Textual Criticism

What it is and Why it Matters
The Challenge

“Not only do we not have the originals, we don't have the first copies of the originals. We don't even have copies of the copies of the originals, or copies of the copies of the copies of the copies of the originals. What we have are copies made later—much later. In most instances, they are copies made many centuries later. And these copies all differ from one another, in many thousands of places. As we will see later in this book, these copies differ from one another in so many places that we don't even know how many differences there are. Possibly it is easiest to put it in comparative terms: there are more differences among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.”

41 And He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and began to pray,
42 saying, “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.”
43 Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him.
44 And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.
45 When He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow,
The Challenge

- “Some early manuscripts do not have verses 43 and 44.”
The Challenge

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- The Bible is the inerrant, unchanging word of God...
Definition

- “The science and art that seeks to determine the most reliable wording of a text.”

- Science: governed by rules
- Art: rules cannot be rigidly applied in every situation

- The study of any written composition of which the original is survived by copies that contain variants in the text
Biblical Textual Criticism is the study of the original wording of the Bible.

Attempts to discover as nearly as possible what is the original text of Scripture as written by the original authors.
Importance

• Precedes any other study of Scripture.

• “Interpretation, teaching and preaching cannot be done until textual criticism has done it’s work.”
Manuscripts

• We do not have the autographs.

• Manuscript: A handwritten document.
Manuscripts

- Old Testament Hebrew Sources
  - Silver Amulets
    Mid 7th Century
    Contain Num. 6:22-27
Manuscripts

- Old Testament Hebrew Sources
  - The Dead Sea Scrolls
    202 Manuscripts/fragments.

Every Old Testament book except Esther.

Dates between 3rd century B.C. and 1st century A.D.
Manuscripts

- Old Testament Hebrew Sources
  - Other Hebrew manuscripts

Nash Papyrus (169-137 B.C.)
Murabba’at Manuscripts (7th century B.C.-2nd century A.D.)
Masada Manuscripts (some time before A.D. 73)
Nahal Hever Manuscripts (about A.D. 130)
Ben Asher Manuscripts (8th century A.D. to 10th century A.D.)
  - Codex Leningradensis (A.D. 1008)
Manuscripts

- Old Testament Secondary Sources

Samaritan Pentateuch (11th Century A.D.)

Aramaic Pentateuch (A.D. 400)

Septuagint (2nd Century B.C. to 5th Century A.D.)
  - Chester Beatty Papyri (2nd to 4th Century A.D.)
  - Codex Vaticanus (4th Century A.D.)
  - Codex Sinaiticus (5th Century A.D.)
Manuscripts

- Codex Sinaiticus
Manuscripts

• New Testament Sources
  • Papyri

$p^{52}$ John Rylands (A.D. 125)
Manuscripts

• New Testament Sources
  • Uncials/Majuscules

※ 01 Codex Sinaiticus (4th Century A.D.)
A 02 Codex Alexandrinus (4th Century A.D.)
B 03 Codex Vaticanus (4th Century A.D.)
Manuscripts

- New Testament Sources
  - Minuscules
    (9\textsuperscript{th} to 15\textsuperscript{th} Century A.D.)
Manuscripts

• New Testament Sources
  • Lectionaries
    \( \text{\textit{\textit{\textit{l}} or lect.}} \)
    From 5\(^{\text{th}}\) century A.D.

• Ancient Versions
  From 5\(^{\text{th}}\) century A.D. onwards

• Church Fathers
Summary:
“As we have seen, the Greek witnesses to the text of the New Testament number around five thousand ranging between the second and the eighteenth centuries. In comparison, manuscripts of the Hebrew Old Testament number perhaps half as many, though the text of these manuscripts is more uniform than that exhibited by the manuscripts of the New Testament. Moreover, the earliest surviving copies of the New Testament are much closer to the date of the original writing than is the case with almost any other piece of ancient literature.”
Variants

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Variants

- Variants: Differences between manuscripts

- John 1:18
  “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (ESV).
“Not only do we not have the originals, we don't have the first copies of the originals. We don't even have copies of the copies of the originals, or copies of the copies of the copies of the originals. What we have are copies made later—much later. In most instances, they are copies made many centuries later. And these copies all differ from one another, in many thousands of places. As we will see later in this book, these copies differ from one another in so many places that we don't even know how many differences there are. Possibly it is easiest to put it in comparative terms: there are more differences among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.”
Variants

• “Most of these differences are completely immaterial and insignificant. A good portion of them simply show us that scribes in antiquity could spell no better than most people can today”

• “This is not a dispute between scholars who think the text has been altered and those who think it has not. Everyone knows that the text has been changed; the only question is which reading represents the alteration and which represents the earliest attainable form of the text. Here scholars sometimes disagree. In a remarkable number of instances—most of them, actually—scholars by and large agree.”
Variants

“To be sure, of all the hundreds of thousands of textual changes found among our manuscripts, most of them are completely insignificant, immaterial, of no real importance for anything other than showing that scribes could not spell or keep focused any better than the rest of us. . . It would be wrong, however, to say--as people sometimes do--that the changes in our text have no real bearing on what the texts mean or on the theological conclusions that one draws from them. We have seen, in fact, that just the opposite is the case. In some instances, the very meaning of the text is at stake, depending on how one resolves a textual problem:
Variants

