was spoken in the churches. Examples of this include "Joseph and Mary" in place of "His parents" in Luke 2:41 and "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen." (Matthew 6:13).

The final intentional change came when two or more variants were combined into one reading. The best manuscripts of Mark 9:49 read "for everyone will be salted with fire". One uncial manuscript reads "For every sacrifice shall be salted with salt" (cf. Leviticus 2:13). Many later manuscripts, and thus the King James Version, combine the two to read "For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt." This practice occurs so often that it has a name, "conflation." Scribes truly were very reluctant to omit any words that could be part of the original text.

This is why we don't have 99% of the original text but 101%!

The affect of the transmission problems

Brooke Foss Westcott and F. J. A. Hort considered only 1/60th of the 10,000 variants rise above "trivialities."

Ezra Abbot considered 19/20 of the readings to be "various" rather than "rival," and 19/20 of the remaining rival readings to be of so little importance that their adoption or rejection makes no real difference in the sense of the passage.

Philip Schaff considered only 400 variants to affect the sense of the passage, only 50 affect the sense significantly, and not one affected "an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of Scripture teaching."

A.T. Robertson suggested that the real concern of textual criticism is of a "thousandth part of the entire text."

Valley Bible Church Theology Studies

The clear consensus of Greek scholars is that very little teaching is affected by the variations that resulted from scribal error.

The families of Greek New Testament manuscripts

As errors crept into the copying process, people who copied what they saw exactly repeated these errors. Therefore, one error can affect many subsequent copies. When differences exist in the wording of the manuscripts we can group the manuscripts together based on which variant reading they use. As this is done, what becomes apparent is that many manuscripts will consistently agree with each other time and time again. This observation led to the grouping of manuscripts together based upon the commonality of their text.

These groupings of manuscripts are known as "text-types" or "families of manuscripts." There are at least three text families:

- The Byzantine text-type is found in the vast majority of later manuscripts, and most often found in the east around Byzantium, or present-day Istanbul.
- The Alexandrian text-type is found in the oldest manuscripts and in Northern Egypt around Alexandria.
- The Western text is the least region-specific but is the text behind the Latin translation and is more often found in Western Europe.

There is a debate that exists concerning how to consider the volume of the Byzantine text-type versus the age of the Alexandrian text-type. Also, there are questions to consider when weighing different manuscripts or manuscript families against each other. The area of study to determine the accuracy of each copy and group of copies is known as "textual criticism."

Evaluating the Greek texts

Since differences that exist in the manuscripts, schools of thought exist concerning how to evaluate the data. Some mistakenly assume that God preserved the original text in the Greek text that underlies the KJV. Some believe that the text that is most prevalent is the text that is most accurate. Most believe that the texts that are the oldest are the most likely to represent the original text.

1. Textus Receptus

Many who hold to the King James Version as the only true Bible argue their case from the Textus Receptus, under the theory that God must have preserved the original text completely intact. The Textus Receptus (TR) is the Greek text that formed the basis for the New Testament of the KJV. It developed from a Greek text that was first compiled by Erasmus (1516), then edited by Stephanus, and again edited by Theodore Beza. It was based primarily on half a dozen Greek manuscripts. Each made several updates of their work. The KJV translators made the largest use of Beza's editions of 1588-89 and 1598.

In 1633, two decades after the publication of the King James Version, Bonaventure and Matthew Elzevir produced their second edition of the Greek New Testament. This edition mostly followed Beza's work but used other sources as well. In their preface they claimed their Greek text was the

Valley Bible Church Theology Studies

"text which is now received by all." The Textus Receptus, Latin for the "received text," was born and is now considered by some to be identical to what was originally penned by the New Testament authors.

Of course, a declaration that this edition of the Greek New Testament is the received text does not make it so. Many of the same problems that come with viewing the KJV as the only inspired Bible are found with the idea of a received text, the Textus Receptus, as the identical replica of the original writings.

First, which text is the "Textus Receptus?" The term was first used by the Greek text produced by the Elzevirs, but their text was not identical to others. Stephanus' 1550 edition has also been called the Textus Receptus. When the term "Textus Receptus" is used today it refers to the Greek text that would reflect those textual choices made by the KJV translators rather than any one edition of a Greek text. Scrivener published a text in 1891 that is considered to be the Greek text that supports the KJV, thus the Textus Receptus.

The KJV translators did not use the Textus Receptus. They used a variety of Greek texts and sometimes favored one text and sometimes another. No single Greek text identical to the Textus Receptus existed at the time of the KJV translation. When the translation was finished they did not produce a Greek text that represented their textual decisions in cases where choices were necessary. Others have come behind them and have declared that their choices were providentially guided by God to completely represent the original writings of the biblical authors preserved by God.

In addition, The KJV translators used the same translation methods that are employed by most modern translations today, including the NIV and NASB. They worked by a committee, drew from all the Greek and Hebrew texts available to them rather than one text, and made decisions on which text had the best reading and how best to translate it into English so it would be best understood.

Even Erasmus, whose work set the foundation that others would build upon, compiled his text from several Greek manuscripts, not from a single manuscript. Erasmus could not find a manuscript that contained the entire Greek NT, so he used several for various parts of the New Testament. The oldest was from the tenth century, yet was considered to be the least reliable by Erasmus. Today over 5,400 handwritten manuscripts of all or parts of the Greek New Testament have been discovered, and hundreds that are older than what was available to Erasmus.

Erasmus, like the KJV translators, did a superior job considering the resources that were available to him. However, clearly he was limited. For example, Erasmus had only one manuscript for the book of Revelation, which lacked the final leaf containing the last six verses of the book. For those verses Erasmus relied on the Latin Vulgate translation. This explains why Revelation 22:19 in the KJV reads "the book of life," while every known Greek manuscript read "the tree of life." Yet it is claimed that the KJV has preserved the original Greek text in spite of this obvious error.

Another illustration of the same problem is in Acts 9:6 regarding Paul at the time of his conversion on the Damascus road, "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" This was also added by Erasmus from the Latin Vulgate. This addition became part of the Textus Receptus, although there is no known Greek manuscript that contains this verse. It is apparently transferred from the parallel account in Acts 22:10. The result is the Textus Receptus

Valley Bible Church Theology Studies

includes a Greek sentence absent from all of the 5,300+ known Greek manuscripts. How can this possibly replicate the original text?

Also, the men who worked to compile the Greek texts did not view themselves as producing an inerrant text for they each made several editions to improve their work. Stephanus placed variant readings that he felt to be credible in the margins of his text. Beza offered similar alternate readings. This is not done when there is a conviction regarding the accuracy of a work.

Furthermore, why should the Greek text behind the most widely used English Bible be the correct text? Why not the Greek text behind Martin Luther's German translation (the second edition of Erasmus' text from 1519)? One of the main arguments offered to support the Greek text underlying the KJV is its widespread and long use, which allegedly shows that God has preserved it. If this is compelling proof, then why not the Greek text behind Jerome's Vulgate (Latin)? Jerome's Latin translation has been used for 1,500 years and has been more widely spread.

Those who support the Textus Receptus do so because of their commitment to the KJV. Instead of working from the Greek text to construct a translation, they work backwards from the translation to construct a Greek text from it. Then, in spite of the fact that the resultant Textus Receptus is not identical to any published Greek text or handwritten manuscript available at the time of the publication of the KJV in 1611, it is considered to be God's providentially preserved text.

2. Majority Text

The majority text is the majority of existing Greek manuscripts. Those who hold to the majority text would agree with the readings of the Textus Receptus only in the instances where the TR readings are found in the majority. The Majority Text forms the basis for the New King James Version (1982).

Those who hold to a majority text are not speaking about a specific edition of a Greek text. Nor would they consider passages such as 1 John 5:7 in the KJV to be original. Yet the majority text advocates are often confused with the Textus Receptus proponents in that the TR is very similar to the Majority Text.

Zane Hodges in "A Defense of the Majority Text" notes, "More than any other printed edition of the New Testament, the Textus Receptus has been found to exhibit a form of text like that which exists in a large majority of all extant Greek manuscripts." While the Majority Text is very close to the Textus Receptus, how each arrived at their respective texts was different.

The driving force behind the argument for the Majority Text is that God would not have allowed His word to become corrupted. Therefore, God providentially guided the church in the selection of the proper Greek text. What then was most copied must be most accurate.

The arguments against this are as follows:

- It is evident that God has preserved all four text-types, not just the Byzantine.
- While it appears the Byzantine text-type has been the majority for the last 1,000 years, it might not have been the majority before then. The vast majority of Byzantine manuscripts

Valley Bible Church Theology Studies

are recent in comparison to other text-types. It is hard to be certain since a great number of manuscripts have been lost.

- There is good reason why the Byzantine text-type is more abundant. By the fourth century, the only area where Greek was still widely used was the Eastern Roman Empire. The Western Roman Empire used Latin and the church in that area used a Latin translation, based upon the western text-type. The areas where Greek was well known (the Byzantine Empire) would have naturally made more copies of the Greek text, as opposed to a translation of the Greek text.
- It is a mistake to assume the copiers chose the Byzantine text over others. They simply used what was available to them.
- There is no Byzantine manuscript that dates before the fourth century. Quotations from church fathers and translation into other languages from the Byzantine text-type are no earlier either. The Byzantine text-type is not found in the Old Syriac version, dating from the second century from the very region of later Byzantine supremacy.

3. The Critical Text

The nineteenth century brought the discovery of new manuscript evidence and a movement by many to reexamine the Received Text in light of these findings. This process led to a Greek New Testament published by two Cambridge professors in 1881, Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort. Their product was based strongly upon two very old manuscripts:

- a. Codex Sinaiticus, a fourth century uncial discovered at the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai in the middle of the nineteenth century. It is the only known complete copy of the Greek NT in uncial script, and belongs in general to the Alexandrian text-type.
- b. Codex Vaticanus, which dates from the middle of the fourth century. It is in the Vatican Library and was mentioned in the first catalogue made of the library (1475). It contains most of the OT, much of the Apocrypha, and the NT from Matthew through Hebrews 9:13. It is also Alexandrian.

The Critical Text is published today by the United Bible Societies (known as UBS 4th edition) and by Nestle-Aland (27th edition). It is based upon textual decisions made by a committee of five world-renowned scholars. This text favors the Alexandrian text-type, but not exclusively.

The procedure to determine the best reading of variant text includes:

a. External Evidence

- Date: The older reading is preferred.
- Geography: The reading shared by diverse "families" is preferred.
- Families: Texts are evaluated by families and not merely counted.

Valley Bible Church Theology Studies

b. Internal evidence

- The more difficult reading is preferred.
- The shorter reading is preferred.
- The divergent reading of parallel passages is preferred.
- The least refined grammatical construction is preferred.

Our modern translations are using the most reliable Greek manuscript evidence and therefore are more accurate than the KJV or NKJV.