Elenctic Theology: Bibliology

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*The Essentials of Textual Criticism*

***“The grass withers, the flower fades,   
but the word of our God stands forever.” (Isaiah 40:8).***

## Introduction

### The Primary Issue

#### Since none of the original manuscripts of the OT or NT currently exist, how can one rely on modern Hebrew and Greek Bibles?

#### If we cannot establish the reliability of the Text, the text is not authoritative.

### Definition of Lower or Textual Criticism

#### Textual Criticism is the scholarly study of the text of a written work, often specifically focusing its efforts to determine the original or most authoritative form of that text.

#### Scholars do not possess, for example, the original papyri Moses used to write the Torah or the original Epistle of Paul to the Romans. Only copies of these original writings exist today.

#### The science of textual criticism involves carefully examining extant copies (*apographa*) to determine the original text.

### THE MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE

#### *The Apostolic Fathers & the Ante-Nicene Fathers*

##### The Church Fathers produced a tremendous amount of written material which contains thousands of citations of the New Testament.

##### In *General Introduction to the Bible*, Geisler and Nix estimate that there are over 36,000 references or citations by the Fathers of the New Testament.

##### In *Introduction To New Testament Textual Criticism*, Harold Greenlee concluded that the quotations from the church fathers are so extensive that the New Testament “could be virtually reconstructed from them without the use of New Testament Manuscripts.” (p.54)

##### **THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS (c.70 - c.150)**

###### These were primarily Greek speaking fathers who quoted from every book of the NT with the possible exception of the books of Philemon and III John.

##### **THE ANTE-NICENE FATHERS (c.150 - c.325)**

###### The Ante-Nicene Fathers wrote in Greek, Syriac and Latin.

###### Geisler and Nix point out that prior to the council of Nicea in 325 A.D. there were approximately 32,000 quotes and allusions made from the New Testament alone.

#### *Extensive Number of Manuscripts*

##### High numbers of manuscripts simplify the job of the textual critic.

##### If a certain phrase is found in 5,994 reliable manuscripts and an alternate reading is found in only 6 manuscripts, it becomes much easier to determine the true text.

### The Manuscript Families

#### *Old Testament Manuscript Families*

##### **The Massoretic Texts**

###### The Massoretes were a group of Hebrew scholars who worked at preserving the Scriptures.

###### The Massoretes developed a system of vowel-points, but there was initial resistance to this among certain Jewish groups who felt that this was a sacrilegious adding to the Word of God.

##### **The Septuagint Texts**

###### The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, translated *circa* 250 B.C. in Alexandria, Egypt.

###### The problem with the Septuagint was that the Hebrew scholars made no attempt to be a word-for-word translation. It was more of a “Dynamic Equivalent” type of translation.

##### **The Samaritan Pentateuch**

###### The Samaritan Pentateuch differs from the Massoretic Text in about 6000 instances, most of which are merely differences in spelling.

###### About 1900 of these instances the Samaritan Pentateuch agrees with the Septuagint against the Massoretic Text.

##### **The Dead Sea Scrolls**

###### The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) had a profound impact upon Old Testament Textual Criticism.

###### The DSS provided evidence that the Massoretic Texts were highly accurate in their rendition of the Hebrew Bible.

###### Simultaneously, the DSS provided evidence that there were some Hebrew manuscripts that appeared to follow the Septuagint reading. This indicates that some of the differences between the Massoretic Text and the Septuagint are not merely translational, but may be the result of copying differences.

#### *New Testament Manuscript Families*

##### **The Proto-Alexandrian Texts**

###### This text family is also designated as the Neutral Text and the Hesychian Text Family.

###### This family of texts is represented by the some of the oldest NT Texts, including Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus, both dating back to the 4th century.

###### It is also represented by Papyrus 66 and Papyrus 75 (Bodmer), both of which date to the beginning of the third century.

##### **The Western Text**

###### These texts were used in the West and particularly in North Africa. This family of texts is represented by Codex Bezae (Codex D) as well as the Old Latin and Syriac translations, some of which are as early as the 2nd century.

###### This text was used by Marcion, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Cyprian. It was rejected by Wescott and Hort.

##### **The Byzantine Text**

###### This text was adopted in Constantinople and used as the common text in the Byzantine world. A great majority of late uncials and minuscules belong to this group

###### It is from this textual family that Erasmus produced his *Textus Receptus*.

###### Martin Luther translated his German Bible from this family.

###### The King James Version reflects this family of texts.

##### **The Alexandrian Text**

###### This family of texts originated in Alexandria, Egypt. It includes Codex Ephraemi (Codex C), the Coptic Versions, and certain of the Alexandrian early church fathers.

##### **The Caesarean Text**

###### This family is thought to be a compilation of the Western and Alexandrian texts.

###### It is associated with Origen and Eusebius as well as with Codex Koridethi, a manuscript containing the gospels which was discovered near the Caspian Sea and dates to the ninth century.

##### **Summary**

###### The textual evidence can be divided into five major groups.

###### The oldest of these is the Proto-Alexandrian. The great majority of manuscripts are in the Byzantine Family.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Textual Family** | **Description** | **Dates** |
| Proto-Alexandrian | Older Texts:  Sinaiticus; Vaticanus | 2nd-4th Century |
| Alexandrian | Ephraemi | 3rd-12th Century |
| Western | Bezae & Latin Fathers | 2nd-13th Century |
| Caesarean | Compilation of Alexandrian & Western? | 3rd-13th Century |
| Byzantine | Textus Receptus; KJV | 5th-10th Century |

## Basic Textual Criticism[[1]](#footnote-1)

### Principles of Textual Criticism

#### Manuscripts should be weighed and not counted.

#### The original language reading is to be preferred unless proven otherwise.

#### The more difficult reading is probably the original.

#### The earlier reading is more likely the original.

#### The shorter reading is more likely to be the original.

#### The reading with a broader geographical attestation is more likely the original.

#### The reading in a larger number of manuscript families is more likely the original.

### Types of Textual Variants

#### ***Accidental Variants***

##### *Miscopying*

###### Definition: The copyist substitutes a letter for a similar letter.

###### Example: Isaiah 9:9 [*wyr‘w* (“and they were friends”) v. *wyd‘w* (and they knew).

##### *Homophony*

###### Definition: The copyist substituted a homonym for the original.

###### Example: Matt. 19:24 [*kamelos* (“rope”) in place of *kamêlos* (“camel’)]

##### *Haplography*

###### Definition: The copyist omits a letter or word that looks similar to one in the context.

###### Example: John 1:13 [*egenêthêsan* v. *egennêthêsan* (“who were born”)]

##### *Dittography*

###### Definition: The copyist accidentally repeats a letter or a word.

###### Example: Jeremiah 51:3 [*yidrôk* (“he drew”) is doubled in the Masoretic Text.

#### ***Intentional Variants***

##### *Correction*

###### Example: The copyist “corrects” alleged spelling of grammatical errors.

###### Example: Changing the word *honour* to *honor*.

##### *Theological Change*

###### Example: Acts 20:28 – Change “church of God” to “church of the Lord.”

##### *Conflation*

###### Definition: The copyist combines two variants into a single text.

###### Example: Acts 20:28 – some manuscripts have “church of the Lord and God” as the reading.

##### *Harmonization*

###### Example: Copyist makes additions to the Lord’s Prayer in Luke 11:2-4 to conform it to the longer version in Matthew 6:9-13.

##### *Pious Expansion*

###### Example: Expanding “Jesus Christ” to “Jesus Christ our Lord” in Romans 2:16.

1. *See* Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament, 3rd ed.* (Oxford, 1992); Robert Bowman, *Outline Studies in Authority, Canon & Criticism*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)