- Was Jesus an angry man (Mark 1:41)? Was he completely distraught in the face of death (Luke 22:44)? Did he tell his disciples that they could drink poison without being harmed (Mark 16:9-20)? Did he let an adulteress off the hook with nothing but a mild warning (John 8:1-11)? Is the doctrine of the Trinity explicitly taught in the New Testament (1 John 5:7)? Is Jesus actually called the "unique God" there (John 1:18)? Does the New Testament indicate that even the Son of God himself does not know when the end will come (Mark 13:32)? The questions go on and on, and all of them are related to how one resolves difficulties in the manuscript tradition as it has come down to us.”
Textual Criticism

- Identify the variants


  - Nestle Alund, *Novum Testamentum Graece*

- Use the textual apparatus
Textual Criticism

5 18 {B} μονογενής θεός Π 66 Λ C B syr hmg Origen 2/4 Didymus Cyril 1/4 // ὁ μονογενής θεός Π 75 N 2 33 cop Clement 2/3 Clement from Theodotus 1/2 Origen 2/4 Eusebius 3/7 Basil 1/2 Gregory-Nyssa Epiphanius Serapion 1/2 Cyril 2/4 // ὁ μονογενής υἱός Α C 3 W supp Δ Θ Ψ 0141 f 1 f 13 28 157 180 205 565 579 597 700 892 1006 1010 1071 1241 1243 1292 1342 1424 1505 Byz [E F G H] Lect it a, aur, b, c, e, f, f 2, 1 vg syr c, h, pal arm eth geo 1 slav Irenaeus lat 1/3 Clement from Theodotus 1/2 Clement 1/3 Hippolytus Origen lat 1/2 Letter of Hymenaeus Alexander Eustathius Eusebius 4/7 Serapion 1/2 Athanasius Basil 1/2 Gregory-Nazianzus Chrysostom Theodore Cyril 1/4 Proclus Theodoret John-Damascus; Tertullian Hegemonius Victorinus-Rome Ambrosiaster Hilary 5/7 Ps-Priscillian Ambrose 10/11 Faustinus Gregory-Elvira Phoebadius Jerome Augustine Varimadum // μονογενής υἱός θεοῦ it iq Irenaeus lat 1/3; Ambrose 1/11 vid // ὁ μονογενής υἱός vg ms Ps-Vigilius 1/2
Textual Criticism

• Identify the variants

1. monogenh;V qeovV

2. oJ monogenh;V qeovV

3. oJ monogenh;V uiovV

4. monogenh;V uiovV qeou

5. oJ monogenhvV
Textual Criticism

- Translate the variants
  1. monogenh;V qeovV
     a (the) only-begotten God
  2. oJ monogenh;V qeovV
     the only-begotten God
  3. oJ monogenh;V uiovV
     the only-begotten son
  4. monogenh;V uiovV qeou
     a only-begotten son of God
  5. oJ monogenhvV
     the only-begotten
Textual Criticism

- External considerations
  Concerns the reliability of the manuscripts that support a reading.

Group the manuscript evidence according to text-types (Alexandrian, Western, Byzantine) and employ the following principles.
## Textual Criticism

- **External considerations**
  - **Variant 1**

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Alexandrian</th>
<th>Western</th>
<th>Byzantine</th>
<th>Other</th>
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## Textual Criticism

- **External Considerations**
- **Variant 3**

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<td>Versions</td>
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<td>Am, Eth, Geor</td>
<td>Vg, Syr, Slav</td>
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Textual Criticism

• External considerations
  • Comparing variant 1 and 3

• Principles
  1. Prefer the reading that is supported in widely separate geographical areas.
  2. Prefer the reading that is supported by the greatest number of text types.
Textual Criticism

- Internal Evidence
  - Scribal habits and practices
  - Style and vocabulary of the author
Textual Criticism

• Internal Evidence
  • Principles

1. Prefer the shorter reading
2. Prefer the more difficult reading
3. Prefer the reading that accords best with the author’s style and vocabulary
Textual Criticism

• Scribal Changes
  • Intentional
    Grammatical, spelling, and historical corrections.
    e.g.
    1. monogenh;V qeovV
       A (the) only-begotten God
       changed to a grammatically superior
    2. o monogenh;V qeovV
       The only-begotten God

Conflation, elimination of discrepancies, doctrinal changes
Textual Criticism

- Unintentional changes
  - Errors of sight
    
    \[ u = c \land \Theta = c \]
  - Errors of hearing
  - Errors of memory
Translate the variants

1. monogenh;V qeovV
   a (the) only-begotten God

2. oJ monogenh;V qeovV
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Textual Criticism

• Conclusion

Can you trust the biblical text in light of its manuscript evidence and the results of vigorous textual criticism thereof?
Take Away

- Pray for, and support text critical work. (www.greenscholarsinitiative, www.csntm.org)
- Read more than one translation of the Bible and be aware of text critical issues.
- Use verses with significant variants wisely in evangelism and teaching.
- Thank God for his word and the preservation thereof over millennia. Read, study, and proclaim it with the diligence that it deserves.
Resources

- Also, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible*