

## The Old Testament Text

### THE INSPIRATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Thousands of years ago, God chose certain men—such as Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel—to receive his words and write them down. What they wrote became books, or sections, of the Old Testament.

God gave his words to these men in many different ways. Certain writers of the Old Testament received messages directly from God. Moses was given the Ten Commandments inscribed on a stone when he was in God's presence on Mount Sinai. When David was composing his psalms to God, he received divine **inspiration** to foretell certain events that would occur a thousand years later in the life of Jesus Christ. God told his prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others—exactly what to say; therefore, when they gave a message, it was God's word, not their own. This is why many prophets often said, "Thus says the Lord." (This statement appears over two thousand times in the Old Testament.) God communicated his message to other prophets, such as Ezekiel and Daniel, through visions and dreams. They recorded exactly what they saw, whether they understood it or not. And other writers,

such as Samuel and Ezra, were directed by God to record events in the history of Israel.

Four hundred years after the last book of the Old Testament (Malachi) was written, God's Son, Jesus Christ, came to earth. In his talks, he affirmed the divine authorship of the Old Testament writings—even down to the very letter (see Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 16:17; John 10:35-36). Furthermore, Jesus often pointed to passages in the Old Testament as having predicted events in his life (see Luke 24:27, 44).

The New Testament writers also affirmed the divine inspiration of the Old Testament text. The apostle Paul was directed by God to write, "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16, NLT). Quite specifically, he was speaking of the Old Testament. A translation of Paul's statement closer to the original language (Greek) would be, "All Scripture is God-breathed" (NIV). This tells us that every word of the Bible was breathed out from God. The words of the Bible came from God and were written by men. The apostle Peter affirmed this when he said, "No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:20-21, NIV).

## THE LANGUAGES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

### HEBREW

Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. It was one of several Canaanite dialects, which included Phoenician, Ugaritic, and Moabite. Such dialects were already present in the land of Canaan before its conquest by the Israelites.

Hebrew belongs to the **Semitic** family of languages; these languages were used from the Mediterranean Sea to the

## The Hebrew Alphabet (*Square Script*)

Letter	Name	Gloss
א	aleph	' (glottal stop)
ב	beth	b
ג	gimel	g
ד	daleth	d
ה	heh	h
ו	vav	v/w
ז	zayin	dz
ח	heth	kh
ט	teht	t
י	yodh	y
כ	kaph	k
ל	lamedh	l
מ	mem	m
נ	nun	n
ס	samekh	s
ע	ayin	' (smooth stop)
פ	pe	p
צ	tsadhe	ts
ק	qoph	q (guttural k)
ר	resh	r
ש	shin	sh

mountains east of the Euphrates River valley, and from Armenia (Turkey) in the north to the southern extremity of the Arabian Peninsula. Semitic languages are classified as Southern (Arabic and Ethiopic), Eastern (Akkadian), and North-western (Aramaic, Syriac, and Canaanite).

The Hebrew alphabet consists of twenty-two consonants; signs for vowels were devised and added late in the language's history.

The origin of the alphabet is unknown. The oldest examples of a Canaanite alphabet were preserved in the Ugaritic

Cuneiform alphabet of the fourteenth century B.C. The old style of writing the letters is called the Phoenician or **paleo-Hebrew script**. The script used in modern Hebrew Bibles (Aramaic or **square script**) came into vogue after Israel's exile into Babylon (sixth century B.C.). The older style was still used sporadically in the early Christian era on coins and for writing God's name, Yahweh, as the **tetragrammaton** YHWH (יהוה). Hebrew has always been written right to left.

## ARAMAIC

A few sections of the Old Testament were written in Aramaic: Daniel 2:4b–7:28; and Ezra 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26. Aramaic phrases and expressions also appear in Genesis (31:47), Jeremiah (10:11), and the New Testament. Aramaic has perhaps the longest continuous living history of any language known. It was used during the Bible's patriarchal period and is still spoken by a few people today. Aramaic and its cognate, Syriac, evolved into many dialects in different places and periods. Characterized by simplicity, clarity, and precision, it adapted easily to the various needs of everyday life. It could serve equally well as a language for scholars, pupils, lawyers, or merchants. Some have described it as the Semitic equivalent of English.

The origin of Aramaic is unknown, but it seems to have been closely related to Amorite and possibly to other ancient Northwest Semitic dialects barely known to scholars. By the eighth century B.C., King Hezekiah's representatives requested the spokesmen of the Assyrian king Sennacherib to "speak to your servants in Aramaic, since we understand it" (2 Kings 18:26, NIV). By the Persian period, Aramaic had become the language of international trade in the Mediterranean world.

The Jews probably adopted Aramaic during their captivity for the sake of convenience. They certainly used Aramaic in commerce, while Hebrew became confined to scholarly and religious use. After the Babylonian exile, Aramaic was widely used in the land of Palestine. Nehemiah complained that children from mixed marriages were unable to speak Hebrew (Neh. 13:24). The Jews seem to have continued using Aramaic widely during the Persian, Greek, and Roman periods. Jesus spoke in Aramaic: several of the Gospels, though written in Greek, retain some of Jesus' actual wording in Aramaic.

Eventually, the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Aramaic paraphrases, called **Targums**, some of which have been found among the **Dead Sea Scrolls**.

## OLD TESTAMENT CANON

The **canon** designates those books in the Jewish and Christian Bible that are considered to be Scripture and therefore authoritative in matters of faith and doctrine. The term canon comes from a Greek word (*kainon*) that means “a rule,” or “measuring rod.” A canon is a list to which other books are compared and by which they are measured. Only those writings that met the standard were accepted as “Scripture,” the word of God, worthy of reading by God's people.

The criteria for selecting the books in the Old Testament canon are not known, but they clearly had to do with their worth in the religion of the Jewish nation. Jews call their thirty-nine books of Scripture the **Tanakh**—an acronym formed from the first letters of *Torah* (Law), *Naviim* (Prophets), and *Kethubim* (Writings). These are called the “Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” in Luke

24:44 (NIV) (the first book of the Writings in the Hebrew Bible is the Psalms).

Jewish religion existed for a millennium, from Moses to Malachi, without a **closed canon**, an exclusive list of authoritative books. Never in their history did the people of the Old Testament have the entire thirty-nine books of the Old Testament. The exact date for the closing of their canon is not known. Some scholars think it occurred at the Council of Jamnia in A.D. 90, but others point out that we did not have our first list of thirty-nine books until A.D. 170, in a list produced by Melito of Sardis. That list included no books written after the time of Malachi (ca. 430 B.C.).

The thirty-nine books of the modern Old Testament were originally divided into only twenty-four according to the uniform testimony of early Hebrew tradition. The **Talmud**, **rabbinic literature**, and probably the book of 4 Esdras testify to this arrangement, which included five books of the Law, eight of the Prophets, and eleven of the Writings. Modern Hebrew Bibles reflect this tripartite arrangement that was used in the first three printed editions (Soncino, 1488; Naples, 1491–1493; Brescia, 1492–1494).

Of the three sections of the Hebrew Bible, the most important to the Israelites has always been the Law. Another name for the Law is the **Pentateuch** (literally, “five in a case”—referring to five scrolls in a case). The Pentateuch contains the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Pentateuch, said to be written by Moses, provided the Israelites with basic teachings and principles for personal, social, and spiritual life.

The second section, “the Prophets,” comprises a very large segment of the Hebrew Bible. This includes four historical books (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings), the books of the

three major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel), and the books of the twelve minor prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). The prophetic books are a record of God's oracles to his people concerning past, present, and future events.

In the Hebrew Bible, the last section is "the Writings," which are of two kinds. The first kind is "Wisdom Writings"; this set includes Psalms, Proverbs, Job, the Song of Songs, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes. Most of these books are poetic in form and thought, and many of them, especially Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, purport "wisdom" as a central theme. The second kind of "Writings" includes historical books, specifically Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

### OLD TESTAMENT AUTHORSHIP

Traditionally, authorship of the Pentateuch has been ascribed to Moses. Several Old Testament writers considered him to be the author (2 Kings 14:6; Ezra 3:2; Dan. 9:11), as did Jesus (Luke 24:44) and Paul (1 Cor. 9:9). Traditionally, Joshua is thought to be the author of the book that bears his name, although the book itself does not say this. Judges is thought to have been written by Samuel on the basis that he was the last of the judges. He did not write 1 and 2 Samuel (originally one book) inasmuch as his death is recorded in 1 Samuel, making it impossible for him to record the events of 2 Samuel. The "Samuel" who wrote the books 1 and 2 Samuel is most likely Samuel the Prophet, whose writing is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 29:29—*The Record of Samuel the Seer*. We do not know who wrote Ruth, Esther, or 1 and

2 Kings. The rest of the historical writings (1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah) were probably written by Ezra, a knowledgeable and well-trained scribe.

As for the poetic books, it is thought that Job was written by Job, but we do not know this with certainty. The Psalms were composed by a number of individuals, including Korah, Asaph, and David, whose names are mentioned in the titles to their psalms. Most of the proverbs probably came from Solomon, and a few were authored by Agur and Lemuel. The Song of Songs is said to be Solomon's (1:1). Solomon is usually credited with Ecclesiastes, but scholars are uncertain about this.

The authorship of the prophets is more certain because the prophet's name is specifically identified in each of the books—usually in the first verse.

The grouping and ordering of the books in the Hebrew Bible is different from what Christians have in their Bibles because the Christian Bible adopted the order in the **Septuagint**, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. The Septuagint, the first translation of the Hebrew Bible, was made in the third century B.C. by Jewish scribes versed in Hebrew and Greek. This translation became very popular among Jews in the first two centuries before Christ because many Jews in those days did not understand Hebrew. Their ancestors had left Israel centuries before, and succeeding generations gradually lost the ability to read the Scriptures in Hebrew. Many of the Jews in Jesus' day used the Septuagint as their Bible. Quite naturally, the early Christians also used the Septuagint in their meetings and for personal reading; and many of the apostles quoted it when they wrote the Gospels and Epistles in Greek.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion on the Old Testament canon, see R. T. Beckwith, "The Canon of the Old Testament" in Comfort, ed., *Origin of the Bible*, 51-64.

The Christian Old Testament can be divided into five sections, as follows:

### The Old Testament Books and Their Authors

#### The Pentateuch (the Law)

Genesis	Moses
Exodus	Moses
Leviticus	Moses
Numbers	Moses
Deuteronomy	Moses

#### Historical Writings

Joshua	Joshua
Judges	Samuel (?)
Ruth	Anonymous
1 and 2 Samuel	Anonymous
1 and 2 Kings	Anonymous
1 and 2 Chronicles	Ezra
Ezra	Ezra
Nehemiah	Ezra
Esther	Anonymous

#### Wisdom Literature / Poetry

Job	Job (?)
Psalms	Korah, Asaph, David, and others
Proverbs	Solomon, Agur, and Lemuel
Ecclesiastes	Solomon (?)
Song of Songs	Solomon (?)

#### Major Prophets

Isaiah	Isaiah
Jeremiah	Jeremiah
Lamentations	Jeremiah
Ezekiel	Ezekiel
Daniel	Daniel

#### Minor Prophets

Hosea	Hosea
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Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos
Obadiah	Obadiah
Jonah	Jonah (?)
Micah	Micah
Nahum	Nahum
Habbakuk	Habbakuk
Zephaniah	Zephaniah
Haggai	Haggai
Zechariah	Zechariah
Malachi	Malachi

THE TEXT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE SCRIBES

In Old Testament times, professional scribes were employed as secretaries in Palestine, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Greco-Roman Empire. Court scribes would sometimes rise to positions of social prestige and considerable political influence, much as a secretary of state today. There were schools for the training of such scribes. To master the difficult art of writing on clay probably required as much time then as it takes students now to develop the ability to read and write. Would-be scribes could either enter a regular school or work as an apprentice under a private teacher, though most of them apparently followed the latter procedure. Scribes who were willing to teach could be found everywhere—even in the smaller towns. In fact, most scribes had at least one apprentice, who was treated like a son while learning the profession. Such students learned not only from private tutoring but also from the example of their teacher. This kind of education was sufficient to equip young scribes for the normal commercial branches of the craft. They were fully prepared to handle vari-

ous kinds of legal and business documents, and they could easily take dictation for private correspondence.

For additional study and training, however, it was necessary to attend the regular schools. For example, only the schools adjacent to the temples had the proper facilities to teach the sciences (including mathematics) and literature, which the more advanced scribes had to master. There, a budding scribe could even study to become a priest. In the ruins of ancient cities, archaeologists have discovered “textbooks” used by pupils. Excavators have also uncovered schoolrooms with benches on which the students sat. Some of the ancient Near Eastern texts that have been unearthed are schoolboy exercises or student copies of originals. These copies are usually not as beautiful or as legible as the originals, which were written by master scribes.

When the teacher wanted to give the students an assignment, he had available in the temple school virtually every type of text imaginable. For elementary work he could have the students practice writing a list of **cuneiform** signs, much like our learning the letters of the alphabet—except that there were some six hundred signs! Another simple assignment would have been to copy dictionaries containing lists of stones, cities, animals, and gods. After such preparatory work, the students could then move to literary texts and, for example, accurately reproduce a portion of one of the great epics, a hymn, or a prayer. Through arduous study and a lengthy program of instruction and practice, a gifted student could become qualified for scribal service in almost any field.

The Jewish scribe undertook a wide range of writing tasks. Often the scribe sat at the gate of the city or in an open area undertaking numerous kinds of writing tasks for illiterate citizens, including correspondence and the writing of receipts

and contracts. More officially, the scribe kept records and wrote annals. Religious scribes copied the Scriptures. Several of these men are mentioned in the Old Testament: Shebna (2 Kings 18:18, 37), Shaphan (2 Kings 22:8-12), Ezra (Ezra 7:6, 11; Neh. 8:1, 9-13; 12:26, 36), Baruch (Jer. 36:26, 32), and Jonathan (Jer. 37:15, 20).

From the Old Testament itself, we learn of two exemplary scribes, Baruch and Ezra. Baruch was the scribe for the prophet Jeremiah. During the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah (605/604 B.C.), Baruch wrote down Jeremiah's prophecy of the judgment that God was going to bring upon Judah unless the nation repented (Jer. 36:1-4). Baruch read the words of Jeremiah's prophecy to the people and to the officials (Jer. 36:9-19). The message finally reached Jehoiakim, who destroyed the scroll and demanded Baruch's and Jeremiah's arrest (Jer. 36:21-26). As a fugitive, Baruch again wrote down Jeremiah's prediction of Judah's destruction (Jer. 36:27-32).

Ezra was called a priest and a scribe (Ezra 7:11-12; Neh. 8:9; 12:26). In the commission of the Persian king Artaxerxes to Ezra, the king described him as "scribe" (Ezra 7:6-11). But Ezra was not a mere copyist; he was a diligent and profound student of God's law (Ezra 7:11-12). It was Ezra who began the tradition of the scribe being a religious teacher, a "scholar." Scribes such as Ezra were qualified to teach and preach the Scriptures, as well as interpret them.

## THE WRITING MATERIALS

Writers used a **stylus** for writing cuneiform ("wedge-shaped" characters) on clay tablets. For writing on **ostraca** (potsherds, or pottery fragments), **papyrus**, and **parchment**, writers split or cut a reed to function as a brush. In Egypt, rushes were used to form a brush. Ink was usually a black carbon (charcoal) mixed with

gum or oil for use on parchment or with a metallic substance for use on papyrus. It was kept in an inkhorn as a dried substance, in which the scribe would dip or rub his moistened pen.

The ancient Hebrews probably used leather and papyrus for writing materials. The Dead Sea Scrolls, for example, were sheets of leather sewed together with linen thread. Metal scrolls also existed (e.g., copper). Parchment, a refined leather made from sheep and goat skins, began to replace leather as early as the third century B.C. To prepare parchment, the hair was removed from the skins and the latter rubbed smooth.

The most common form of book for Old Testament documents was evidently a roll or scroll of papyrus, leather, or parchment. The average length of a scroll was about 30 feet, though the famous Harris Papyrus is 133 feet long. Scrolls were often stored in pottery jars (Jer. 32:14) and were frequently sealed.

## THE MANUSCRIPTS

Not one of the original writings (called the **autographs**) of any book in the Old Testament exists or is **extant** today. Fortunately, Jewish scribes throughout the ages have made copies of God's word. If a scroll wore out or if there was a need for copies in various synagogues, Jewish scribes would make additional copies. These scribes were usually the "readers" (or what is technically known as **lectors**) of Scripture in the meetings of the Jews. Thus, their task was to keep good copies of the Scriptures and to read them to the congregation on each Sabbath day.

### Significant Masoretic Manuscripts

Beginning in the sixth century and continuing into the tenth century A.D., European Jewish scribes called the **Masoretes** worked carefully to preserve the Old Testament text as they

transmitted it from copy to copy. The Hebrew word *masora* means “that which is transmitted,” “that which is handed down”; hence, the name, Masoretes.

The Masoretes came from Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee. Their scholarly school flourished between A.D. 500 and 1000. They standardized the traditional **consonantal text** by adding **vowel pointing** and marginal notes. And they produced countless copies of the Old Testament Scriptures. Several of the manuscripts they produced still exist.

The Masoretic Text (denoted as MT) as it exists today owes much to the ben Asher family. For five or six generations, from the second half of the eighth century to the middle of the tenth century A.D., this family played a leading role in the Masoretic work at Tiberias. A faithful record of their work can be found in the oldest existing Masoretic manuscripts. The oldest dated Masoretic manuscript is Codex Cairensis (A.D. 895), which is attributed to Moses ben Asher. The other major surviving manuscript attributed to the ben Asher family is the Aleppo Codex (see below).

There are quite a number of less important manuscript **codices** that reflect the Masoretic tradition: the Petersburg Codex of the prophets and the Erfurt Codices. There are also a number of manuscripts that no longer exist but were used by scholars in the Masoretic period. One of the most prominent is Codex Hillel, traditionally attributed to Rabbi Hillel ben Moses ben Hillel about A.D. 600. This **codex** was said to be very accurate and was used for the revision of other manuscripts. Readings of this codex are cited repeatedly by the early medieval Masoretes.

Codex Muga, Codex Jericho, and Codex Jerushalmi, also no longer extant, were cited by the Masoretes. These manuscripts were likely prominent examples of unpointed texts that had become part of a standardizing consensus in the first centuries

A.D. These laid the groundwork for the work of the Masoretes of Tiberias.<sup>1</sup>

*The Cairo Codex of the Prophets (Codex Cairensis) (ca. A.D. 895)* This manuscript contained both the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) and the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets). The rest of the Old Testament is missing from this manuscript. It was probably written by Moses ben Asher for the Akraite Jew, Yabes ben Shelomo, in 895. Thereafter, it was well preserved by the Karaite Synagogue of Cairo.

*The Aleppo Codex (tenth century A.D.)* According to the manuscript's concluding note, Aaron ben Moses ben Asher was responsible for writing the Masoretic notes and pointing the text. This manuscript contains the entire Old Testament and dates from the first half of the tenth century A.D. It was reportedly destroyed in anti-Jewish riots in 1947, but this proved to be only partly true. A majority of the manuscript survived and has been used as the basis for a new critical edition of the Hebrew Bible to be published by the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

*The Leningrad Codex (Codex Leningradensis) (A.D. 1008–1009)* This manuscript originally contained the entire Old Testament, but a quarter of it is now missing. Presently stored in the Leningrad Public Library, this manuscript is of special importance as a witness to the ben Asher text. According to a note on the manuscript, it was copied in A.D. 1008 from texts written by Aaron ben Moses ben Asher. Since the oldest complete Hebrew text of the Old Testament (the Aleppo Codex) was not available to scholars earlier in this century, Codex Leningradensis (as the

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the Masoretes and their work, see Würthwein, *Text of the Old Testament*, 12–37.

Leningrad Codex is called in Latin) was used as the textual base for the popular Hebrew texts of today: *Biblia Hebraica* (1929–1937), edited by R. Kittel, and its revision, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1967–1977), edited by A. Alt, O. Eissfeldt, and P. Kahle.

*The Leningrad Codex of the Prophets* This codex, made in A.D. 916, contains the Major Prophets.<sup>1</sup>

*The British Museum Codex Oriental 4445* This ninth- or tenth-century codex, housed in the British Museum, contains a large portion of the Pentateuch in 186 folios. It appears that 129 of these folios reflect an early form of the text made by ben Asher around A.D. 895. The other 55 folios were added later, around 1540.

*The Firkowitsch Codex* This is the oldest complete codex of the Old Testament, dated A.D. 1010.

### Other Significant Old Testament Manuscripts

*The Nash Papyrus* This papyrus was unearthed from Egypt at the beginning of the twentieth century. When it was compared with Aramaic papyri and ostraca (texts written in ink on pottery) from Egypt and with Herodian inscriptions, it was determined that the Nash Papyrus was written in the Maccabean period, about 100 B.C. This papyrus shows a striking similarity of script with the scrolls of the Qumran manuscripts of the Old Testament. It contains the Ten Commandments and the Jewish *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-5): “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (KJV). This manuscript was not a part of a parchment scroll but a separate leaf used in teaching. W. L. Nash acquired it in

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<sup>1</sup> Further descriptions of extant Masoretic manuscripts can be found in Würthwein, 34–37.

Egypt in 1902 and later donated it to the Cambridge University Library.

*Cairo Genizah Fragments* Near the end of the nineteenth century, many fragments from the sixth to the eighth centuries were found in an old synagogue in Cairo, Egypt, which had been Saint Michael's Church until A.D. 882. They were found there in a **genizah**, a storage room where worn or faulty manuscripts were hidden until they could be disposed of properly. This **genizah** had apparently been walled off and forgotten until its recent discovery. In this small room, as many as two hundred thousand fragments were preserved, including biblical texts in Hebrew and Aramaic. The fact that the biblical fragments date from the fifth century A.D. makes them invaluable for shedding light on the development of the Masoretic work prior to the standardization instituted by the great Masoretes of Tiberias.

### The Dead Sea Scrolls

In 1947 and in 1948, the year Israel regained its national independence, there was a phenomenal discovery. A Bedouin shepherd boy found scrolls in a cave west of the Dead Sea. These scrolls, known as the **Dead Sea Scrolls**, are dated between 100 B.C. and A.D. 100. They are nearly a thousand years earlier than any of the Masoretic manuscripts. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain significant portions of the Old Testament. Every book except Esther is represented. The largest portions come from the Pentateuch (especially Deuteronomy: twenty-five manuscripts), the major Prophets (especially Isaiah: eighteen manuscripts), and Psalms (twenty-seven manuscripts). The Dead Sea Scrolls also have portions of the Septuagint, the **Targums** (an Aramaic paraphrase of the Old Testament), some **apocryphal** fragments, and a commentary on Habakkuk.

The scribes who made these scrolls were members of a community of ascetic Jews who lived in Qumran from the third century B.C. to the first century A.D.

*Significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls* Even though the Dead Sea Scrolls are nearly a thousand years older than the Masoretic manuscripts, there are not as many significant differences between the two groups of manuscripts as one might expect. Normally, a thousand years of copying would have generated thousands of differences in wording. But this is not the case when one compares most of the Dead Sea Scrolls with the Masoretic manuscripts. This shows that Jewish scribes for over a millennium copied one form of the text with extreme fidelity.

The greatest importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls lies in the discovery of biblical manuscripts dating back to only about three hundred years after the close of the Old Testament canon. That makes them one thousand years earlier than the oldest manuscripts previously known to biblical scholars. The texts found at *Wadi Qumran* (as the area is called) were all completed before the Roman conquest of Palestine in A.D. 70, and many predate this event by quite some time. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Isaiah Scroll has received the most publicity, although the collection contains fragments of all the books in the Hebrew Bible with the exception of Esther.

*History of the Dead Sea Scrolls' Discovery* Because the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls is so important for Old Testament textual criticism, a short history and description of these recent discoveries is appropriate. Before the Qumran find, few manuscripts had been discovered in the Holy Land. The early **church father** Origen (third century A.D.) mentioned using Hebrew and Greek manuscripts that had been stored in jars in caves near Jericho. In the ninth century A.D., a patriarch of the

Eastern church, Timothy I, wrote a letter to Sergius, Metropolitan (Archbishop) of Elam, in which he, too, referred to a large number of Hebrew manuscripts found in a cave near Jericho. For more than one thousand years since then, however, no other significant manuscript discoveries were forthcoming from caves in that region near the Dead Sea.

The history of the Dead Sea manuscripts, both of their hiding and of their finding, reads like a mystery adventure story. It began with a telephone call on Wednesday afternoon, February 18, 1948, in the troubled city of Jerusalem. Butrus Sowmy, librarian and monk of Saint Mark's Monastery in the Armenian quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, was calling John C. Trever, acting director of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR). Sowmy had been preparing a catalog of the monastery's collection of rare books. Among them he found some scrolls in ancient Hebrew which, he said, had been in the monastery for about forty years. Could ASOR supply him with some information for the catalog?

The following day, Sowmy and his brother brought a suitcase containing five scrolls or parts of scrolls wrapped in an Arabic newspaper. Pulling back the end of one of the scrolls, Trever discovered that it was written in a clear, square Hebrew script. He copied several lines from that scroll, carefully examined three others, but was unable to unroll the fifth because it was too brittle. After the Syrians left, Trever told the story of the scrolls to William H. Brownlee, an ASOR fellow. Trever further noted in the lines he had copied from the first scroll the double occurrence of an unusual negative construction in Hebrew. In addition, the Hebrew script of the scrolls was more archaic than anything he had ever seen.

Trever then visited Saint Mark's Monastery. There he was introduced to the Syrian Archbishop, Athanasius Samuel, who

gave him permission to photograph the scrolls. Trever and Brownlee compared the style of handwriting on the scrolls with a photograph of the Nash Papyrus. The two ASOR scholars concluded that the script on the newly-found manuscripts belonged to the same period. When ASOR director, Millar Burrows, returned to Jerusalem from Baghdad a few days later, he was shown the scrolls, and the three men continued their investigation. Only then did the Syrians reveal that the scrolls had been purchased the year before, in 1947, and had not been in the monastery for forty years as was first reported.

The true history is that sometime during the winter of 1946/1947, three Bedouins were tending their sheep and goats near a spring in the vicinity of Wadi Qumran. One of the herdsmen, throwing a rock through a small opening in the cliff, heard the sound of the rock evidently shattering an earthenware jar inside. Another Bedouin later lowered himself into the cave and found ten tall jars lining the walls. Three manuscripts (one of them in four pieces) stored in two of the jars were removed from the cave and were thereafter offered to an antiquities dealer in Bethlehem.

Several months later, the Bedouins secured four more scrolls (one of them in two pieces) from the cave and sold them to another dealer in Bethlehem. During Holy Week in 1947, Saint Mark's Syrian Orthodox Monastery in Jerusalem was informed of the four scrolls, and Metropolitan Athanasius Samuel offered to buy them. The sale was not completed, however, until July 1947 when the four scrolls were bought by the Monastery. They included a complete Isaiah scroll, a commentary on Habakkuk, a scroll containing a Manual of Discipline of the religious community at Qumran, and the *Genesis Apocryphon* (an Aramaic paraphrase of Genesis).

In November and December of 1947, an Armenian antiqui-

ties dealer in Jerusalem informed E. L. Sukenik, then Professor of Archaeology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, of the first three scrolls found in the cave by the Bedouins. Sukenik then secured the three scrolls and two jars from the antiquities dealer in Bethlehem. They included an incomplete scroll of Isaiah, the Hymns of Thanksgiving (containing twelve columns of original psalms), and the War Scroll. (That scroll, also known as “The War of the Children of Darkness,” describes a war, actual or spiritual, of the tribes of Levi, Judah, and Benjamin against the Moabites and Edomites.)

On April 1, 1948, the first news release appeared in newspapers around the world, followed by another news release on April 26 by Sukenik about the manuscripts he had already acquired at the Hebrew University. In 1949, Athanasius Samuel brought the four scrolls from Saint Mark’s Monastery to the United States. They were exhibited in various places and finally were purchased on July 1, 1954, in New York for \$250,000 by Sukenik’s son on behalf of the nation of Israel and sent to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Today they are on display in the “Shrine of the Book” Museum in Jerusalem.

Because of the importance of the initial discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, both archaeologists and Bedouins continued their search for more manuscripts. Early in 1949, G. Lankester Harding, director of antiquities for the Kingdom of Jordan, and Roland G. de Vaux, of the Dominic Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem, excavated the cave (designated Cave 1 or 1Q—“Q” is for Qumran) where the initial discovery was made. Several hundred caves were explored the same year.

*Contents of the Dead Sea Scrolls* So far, eleven caves in the Wadi Qumran have yielded treasures. Almost 600 manuscripts have been recovered, about 200 of which are biblical material. The

fragments number between 50,000 and 60,000 pieces. About 85 percent of the fragments are leather; the other 15 percent are papyrus. The fact that most of the manuscripts are leather contributed to their preservation.

The second most important cave (next to Cave 1) is Cave 4 (designated 4Q), which has yielded about 40,000 fragments of 400 different manuscripts, 100 of which are biblical.

In addition to biblical materials, many sectarian scrolls peculiar to the religious community that lived at Qumran were also found. They furnish historical background on the nature of pre-Christian Judaism and help fill in the gaps of intertestamental history. One of the scrolls, the Damascus Document, had originally turned up in Cairo, but manuscripts of it have now been found at Qumran. The Manual of Discipline was one of the seven scrolls from Cave 1. Fragmentary manuscripts of it have been found in other caves. The document gives the group's entrance requirements, plus regulations governing life in the Qumran community. The Thanksgiving Hymns include some thirty hymns, probably composed by one individual.

There were also many commentaries on different books of the Old Testament. The Habakkuk commentary was a copy of the first two chapters of Habakkuk in Hebrew accompanied by a verse-by-verse commentary. The commentary gives many details about an apocalyptic figure called the "Teacher of Righteousness" who is persecuted by a wicked priest.

A unique discovery was made in Cave 3 (3Q) in 1952. It was a scroll of copper, measuring about eight feet long and a foot wide. Because it was brittle, it was not opened until 1966, and then only by cutting it into strips. It contained an inventory of some sixty locations where treasures of gold, silver, and incense were hidden. Archaeologists have not been able to find any of it. That list of treasures, perhaps from the Jerusalem

temple, may have been stored in the cave by Zealots (a revolutionary Jewish political party) during their struggle with the Romans in A.D. 66–70.

During the Six-Day War in June 1967, Sukenik's son, Yigael Yadin of the Hebrew University, acquired a Qumran document called the Temple Scroll. That scroll measures twenty-eight feet and is the longest scroll found so far in the Qumran area. A major portion of it is devoted to statutes of the kings and matters of defense. It also describes sacrificial feasts and rules of cleanliness. Almost half of the scroll gives detailed instructions for building a future temple, supposedly revealed by God to the scroll's author.

*Dating the Dead Sea Scrolls* Early conclusions about the antiquity of the first Dead Sea Scrolls were not accepted by everyone. Some scholars were convinced that the scrolls were of medieval origin. A series of questions relate to the dating problem. When were the texts at Qumran composed? When were they deposited in the caves? Many scholars believe the manuscripts were placed in the caves by members of the Qumran community when Roman legions were besieging Jewish strongholds. That was shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Many other scholars think the scrolls were taken to the Dead Sea caves by Jewish scribes fleeing Roman persecution in the period prior to the destruction of Jerusalem or around the time of the Bar-Kochba revolt (A.D. 132).

Careful study of the contents of a document sometimes reveals its authorship and the date when it was written. An example of using such **internal evidence** for dating a non-biblical work is found in the Habakkuk commentary. It gives hints about the people and events in the days of the commentary's author, not in the days of the prophet Habakkuk. The

commentator described the enemies of God's people as the Kittim. Originally that word denoted Cyprus, but later came to refer more generally to the Greek islands and the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean. In Daniel 11:30 the term is used prophetically, and most scholars seem to identify the Kittim with the Romans. Thus, the Habakkuk commentary was probably written about the time of the Roman capture of Palestine under Pompey in 63 B.C.

Another significant way to date a manuscript is by **paleography**, the study of ancient handwriting. That was the method initially employed by Trever when he compared the script of the Isaiah Scroll with the Nash Papyrus, thus dating it to the pre-Christian era. His conclusions were confirmed by William F. Albright, then the foremost American archaeologist. The evidence of paleography clearly dates the majority of the Qumran scrolls in the period between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200.

Archaeology provides another kind of **external evidence**. The pottery discovered at Qumran dates from the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods (200 B.C.–A.D. 100). Earthenware articles and ornaments point to the same period. Several hundred coins were found in jars dating from the Greco-Roman period. A crack in one of the buildings at Qumran is attributed to an earthquake that, according to Josephus (a Jewish historian who wrote during the first century A.D.), occurred in 31 B.C. The excavations at Khirbet Qumran (the caves of Qumran) indicate that the general period of their occupation was from about 135 B.C. to A.D. 68, the year the Zealot revolt was crushed by Rome.

Finally, radiocarbon analysis has contributed to dating the finds. Radiocarbon analysis is a method of dating material from the amount of radioactive carbon remaining in it. The process is also known as carbon 14 dating. Applied to the linen

cloth in which the scrolls were wrapped, the analysis gave a date of A.D. 33 plus or minus two hundred years. A later test bracketed the date between 250 B.C. and A.D. 50. Although there may be questions concerning the relation of the linen wrappings to the date of the scrolls themselves, the carbon 14 test agrees with the conclusions of both paleography and archaeology. On the basis of all of these dating methods, the general period in which the Dead Sea Scrolls can be safely dated is between about 150 B.C. and A.D. 100.

Before the Qumran discoveries, the oldest existing Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament were the Masoretic manuscripts noted above, along with the Nash Papyrus and Cairo Genizah fragments. The oldest complete manuscript was the Firkowitsch Codex from A.D. 1010. The greatest importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls, therefore, lies in the discovery of biblical manuscripts dating back to only about three hundred years after the close of the Old Testament canon. That makes them a thousand years earlier than the oldest manuscripts previously known to biblical scholars. The most frequently represented Old Testament books are Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Isaiah. The oldest text is a fragment of Exodus dating from about 250 B.C. The Isaiah Scroll from Cave 1 dates from about 100 B.C.

Whatever differences may have existed between the community at Qumran and the mainstream of Jews from which it separated, it is certain that both used common biblical texts. Thus, the manuscripts could have originated from either Jerusalem, the Qumran community, or both.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The section on the Dead Sea Scrolls and their dating was excerpted and adapted from M. Norton, "The Text of the Old Testament," in Comfort, *Origin of the Bible*, 156-161, 171-173. Used by permission.

## Significant Dead Sea Scroll Manuscripts

Among the hundreds of biblical manuscripts discovered in the eleven caves around the Dead Sea, there are some very significant ones—especially for textual studies.

Over eight hundred manuscripts have been discovered in the caves at Qumran. The vast majority of the manuscripts are poorly preserved. Often, only a few columns of text survive. Many times only a few barely legible scraps can be identified; but the quantity of material offers a treasure of information from a period and region that previously yielded little manuscript evidence. There are about two hundred fifty Qumran biblical manuscripts, mostly in Hebrew, but some in Aramaic and Greek.

Some of the more significant manuscripts are briefly described below. When a manuscript is described as being **proto-Masoretic**, this means that its text largely agrees with that found later in Masoretic manuscripts. Other manuscripts will be described as having affinities with the Samaritan Pentateuch or the Septuagint (designated LXX).

In the names of the Qumran manuscripts, the first number signifies the cave, Q indicates Qumran, the abbreviation for the biblical book follows, often followed by a superscript letter for successive manuscripts containing the same book.

*1QIsa<sup>a</sup>* This is the first Dead Sea Scroll to receive widespread attention. It is dated to ca. 100 B.C. The text, which includes most of Isaiah, is proto-Masoretic with some significant variants. The RSV committee, which was nearing completion of their work at the time, adopted thirteen readings from 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>. Many translations published since the RSV have also adopted readings from this manuscript.

*1QpaleoLev(+Num)* (= 1Q3) This manuscript contains portions of Leviticus and Numbers (Lev. 11; 19–23; Num. 1). Some scholars categorize it as three different manuscripts, which are designated as 1QpaleoLev<sup>a</sup>, 1QpaleoLev<sup>b</sup>, and 1QpaleoNum. The **paleo-Hebrew script** (archaic Hebrew handwriting) is difficult to date, since the scribe was probably imitating an older style of writing. Richard S. Hanson dates it somewhere between 125 and 75 B.C.<sup>1</sup>

*1QIsa<sup>b</sup>* The text, which includes most of Isaiah, is proto-Masoretic. It is dated from 25 B.C. to A.D. 50.

*2QJer* This manuscript is dated from 25 B.C. to A.D. 50 and has portions of Jeremiah chapters 42–49. It has some readings that follow the Septuagint (LXX), while it follows the order of chapters found in proto-Masoretic texts. For the book of Jeremiah, the Septuagint and Masoretic Text are quite different: the Septuagint is one-eighth shorter and has a different arrangement of chapters.

*4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup>* This manuscript, containing most of Exodus, is dated quite early, 200–175 B.C., primarily because it displays paleo-Hebrew script. As such, it has provided scholars with some interesting insights into the early history of the **textual transmission** of Exodus and the Pentateuch. The manuscript shows many similarities with the Samaritan Pentateuch (described below).

*4QNum<sup>b</sup>* This manuscript, dated 30 B.C.–A.D. 20, contains most of Numbers. The book of Numbers existed in three distinguishable textual traditions: the Masoretic Text, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Septuagint. This manuscript, 4QNum<sup>b</sup>, shows similarities with the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint, while having its own unique readings.

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<sup>1</sup> Hanson, *Paleo-Hebrew Scripts*, 41.

**4QDeut<sup>a</sup>** Though it contains only a few verses of Deuteronomy (23:26(?); 24:1-8), this manuscript is one of the earliest copies of Deuteronomy found at Qumran. Harold Scanlin said, “The text appears to be quite close to the presumed original form of the text of Deuteronomy.”<sup>1</sup>

**4QSam<sup>a</sup>** This manuscript, containing about a tenth of 1 and 2 Samuel, is dated ca. 50–25 B.C. This manuscript, showing some similarities with the Septuagint, is believed to have several readings that are superior to the Masoretic Text. Scanlin said, “The MT of Samuel is generally considered to be quite problematic, with numerous omissions. This Qumran manuscript demonstrates the existence of a Hebrew text that is considered to be superior to the MT in many passages.”<sup>2</sup>

**4QJer<sup>a</sup>** This manuscript, containing portions of Jeremiah 7–22, dates ca. 200 B.C. It generally concurs with the Masoretic Text.

**4QJer<sup>b</sup>** This manuscript, dated ca. 150–125 B.C., follows the arrangement of the Septuagint, as well as its brevity. The significance of this is that two different texts of Jeremiah were used in the pre-Christian era—one that was proto-Masoretic (as with 4QJer<sup>a</sup>) and one that was like the Septuagint.

**4QDan<sup>a</sup>** This manuscript, containing portions of many chapters in Daniel, dates to the late Hasmonean or early Herodian period. In Daniel 1:20 there appears to be a gap in the extant fragments that would be about the size necessary to include the longer text found in the Greek manuscript 967 (Chester Beatty Papyrus IX).

**5QPs** This manuscript from the first century A.D. contains Psalm 119:99-101, 104, 113-120, 138-142. The first letters in

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<sup>1</sup> Scanlin, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 60.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

the right margin of two columns show that the manuscript of this Psalm preserved the original acrostic arrangement, which means that each new stanza began with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

*11QP5<sup>a</sup>* This manuscript, dated ca. A.D. 25–50, preserves many psalms. However, these are not in the traditional sequence found in the Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, the manuscript has an additional psalm, known as Psalm 151. Prior to the Qumran discovery, this psalm was known only through ancient translations (LXX, Latin, and Syriac). The Hebrew text indicates two separate poems, which the translations combined. The first poem (designated by Sanders as 151a) is a commentary on 1 Samuel 16:1-13. It relates how David was set over his father's flocks but was made king over God's people after God had looked upon his heart. The second poem (151b) is a commentary on 1 Samuel 17 and deals with David and Goliath. It is thought by some to show the bravery of David in contrast to his humility as is shown in 151a.<sup>1</sup>

### Scroll Discoveries at Wadi Murabba'at

In 1951, Bedouins discovered more manuscripts in caves in the *Wadi Murabba'at*, which extends southeast from Bethlehem toward the Dead Sea, about eleven miles south of Qumran. Four caves were excavated there in 1952 under G. Lankester Harding and Roland G. de Vaux. They yielded biblical documents and important materials, such as letters and coins, from the time of the Second Jewish Revolt under Bar Kochba in A.D. 132–135. Among the biblical manuscripts was a scroll containing a Hebrew text of the Minor Prophets, dating from the second century A.D. This manuscript corresponds almost perfectly with the

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<sup>1</sup> Further descriptions of the Dead Sea Scrolls can be found in Scanlin's *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 43-83.

Masoretic Text, hinting that by the second century, a standard consonantal text was already taking shape. Also found in Wadi Murabba'at were fragments of the Pentateuch and of Isaiah.

## TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The task of the textual critic can be divided into a number of general stages: (1) the collection and collation of existing manuscripts, translations, and quotations; (2) the development of theory and methodology that will enable the critic to use the gathered information to reconstruct the most accurate text of the biblical materials; (3) the reconstruction of the history of the transmission of the text in order to identify the various influences affecting the text; and (4) the evaluation of specific **variant readings** in light of textual evidence, theology, and history.

## MANUSCRIPT TRADITIONS

All the primary sources of the Hebrew Scriptures are handwritten manuscripts, usually written on animal skins, **papyrus**, or sometimes metal. The fact that the manuscripts are handwritten creates the need for textual criticism. Human error and editorial tampering are the source of the many variant readings in Old and New Testament manuscripts. The fact that the ancient manuscripts are written on skins or papyrus is another source of difficulty. Due to natural decay, most of the surviving ancient manuscripts are fragmentary and difficult to read.

There are many secondary witnesses to the ancient Old Testament text, including translations into other languages, quotations used by both friends and enemies of biblical religion, and evidence from early printed texts. Most of the sec-

ondary witnesses have suffered in ways similar to the primary ones. They, too, contain numerous variants due to both intentional and accidental scribal errors and are fragmentary as a result of natural decay. Since variant readings do exist in the surviving ancient manuscripts, these must be collected and compared. The task of comparing and listing the variant readings is known as **collation**.

Both Old and New Testament textual critics undertake a similar task and face similar obstacles. They both seek to recover a hypothetical “original” text with limited resources that are at varying degrees of deterioration. But the Old Testament textual critic faces a more complex textual history than does his New Testament counterpart. The New Testament was written primarily in the first century A.D., and complete New Testament manuscripts exist that were written only a hundred years later. The Old Testament, however, is made up of literature written over a thousand-year period, the oldest parts dating to the twelfth century B.C., or possibly even earlier. To make matters even more difficult, until recently, the earliest known Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament were medieval. This left scholars with little witness to the Old Testament’s textual development from ancient times to the Middle Ages, a period of over two thousand years.

The Masoretic manuscripts, as old as they are, were written between one and two thousand years after the original **autographs**. Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 1940s and 1950s, secondary Aramaic, Greek, and Latin translations served as the earliest significant witnesses to the early Hebrew Scriptures. Since these are translations, and subject to sectarian alterations, editorial tampering, and **interpolations**, their value to the textual critic, though significant, is limited.

The discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other early

manuscripts have provided primary witnesses to the Hebrew Old Testament in earlier times. The textual evidence of Dead Sea Scrolls has helped scholars understand that there were, at least, three lines of textual transmission prior to the first century B.C. They know this because some of the manuscripts discovered in Qumran, especially two manuscripts of 1 Samuel, show greater affinity with the Septuagint than with the Masoretic Text; and other manuscripts from Qumran, especially one manuscript of Exodus, resemble the **Samaritan Pentateuch**. Thus, there must have been some different forms of the text other than the one appearing in most of the Dead Sea Scrolls and then later in the Masoretic manuscripts.

One line of transmission of the Old Testament text has been manifest in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament known as the **Septuagint**. (The majority of Old Testament quotations in the New Testament are from the Septuagint). That translation was made about 250 B.C. and ranks second in importance to the Masoretic Text for reconstructing an authentic Old Testament text. In the past, some scholars attributed differences between the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text to imprecision, subjectivity, or laxity on the part of the Septuagint's translators. Now it seems that many of those differences resulted from the fact that the translators were following a slightly different Hebrew text. Some Hebrew texts from Qumran correspond to the Septuagint and have proved helpful in solving textual problems. Septuagint manuscripts have also been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Another line of Old Testament transmission has been manifest in the Samaritan preservation of the Hebrew text of the Pentateuch dating from the second century B.C. The copies of the Samaritan Pentateuch were written in the same script used in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran. Some

of the Hebrew biblical texts among the Qumran documents have closer affinities with the text of the Samaritan version than with the text handed down by the Masoretic scholars. All of the manuscripts have shed new light on grammatical forms, spelling, and punctuation.

Another line of textual transmission led up to the kind of text that is found in most of the Dead Sea Scrolls and then in the Masoretic Text. The Masoretes standardized the traditional consonantal text by adding vowels and marginal notes (the ancient Hebrew alphabet had no vowels). Some scholars dated the origin of the consonantal Masoretic Text to the editorial activities of Rabbi Akiba and his colleagues in the second century A.D. The discoveries at Qumran, however, proved them wrong, by showing that the Masoretic Text went back several more centuries into antiquity and had been accurately copied and transmitted. Although there are some differences in spelling and grammar between the Dead Sea Scrolls and Masoretic Text, the differences have not warranted any major changes in the substance of the Old Testament. Yet they have helped biblical scholars gain a clearer understanding of textual differences.

Various scholars attempted to account for such diversity by **local text theories**. Frank M. Cross, the first editor assigned to most of the biblical manuscripts in Qumran's Cave 4, developed a **three-recension theory** with **text types** being created in three different geographic regions: (1) Egypt (the Septuagint), (2) Palestine (the Samaritan Pentateuch), and (3) Babylon (the proto-Masoretic text). Cross's theory was quite influential in shaping the discussion about textual witnesses.<sup>1</sup>

Shemaryahu Talmon adjusted Cross's text type theory by arguing that the groupings should be sociological rather than

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<sup>1</sup> Cross, "New Directions."

geographical. His contention was that three text groups survived because the groups that preserved them survived: (1) Jews (the proto-Masoretic text), (2) Samaritans (the Samaritan Pentateuch), and (3) Christians (who adopted the Septuagint as their edition of the Old Testament).<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, scholars have been less prone to affirm three clear-cut types of texts. Instead, they point out that several of the Dead Sea Scrolls show a mixture of text types. For example, the Old Testament textual critic Emanuel Tov, expressing a typical view among contemporary Old Testament textual critics, has observed the mixed nature of some important Qumran biblical manuscripts:

We suggest that the Samuel scrolls from Cave 4, 11QpaleoLev, as well as many other texts from Qumran, reflect such early texts [not three recensions] of the OT, insofar as they do not agree exclusively with one tradition, but agree now with this and then with that text (MT, LXX, and Samaritan Pentateuch), and in addition contain a significant number of exclusive readings. In our view, the traditional characterization of the LXX as a text type is imprecise and misleading. In the case of the Samuel scrolls, the recognition of a relatively large number of “LXX readings” made it easy for scholars to label some of these scrolls as “Septuagintal,” and this characterization was readily accepted in scholarship which had become used to viewing the textual witnesses of the OT as belonging to three main streams. However, . . . this view should now be considered outdated.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Talmon, “Old Testament Text.”

<sup>2</sup> Tov, *Texts of Samuel*, 64–65.

Many contemporary Old Testament textual critics think that the varying degrees of textual fidelity probably show that the autographs were subject to editorial adjustments soon after they were originally composed. Indeed, the earliest scribes seemed to have functioned as editors or **redactors**, who thought it their function to improve the original work by adding minor details and other interpolations. According to Tov, this was a kind of intermediary stage between the original composition and the copying of the book. One could call it a “compositional-transmissional” or “editorial-scribal” stage.

Thus, the period of textual unity reflected in the assumed pristine texts of the biblical books was brief at best. Tov believed that most of the textual changes in the Hebrew Bible were created by editors during the **compositional-transmissional stage**, and not by later scribes in the **textual-transmission stage**. In this regard, Tov wrote:

The amount of deliberate changes inserted by scribes was probably smaller than believed . . . [because] many of the pervasive changes in the biblical text, pertaining to whole sentences, sections and books should not, according to our description, be ascribed to copyists, but to earlier generations of editors who allowed themselves such massive changes in the formative stage of the biblical literature.<sup>1</sup>

Another prominent view among contemporary scholars is that some of the extreme textual differences in certain books of the Old Testament can be traced—not to the **recensional** work of scribes—but to early editions of the same work.

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<sup>1</sup> Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 265-266.

Scanlin, for example, thinks there is clear evidence of at least two ancient editions for 1 and 2 Samuel.<sup>1</sup> Sharing the same view, Eugene Ulrich makes the following comments:

For 1 Samuel 1–2, we find in the earlier edition (which, I would suggest, is the MT) a straightforward account with one portrait of Hannah. In the secondary edition (the LXX), we find the intentional and consistent reshaping of that account, arguably for theological motives and possibly for misogynous motives, to give a changed portrait of Hannah. When we turn to 1 Samuel 17–18, in the earlier edition (the LXX this time), we find a single version of the story; whereas in the secondary edition (here the MT), we find a composite version.<sup>2</sup>

The current view about the transmission of the Old Testament text is that, after several centuries of textual plurality in the books of the Hebrew Bible, a period of uniformity and stability can be discerned, beginning as early as the third century B.C. and becoming firmly fixed by the end of the first century A.D. This text has been called the proto-Masoretic text because it anticipates the Masoretic Text of Medieval times. During this period (200 B.C.–A.D. 100), the Hebrew text did not change much because it was copied with painstaking accuracy. It is known that scribes would count the number of letters on the new copy and compare it with the **exemplar** in an attempt to find even one letter difference between the two. If the copy was in error, it would be corrected or destroyed. This practice continued generation after generation and century after century. Beginning in the sixth century and into the tenth century

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<sup>1</sup> Scanlin, *op. cit.*, 211–213.

<sup>2</sup> Ulrich, "Double Literary Editions," 103–105.

A.D., the Masoretes worked carefully to preserve the Old Testament text as they transmitted it from copy to copy. Thus, it is evident that the period of textual stability greatly curbed scribal creativity—meaning scribes had to keep themselves from interacting with the text.

Standardization as practiced by the Masoretes meant identifying one text as normative and copying carefully from that text. It also meant correcting existing texts by the normative text. The next stage in the transmission of the Old Testament text was standardization of punctuation and vowel patterns. That process, which began fairly early in the Christian era, extended over a period of one thousand years. A long series of Masoretes provided annotations known as *masora*, which, in Hebrew, means “tradition.” Two different motivations are evident in their work. One was their concern for accurate reproduction of the consonantal text. For that purpose a collection of annotations on irregular forms, abnormal patterns, the number of times a form or word was used, and other matters was gathered and inserted in the margins or at the end of the text.

A second concern of the Masoretes was to record and standardize the **vocalization** (pronunciation) of the consonantal text for reading purposes. Up until that time, scribes had been prohibited against inserting vowels to make the vocalization of the text clear. Because of this, a proper reading of the text depended on the oral tradition passed down from generation to generation. The Masoretes designed a system of **vowel pointing** in which the vowels were represented above and below the consonantal text by small marks, rather than by letters inserted into the consonantal text.

The origins of vocalization reflect differences between Babylon and Palestine. The Tiberian Masoretes (scholars working

in Tiberias in Palestine) provided the most complete and exact system of vocalization. The earliest-dated manuscript from that tradition is a codex of the Prophets from the Karaite synagogue of Cairo dated A.D. 896.

Standardization of both the consonantal text and vocalization succeeded so well that the manuscripts that have survived display a remarkable agreement. Most of the variants, being minor and attributable to scribal error, do not affect interpretation.

### METHODOLOGY OF OLD TESTAMENT TEXTUAL CRITICISM

The search for an adequate methodology to handle the many variant readings found in manuscripts is inseparably intertwined with our understanding of the history of transmission. The basic issue in textual criticism is the method used to decide the relative value of those variant readings. Many factors must be evaluated in order to arrive at a valid decision.

Modern science has provided a number of aids for deciphering a manuscript. Scientific dating procedures help to determine the age of the writing materials. Chemical techniques help clarify writing that has deteriorated. Ultraviolet light enables a scholar to see traces of ink (carbon) in a manuscript even after the surface writing has been effaced.

Each manuscript must be studied as a whole, for each has a “personality.” It is important to identify the characteristic errors, characteristic carelessness or carefulness, and other peculiarities of the scribe(s) who copied the manuscript. Then the manuscript must be compared with other manuscripts to identify the “family” tradition with which it agrees. Preservation of common errors or insertions in the text is a clue to relationships. All possible details of date, place of origin, and authorship must be ascertained.

## Types of Scribal Errors

Scribal errors fall into several distinct categories. The first large category is that of *unintentional errors*. Unintentional errors fall into the following types:

1. Confusion of similar consonants and the **transposition** of two consonants are frequent errors.
2. Corruptions also resulted from an incorrect division of words (many early manuscripts omitted spaces between words in order to save space).
3. Confusion of sounds occurred particularly when one scribe read to a group of scribes making multiple copies.
4. In the Old Testament, the method of vocalization (addition of vowels to the consonantal text) created some errors.
5. Omissions (**haplography**) of a letter, word, or phrase created new readings. Omission could be caused by the eye of a scribe slipping from one word to a similar word or ending. Omissions by **homoioteleuton** (Greek meaning “similar endings”) were quite common. This occurred when two words that were identical, similar, or had identical endings were found close to each other, and the eye of the copyist moved from the first to the second, omitting the words between them.
6. Repetition (**dittoigraphy**) of a letter, word, or even a whole phrase was also common, caused by the eye skipping backward, perhaps to a word with a similar ending (homoioteleuton).
7. In the Old Testament, errors were at times caused by the use of consonants as vowel letters in some ancient

texts. Copyists unaware of this usage of vowel letters would copy them in as aberrant consonants.

Normally, unintentional errors are fairly easy to identify because they create nonsense readings. **Intentional alterations** are much more difficult to identify and evaluate. **Harmonizations** from similar materials occurred with regularity. A thinking scribe might attempt to “improve” a difficult reading. Objectionable expressions were sometimes eliminated or smoothed out. Occasionally synonyms were employed. **Conflation** (resolving a discrepancy between two variant readings by including both of them) often appears.

Becoming aware of these common problems is the first step in detecting and eliminating the more obvious errors and identifying and eliminating the peculiarities of a particular scribe. Then more subtle criteria for identifying the reading most likely to be the original must be employed. Procedures for applying such criteria are similar in both Old Testament and New Testament work.

### General Characteristics of Various Text Types

The basic text for primary consideration is the Masoretic Text because of the careful standardization it represents.<sup>1</sup> That text is compared with the testimony of the ancient versions. The Septuagint, by reason of age and basic faithfulness to the Hebrew text, carries significant weight in all decisions. The **Targums** (Aramaic paraphrases) also reflect the Hebrew base but exhibit a tendency to expansion and paraphrase. The Syriac (**Peshitta**), Latin (**Vulgate**), Old Latin, and **Coptic** (Egyptian) versions add **indirect evidence**, although translations are not always clear witnesses in technical details. Use of

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<sup>1</sup> Würthwein makes a strong case for this in his *Text of the Old Testament*, 114–116.

such versions enables scholars to do **comparative philology** in textual decisions and thus expose early errors for which the original reading probably has not survived. (Each of these versions is discussed in chapter 5.)

### General Methodological Principles

Through the work of textual critics in the last several centuries, certain basic principles have evolved. The primary principles for the Old Testament can be summarized briefly.

1. *The reading that best explains the origin of other variants is preferable.* Information from reconstruction of the history of transmission often provides additional insight. Knowledge of typical scribal errors enables the critic to make an educated decision on the sequence of variants.
2. *The shorter reading is preferable.* The scribes frequently added material in order to solve problems with style or syntax and seldom abridged or condensed material.
3. *The more difficult reading is more likely to be the original one.* This principle is closely related to the second. Scribes did not intentionally create more complex readings. Unintentional errors are usually easy to identify. Thus, the easier reading is normally suspect as a scribal alteration.
4. *Readings that are not harmonized or assimilated to similar passages are preferable.* Copyists had a tendency to correct material on the basis of similar material elsewhere (sometimes even unconsciously).
5. *When all else fails, the textual critic must resort to conjectural emendation.* To make an “educated guess” requires intimate acquaintance with the Hebrew

language, familiarity with the author's style, and an understanding of culture, customs, and theology that might color the passage. Use of conjecture must be limited to those passages in which the original reading has definitely not been transmitted to us.

It should be noted that textual criticism operates only when two or more readings are possible for a specific word or phrase. For most of the biblical text, a single reading has been transmitted. Elimination of scribal errors and intentional changes leaves only a small percentage of the text about which any questions occur.

The field of textual criticism is complex, requiring the gathering and skillful use of a wide variety of information. Because it deals with the authoritative source of revelation for all Christians, textual argumentation has often been accompanied by emotion. Yet in spite of controversy, great progress has been made, particularly in the last century. Refinements in methodology have greatly aided our understanding of the accumulated materials. Additional aid has come from accumulations of information in related fields of study such as archaeology, church history, biblical theology, and the history of Christian thought.

The collection and organization of all variant readings has enabled modern textual critics to give strong assurance that the word of God has been transmitted in an accurate and dependable form. Although variant readings have become obvious through the publication of so many manuscripts, the inadequate, inferior, and secondary readings have been largely eliminated. In relatively few places is conjectural emendation necessary. In matters pertaining to the Christian's salvation,

clear and unmistakable transmission provides authoritative answers. Christians are thus in debt to the textual critics who have worked, and are working, to provide a dependable biblical text.

To this day, almost all Bible scholars and translators still use the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible as the authoritative, standard text. At the same time, they make use of the findings of the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as two other important sources: the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch. During this century, translators have used *Biblia Hebraica* (1929–1937), and its revision, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1967–1977). At the same time, translators have profited from the work of the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project (sponsored by the United Bible Societies) and the Hebrew University Bible Project, both of which provide textual information on variant readings from all the extant sources. Using these sources has helped translators make decisions about adopting readings that are superior to those in the Masoretic Text.

## The New Testament Text

### INSPIRATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

After the church began, the early believers relied on the words of the apostles to teach them about Jesus' life and ministry. This oral teaching about Jesus, together with the Septuagint, provided the verbal sustenance for the early church. Then certain individuals—the apostles themselves (such as Matthew and John) and those who knew the apostles (Mark and Luke)—were **inspired** by God to write Gospel accounts to substantiate the oral tradition. Luke, for example, explained in the preface to his Gospel (Luke 1:1-4) that he wrote his account to confirm what had been taught **catechetically** about Jesus' life and ministry. Mark, tradition tells us, compiled a Gospel based on Peter's messages about Jesus' ministry. Many scholars believe that John first preached many of the chapters that he later weaved into a Gospel narrative.

We must remember that Jesus himself never wrote anything. We must rely on the writings of the eyewitnesses for the true accounting of his life and words. By way of analogy, we could consider the writings of Plato about Socrates. As far as we know, Socrates wrote nothing. All that we know about Socrates comes

from one of his disciples, Plato. All that we know about Jesus comes from a few of his disciples. What kept these disciples—whether of Plato or of Jesus—from composing fabrications? The presence of the other disciples, who could challenge them on anything they said. One among the Twelve could have testified against any falsification. And there was also a group of seventy-two other disciples (Luke 10:1). By the time the church began, the group had grown to one hundred twenty (Acts 1:15). According to 1 Corinthians 15:6, by the time he had finished his ministry, Jesus had at least five hundred followers (those who witnessed a resurrection appearance) and most of these were still alive (Paul said) in the A.D. 60s—the approximate time when the synoptic Gospels were composed.

Before Jesus left this earth and returned to his Father, he told the disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit to them. He told them that one of the functions of the Holy Spirit would be to remind them of all the things that Jesus had said and then to guide them into more truth (see John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15). Those who wrote the Gospels were helped by the Holy Spirit to remember Jesus' exact words, and those who wrote other parts of the New Testament were guided by the Spirit as they wrote.

The **inspiration** for writing the Gospels didn't begin when the authors set pen to papyrus; the inspiration began when the disciples Matthew, Peter (for whom Mark wrote), and John were enlightened by their encounters with Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The apostles' experiences with him altered their lives forever, imprinting on their souls unforgettable images of the revealed God-man, Jesus Christ.

This is what John was speaking of in the prologue to his Gospel when he declared, "The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory" (John 1:14, NRSV). The "we" refers to those eyewitnesses of Jesus' glory—the apostles who

lived with Jesus for over three years. John expands upon this reminiscence in the prologue to his first epistle, where he says “we have heard him, touched him, seen him, and looked upon him” (1 John 1:1-2, paraphrased). In both the Gospel and the Epistle, the verbs are in the perfect tense, denoting a past action with a present, abiding effect. John never forgot those past encounters with Jesus; they lived with him and stayed with him as an inspiring spirit until the day—many years later—he wrote of them in his Gospel.

Matthew, as one of the apostles who accompanied Jesus for three years, was also an eyewitness. His profession suited him as a writer. As a custom’s collector, he would have regularly used shorthand to keep track of people’s taxes. He could easily have employed this practice in taking notes on Jesus’ sermons, and then transferred the shorthand form to a fuller, written form. This would not have been unusual in those days. Thus, Matthew’s Gospel (in limited form) may have existed in written form (perhaps originally in Aramaic—the language Jesus spoke) as early as the A.D. 30s. Later, Matthew composed an entire Gospel narrative, built around Jesus’ sayings. The importance of this is that Matthew’s Gospel is an on-the-spot, eyewitness account. In essence, it may have been composed concurrently with the history being observed—much like a traveling journalist would do.

The inspiration for the writing of the Epistles can also be traced to the writers’ encounters with the living Christ. The most prominent epistle-writer, Paul, repeatedly claims that his inspiration and subsequent commission came from his encounter with the risen Christ (see, for example, 1 Cor. 15:8-10). Peter also claims that his writings were based upon his experiences with the living Christ (see 1 Pet. 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:16-18). And so does John, who claims to have experienced the God-man visibly,

audibly, and palpably (see 1 John 1:1-4). James and Jude make no such claim directly; but since they were the brothers of Jesus who became converts when they saw the risen Christ (this is certain for James—see 1 Cor. 15:7; and presumed for Jude—see Acts 1:14), they too drew their inspiration from their encounters with the living Christ. Thus, all the epistle writers (with the potential exception of the unknown writer of Hebrews) knew the living Christ. This is the relationship that qualified them to write those books which became part of the New Testament **canon**. This made these books distinct from all others.

The writers of the New Testament Epistles were inspired by the Spirit when they wrote. Speaking for all the apostles, Paul indicated that they were taught by the Holy Spirit what to say. The writers of the New Testament did not speak with words “taught by human wisdom,” but with words “taught by the Spirit” (see 1 Cor. 2:13, NIV). What they wrote was Spirit-taught. For example, when the apostle John saw that Jesus Christ had come to give eternal life to men, the Spirit helped him express this truth in many different ways. Thus, when the apostle Paul contemplated the fullness of Christ’s deity, he was inspired by the Spirit to use such phrasing as “in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,” “in [him] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” and “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (see Col. 2:9; 2:3; Eph. 3:8, NKJV).

As the Spirit taught the writers, they used their own vocabulary and writing style to express the thoughts of the Spirit. So the Scriptures came as the result of divine and human cooperation. The Scriptures were not **mechanically inspired**—as if God used the men as machines through whom he dictated the divine utterance. Rather, the Scriptures were inspired by God, then written by men. The Bible, therefore, is both fully divine and fully human.

## The Writers of the New Testament

To the best of our knowledge, the authors of the New Testament books are as follows:

### Gospels and Acts

Matthew	Matthew (the apostle)
Mark	Mark (cowriter with Peter)
Luke	Luke (Paul's coworker)
John	John (the apostle)
Acts	Luke (Paul's coworker)

### Epistles

Romans	Paul (the apostle)
1 Corinthians	Paul
2 Corinthians	Paul
Galatians	Paul
Ephesians	Paul
Philippians	Paul
Colossians	Paul
1 Thessalonians	Paul
2 Thessalonians	Paul
1 Timothy	Paul
2 Timothy	Paul
Titus	Paul
Philemon	Paul

### General Epistles and Revelation

Hebrews	Anonymous (Apollos?)
James	James (Jesus' brother)
1 Peter	Peter (with Silas)
2 Peter	Peter
1 John	John (the apostle)
2 John	John
3 John	John
Jude	Jude (Jesus' brother)
Revelation	John

In none of the Gospels does the author identify himself by name. However, early and widespread tradition indicates who the authors were. The author of the first Gospel was Matthew, one of Jesus' twelve apostles. The second Gospel, probably the first to be written, was composed by John Mark on the basis of Peter's preaching and recollections. We know that the author of the third Gospel is Luke by way of his authorship of the book of Acts, which is the sequel to this Gospel. Luke tells his readers that he based his written Gospel on the accounts given to him by Jesus' eyewitnesses (see Luke 1:1-4). The fourth Gospel was written by Jesus' "beloved disciple," John.

Thirteen New Testament epistles (letters) can be attributed to Paul because they bear his name. The Epistle to the Hebrews is anonymous; many scholars think it was written by Apollos, an early Christian teacher from Alexandria, who was gifted with words. James was written by Jesus' brother James, who had become the primary leader of the church in Jerusalem. 1 Peter was written by Peter with the help of Silas, while 2 Peter was authored by Peter and probably written by some close associate (in much the same way as a book today can be authored by one person, who is the source of the content, while another does the actual writing). Jude was written by another one of Jesus' brothers. 1—3 John, coinciding completely with the style of John's Gospel, were written by John, as was the book of Revelation (1:4).

### THE LANGUAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT: KOINÉ GREEK

During its classic period, Greek was the language of one of the world's greatest cultures. During that cultural period, language, literature, and art flourished. The Greek language reflected artistry in its philosophical dialogues, its poetry, and its stately orations. During this period, Greek was also characterized by

strength and vigor; classical Greek elaborately developed many forms from a few word roots. Its complex syntax allowed intricate word arrangements to express fine nuances of meaning.

The conquests of Alexander the Great encouraged the spread of Greek language and culture. Regional dialects were largely replaced by Hellenistic or **koiné Greek**. Koiné Greek is a dialect preserved and known through thousands of papyrus writings reflecting all aspects of daily life. The koiné dialect added many **vernacular** expressions to classical Greek, thus making it more cosmopolitan. Simplifying the grammar also better adapted it to a worldwide culture. The new language, reflecting simple, popular speech, became the common language of commerce and diplomacy. The Greek language lost much of its elegance and finely shaded nuance as a result of its evolution from classic to koiné. Nevertheless, it retained its distinguishing characteristics of strength, beauty, clarity, and logical-rhetorical power.

During the centuries immediately before Christ, the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek. This Greek translation, known as the **Septuagint**, later had a strong influence on Christian thought. A consequence of Hebrew writers using the Greek language was that Greek forms of thought influenced Jewish culture. The Jews appropriated from the rich and refined Greek vocabulary some expressions for ideas that were beyond the scope of Hebrew terminology. Also, old Greek expressions acquired new and extended meanings in this translation of the Old Testament by Greek-speaking Jews. Thus, the Greek Old Testament was very significant in the development of Christian thought. Often the usage of a Greek word in the Septuagint provides a key to its meaning in the New Testament.

Although most New Testament authors were Jewish, they wrote in Greek, the universal language of their time. In addition, the apostle John seems to have been acquainted with

some Greek philosophy, which influenced his style. John used “Word” (Greek *logos*) in reference to Christ (John 1:1), and several other abstract expressions. John may have been influenced by the Egyptian center of Alexandria, where Greek philosophy and Hebrew learning had merged in a unique way. The apostle Paul also was acquainted with Greek authors (Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 15:33; Titus 1:12). Greek orators and philosophers influenced Paul’s language, as did Hebrew prophets and scholars.

Greek words took on richer, more spiritual meaning in the context of Scripture. Influenced by the simplicity and rich vividness of Semitic style, the New Testament was not written in a peculiar “Holy Ghost” language (as some medieval scholars believed) but in koiné Greek by Semitic-thinking authors. Tens of thousands of papyri unearthed in Egypt in the early twentieth century furnish lexical and grammatical parallels to biblical language, revealing that it was part of the linguistic fabric of that era.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

The way was paved for a New Testament canon early in the church age by the fact that various books were being collected by congregations—especially Paul’s epistles and the four Gospels. Because the Gospels were individual publications from their inception, it took a while for a collection of these four books to be made. The collecting process was completed sooner for Paul’s epistles.

## EARLY COLLECTIONS OF NEW TESTAMENT WRITINGS

As Paul’s epistles circulated to various churches, neighboring churches began to collect copies of these epistles from their

neighbors. This is implicit in Colossians 4:16, where Paul asked the church in Colossae to exchange epistles with the neighboring Laodicean church. Most likely, the epistle “from Laodicea” mentioned in Colossians 4:16 is the epistle we call Ephesians, which was an **encyclical** intended for all the churches in that area, including Laodicea, Colossae, and Ephesus. Paul’s language indicates that this epistle would be coming *from* Laodicea to Colossae—and then probably on to Ephesus, its final destination. This exchange implies that each church would make copies of an epistle and send the copies on to the other churches.

Paul’s epistles were originally sent to the specific churches to which he was ministering: churches in Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi, Galatia, Asia Minor (including Ephesus and Colossae), and Rome. But the intent of many of these epistles is that they would be read by more than one local church. This is especially true for Ephesians, which was an encyclical. This epistle would have made the rounds from church to church in Asia Minor, each of which would have made a copy to keep.

Collections of Paul’s epistles were being made between A.D. 60 and 100. The earliest date for the collecting process comes from a reference in 2 Peter 3:15-16, which indicates a well-known collection of Paul’s writings that are categorized as “Scripture.” If Peter authored 2 Peter, this had to have been written prior to Peter’s death in A.D. 66/67. If 2 Peter was published posthumously, then we have a later date. Either way, the reference in 2 Peter 3:15-16 tells us that Paul’s epistles were being collected and read as Scripture in many churches during the second half of the first century. The well-known New Testament scholar, Gunther Zuntz, was confident that there was a Pauline **corpus** (collection) by A.D. 100. Zuntz quite

convincingly argued that the Pauline corpus was produced by the methods of Alexandrian scholarship and/or in Alexandria itself at the beginning of the second century (ca. 100).<sup>1</sup>

The collection of the four Gospels into one **codex** came about later than the collection of the Pauline Epistles. During the first and early second centuries, each Gospel primarily existed independently. But by the middle of the second century, it appears that churches or individuals began to make codex collections of the Gospels. Various church fathers, such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, were speaking of a fourfold Gospel collection in the second century.

The collection of various books by the Christian churches for use in worship was an inadvertent way of canonizing them. There is evidence that within thirty years of the apostle Paul's death, all the Pauline letters (excluding the Pastoral Epistles) were collected and used in the major churches. It is true that some of the smaller letters of Paul (as well as those of Peter and John) were being questioned as to their authority in some quarters for perhaps another fifty years, but this was due only to uncertainty about their authorship in those particular locales. This demonstrates that acceptance was not being imposed by the actions of councils but was happening spontaneously through a normal response on the part of those who had learned the facts about authorship. In those places where the churches were uncertain about the authorship or apostolic approval of certain books, acceptance was slower.

### EARLY AFFIRMATIONS OF CANONICAL STATUS

According to early church writers, the criteria of the selection of New Testament books for use in Christian worship revolved around their **apostolicity**. Like the books of the Old Testament,

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<sup>1</sup> Züntz, *Text of the Epistles*, 271-272.

the New Testament books were collected and preserved by local churches in the continuing process of their worship and need for authoritative guidance for Christian living. The formation of the canon was a process rather than an event, a process that took several hundred years to reach finality in all parts of the Roman Empire. Local canons were the basis for comparison, and out of them eventually emerged the general canon that exists in Christendom today.

The principle determining recognition of the authority of the canonical New Testament writings was first established within the content of those writings themselves. For example, at the conclusion of 1 Thessalonians, Paul says, “I command you in the name of the Lord to read this letter to all the brothers and sisters” (1 Thess. 5:27, NLT). Earlier in the same letter, Paul commended them for accepting his spoken word as “the very word of God” (2:13, NLT); and in 1 Corinthians 14:37 he speaks similarly of his writings, insisting that they be recognized as commandments from the Lord himself (see also John’s statements in Rev. 1:3).

Other statements in the New Testament itself affirm its canonical status. For example, Paul writes in his first epistle to Timothy:

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves to be paid” (1 Tim. 5:17-18, NRSV).

In giving this instruction, Paul cites two texts. The first citation of Scripture clearly comes from Deuteronomy 25:4, but the second cannot be found anywhere in the Old Testament. It

can, however, be found in the Gospel of Luke (10:7). Jesus made this statement in the same context Paul made his—spiritual workers should receive material benefits from those they serve. Thus, Paul ascribed scriptural status to Jesus’ statement recorded in the Gospel of Luke. This means that Luke’s Gospel, written ca. A.D. 60, was perceived by Paul to be canonical soon after it was published—for Paul wrote 1 Timothy only a few years later (63-64).

In Peter’s second epistle, the author states,

Regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. (2 Pet. 3:15-16, NRSV).

In this statement, we discover that the author unequivocally indicates that Paul’s letters are on the same par as “the other scriptures.” The statement is even stronger in Greek, for he says, literally, “the rest of the Scriptures”—thereby indicating that Paul’s epistles comprise a certain portion of the whole canon. What is also apparent in the Greek is that the author could have been a contemporary of Paul, because he intimates that Paul was presently speaking to the churches through his epistles. The present participle carries this force: “in all his epistles speaking [Greek *lalon*] in them concerning these things.” Of course, the author of 2 Peter could have been referring to the abiding effect of Paul’s apostolic voice after his decease. Nonetheless, the author of 2 Peter addressed the same audience Paul addressed and bears witness to the fact that

there was a Pauline corpus of epistles, which were considered as Scripture.

What we have in these two New Testament portions is quite noteworthy. We have Paul affirming Luke's Gospel as Scripture, and we see Peter affirming Paul's epistles as Scripture. If such affirmations were pronounced by the apostles about various portions of the New Testament, we would assume that some of the early Christians ascribed the same canonical status to these books. What we know from church history is that the Gospels and certain of Paul's epistles were canonized in the minds of many Christians as early as A.D. 90–100—that is, the four Gospels and Paul's epistles were deemed Scripture worthy to be read in church.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

### AFTER A.D. 100

The first notable **church fathers**—Clement, Ignatius, Papias, Justin Martyr, and Polycarp (all writing before A.D. 150)—used the material of the New Testament as authentic, apostolic Scriptures. In A.D. 95, Clement of Rome wrote to the Christians in Corinth using a free rendering of material from Matthew and Luke. He seems to have been strongly influenced by Hebrews and was obviously familiar with Romans and Corinthians. Since Clement's letter was addressed by the entire church of Rome to the church of Corinth, it can be assumed that both of these audiences knew these writings. Therefore, these books that later became part of the New Testament canon were circulating among the churches prior to A.D. 90.

Ignatius, when quoting from the Gospels or Paul's epistles, made a distinction between his own writings and the inspired, authoritative apostolic writings. Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis (ca. 130–140), in a work preserved for us by

Eusebius, specifically mentions the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. His use of them for exposition indicates his acceptance of them as canonical. Near the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr, in describing the worship services of the early church, put the apostolic writings on a par with those of the Old Testament prophets. He stated that the divine voice that spoke through the prophets was the same voice that spoke through the apostles of Christ. Justin was also free in his use of “it is written” with his quotations from New Testament Scriptures.

Polycarp of Smyrna personally knew some of Jesus’ eyewitnesses, particularly the apostle John. Near the end of his life, just prior to his martyrdom (155), he wrote his *Epistle to the Philippians*. In this epistle he used a combined Old Testament and New Testament quotation, introduced by the statement, “As it is said in *these Scriptures*” (Polycarp 12:4, emphasis mine). There are no citations from the Old Testament in this epistle, but there are quotations from and allusions to Matthew, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, and 1 Peter.

Other writings of the first half of the second century (A.D. 100-150) affirm that the New Testament writings were regarded as Scriptures. The *Didache* (or *Teaching of the Twelve*), perhaps even earlier, makes references to a written Gospel. The *Epistle of Barnabas* (ca. 130) has the formula, “it is written” (Barnabas 4:14), with reference to Matthew 22:14.

During the second half of the second century, more apostolic fathers were affirming that the New Testament writings were Scripture. The writings of Irenaeus serve as a primary example. Near the end of the second century, Irenaeus was affirming a fourfold Gospel text. Irenaeus had been privileged to begin his Christian training under Polycarp, a disciple of the

apostles. Then, as a *presbyter* (leader in the church) in Lyons, he had association with Bishop Pothinus, whose own background also included contact with first-generation Christians. Irenaeus quoted from almost all the New Testament on the basis of its authority and asserted that the apostles were endowed with power from on high. They were, he said, “fully informed concerning all things, and had a perfect knowledge . . . having indeed all in equal measure and each one singly the Gospel of God” (*Against Heresies*, 3.3). He was the first to state four Gospels as canon. In *Against Heresies* (3.3) Irenaeus said that Christ “gave us the Gospel in a fourfold shape . . . held together by one Spirit.” To these four he also added a list of apostolic writings, quoting all as “Scripture,” along with the Old Testament.

In addition to the Gospels, Irenaeus made reference to Acts, 1 Peter, 1 John, all the letters of Paul except Philemon, and the book of Revelation. In his primary work, *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus gave his theology as statements of the Christian faith to refute the heresies of Valentinus (the gnostic) and Marcion. For Irenaeus, the authority of “the faith” was established through the direct line of elders in the church back to the apostles.

Another important document of this time period is the *Muratorian Canon* (dated ca. 170). An eighth-century copy of this document was discovered and published in 1740 by the librarian L. A. Muratori. The manuscript is mutilated at both ends, but the remaining text makes Scripture of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, while recording doubts about such books as 2 Peter, Jude, 2–3 John, and Revelation.

In the beginning of the fourth century, Eusebius was the chief proponent of establishing the four Gospels as well as other recognized books as comprising the New Testament

canon. But it was in the middle of the fourth century that the canon was established once and for all. In his *Festal Letter* for Easter (367), Athanasius of Alexandria included information designed to eliminate once and for all the use of certain apocryphal books. This letter, with its admonition, “Let no one add to these; let nothing be taken away,” provides the earliest extant document that specifies the twenty-seven books without qualification.

At the close of the fourth century, the Council of Carthage (397) decreed that “aside from the canonical Scriptures nothing is to be read in church under the Name of Divine Scriptures.” This also lists the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, as we have them today.<sup>1</sup>

## NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

Since the original compositions of the various New Testament books are not **extant**, we must rely on copies for recovering the original text. New Testament scholars have a great advantage over classical scholars in the number of manuscripts available to them.

According to current tabulations of New Testament manuscripts, there are 115 papyrus manuscripts, 257 **uncial manuscripts**, 2,795 **minuscule manuscripts**, and 2,200 Greek **lectionaries**. In total, there are over 5,350 manuscript copies of the Greek New Testament or portions thereof. By way of comparison, Homer’s *Iliad*, the greatest of all Greek classical works, is extant in about 650 manuscripts; and Euripides’ tragedies exist in about 330 manuscripts. The numbers on all the other works of Greek literature are far smaller. Furthermore,

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<sup>1</sup> See M. Fisher, “The Canon of the New Testament” in Comfort, *Origin of the Bible*, 69-74, from which portions of this section were adapted.

the gap in time between the original composition and the first surviving manuscript is far less for the New Testament than for any other work in Greek literature. The lapse for most classical Greek works is about eight hundred to a thousand years, whereas the lapse for many books in the New Testament is around one hundred years.

Individual manuscripts do not exist in isolation from all others—no manuscript is an island. Instead, manuscripts tend to group according to families. A family of manuscripts displays similar characteristics, suggesting that there is a historical connection between those manuscripts. When discussing individual manuscripts, it is often necessary to provide information about the textual character of each manuscript in terms of its family—such as “**proto-Alexandrian**,” “**Alexandrian**,” “**Western**” or “**D-text**,” and “**Byzantine**” (A table of manuscripts and the symbols used to refer to them is in Appendix B, “New Testament Manuscripts,” page 279.

## PAPYRUS MANUSCRIPTS

The papyrus manuscripts are very important witnesses for reconstructing the original text of the New Testament. It is not the material they are written on (**papyrus**) that makes them so valuable, but the date at which they were written. Several of the most significant papyri are dated from the early second century to the early third. These manuscripts, therefore, provide the earliest direct witness to the **autographs**. Among the extant New Testament papyrus manuscripts, four groups are noted below: the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, the Chester Beatty Papyri, the Bodmer Papyri, and other papyri.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Complete descriptions of all the papyri manuscripts dated before A.D. 300 are found in Comfort and Barrett, eds., *Earliest New Testament Manuscripts*. The descriptions in that work include an extensive bibliography. See also Comfort, “New Reconstructions.”

## The Oxyrhynchus Papyri

A new era in New Testament study began on January 11, 1897, when B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt began to excavate at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, one hundred twenty miles south of Cairo. They did not find papyri in ancient cemeteries, churches, or monasteries; rather, they found them in ancient rubbish heaps. Manuscripts found in rubbish heaps are not “rubbish” per se or defective copies. When a manuscript became old and worn, it was customary to replace it with a fresh copy and then discard the old one. The Egyptians are known to have disposed of such copies, not by burning them, but by putting them into rubbish heaps. Excavators looking for ancient Egyptian papyri would search for ancient rubbish heaps in deserted sites on ground higher than the Nile River. Excavators would also look in tombs, cemeteries, monasteries, and church buildings.

Grenfell and Hunt’s choice of the ancient rubbish heap at Oxyrhynchus (now called El Bahnasa) was fortuitous, for it yielded the largest cache of papyri ever discovered. From the time they began digging in January 1897, they made new finds of papyrus fragments almost continuously—day after day and week after week—until they ceased operations in 1906.

### Significant Oxyrhynchus Papyrus Manuscripts

ⲑ<sup>1</sup> (*P. Oxy. 2*) When Grenfell and Hunt went to Oxyrhynchus in search of ancient Christian documents, ⲑ<sup>1</sup> was discovered on the second day of the dig. (Papyri are denoted with the symbol ⲑ and are numbered according to the order in which they were found.) At the time of this discovery, this was the earliest extant copy of any New Testament portion—at least one hundred years earlier than Codex Vaticanus. The copyist of ⲑ<sup>1</sup> seems to have faithfully followed a very reliable exemplar. This third-century manuscript contains Matthew 1:1-9, 12, 14-20.

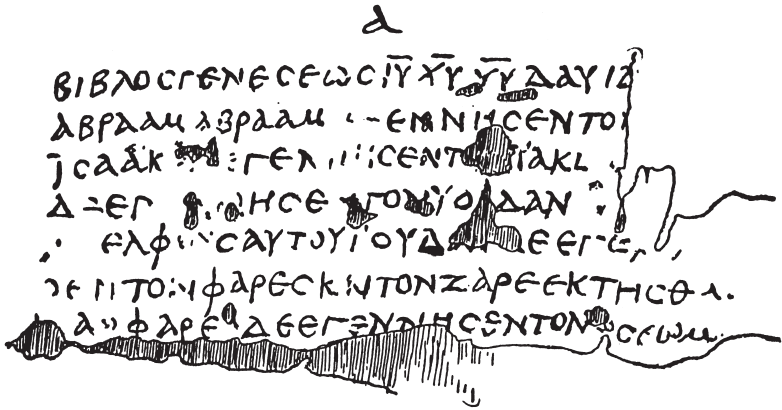


FIGURE 2.1: Papyrus  $\mathfrak{P}^1$ . Third Century. Matthew 1:1-3.

$\mathfrak{P}^5$  (*P. Oxy. 208 and 1781*) Two separate portions of this manuscript (dated to the third century) were unearthed from Oxyrhynchus by Grenfell and Hunt, both from the same papyrus manuscript. The first portion contains John 1:23-31, 33-40 on one fragment and John 20:11-17 on another—probably on the first and last **quires** of a manuscript containing only the Gospel of John.

$\mathfrak{P}^{13}$  (*P. Oxy. 657 and PSI 1292*) This manuscript, dated to the third century, contains twelve columns from a roll preserving the text of Hebrews 2:14-5:5; 10:8-22; 10:29-11:13; 11:28-12:7. The text of Hebrews was written on the back of the papyrus containing the New Epitome of Livy. For this reason, some scholars think the manuscript was possibly brought to Egypt by a Roman official and left behind when he left his post.  $\mathfrak{P}^{13}$  displays nearly the same text as  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$ . Out of a total of eighty-eight variation-units, there are seventy-one agreements and only seventeen disagreements.

$\mathfrak{P}^{20}$  (*P. Oxy. 1171*) This manuscript, containing James 2:19-3:9, is the earliest extant manuscript of James 2-3 (early

third century). A study of the handwriting of  $\mathfrak{P}^{20}$  and  $\mathfrak{P}^{27}$  reveals that the same scribe probably produced both. However, these two fragments are not from the same codex because their dimensions are distinctly different. Codex Vaticanus basically concurs with  $\mathfrak{P}^{20}$ .

$\mathfrak{P}^{23}$  (*P. Oxy. 1229*) Containing James 1:10-12, 15-18, this fragment dated ca. 200 is the earliest extant manuscript of James 1. In general,  $\mathfrak{P}^{23}$  agrees with Codices Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and Ephraemi Rescriptus, which represent the best texts of the General Epistles.

$\mathfrak{P}^{24}$  (*P. Oxy. 1230*) This late-third-century papyrus is the earliest extant manuscript of Revelation 5–6 (5:5-8; 6:5-8). Codex Alexandrinus (an excellent witness in Revelation) generally agrees with the papyrus.

$\mathfrak{P}^{30}$  (*P. Oxy. 1598*) This manuscript, from the early third century, has 1 Thessalonians 4:12-13, 16-17; 5:3, 8-10, 12-18, 25-28; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2.  $\mathfrak{P}^{30}$  must originally have contained all of Paul's epistles, because two leaves show the page numbers 207 and 208.

$\mathfrak{P}^{39}$  (*P. Oxy. 1780*) This manuscript, showing John 8:14-22, was produced in the third century. The large letters and beautiful calligraphy show that this manuscript was probably produced by a professional scribe for church use. Codex Vaticanus agrees with  $\mathfrak{P}^{39}$  verbatim.

$\mathfrak{P}^{48}$  (*PSI 1165*) This fragment preserves Acts 23:11-17, 23-29; it should be dated to the middle of the third century (the same time as  $\mathfrak{P}^{13}$ —the two manuscripts bear a close resemblance in handwriting). The remarkable feature about this manuscript is that it displays an early form of the D-text (see page 87).

℘<sup>49</sup> + ℘<sup>65</sup> (*Yale Papyrus 415 + PSI 1373*) The first manuscript (℘<sup>49</sup>) contains Ephesians 4:16-29; 4:31-5:13; the second (℘<sup>65</sup>) contains 1 Thessalonians 1:3-10; 2:1, 6-13. These manuscripts, of the third century, were produced by the same scribe and probably belong to the same codex. This can be seen in a detailed analysis of the two hands, and in an analysis of the physical features of both manuscripts. ℘<sup>49</sup> + ℘<sup>65</sup> is the fifth early manuscript to display a Pauline codex. The others are ℘<sup>13</sup>, ℘<sup>30</sup>, ℘<sup>46</sup>, and ℘<sup>92</sup>.

℘<sup>77</sup> (*P. Oxy. 2683 + 4405*) Dated to the late second century, this is one of the earliest manuscripts of Matthew (containing a small portion of Matt. 23). The manuscript, which is clearly a literary production, has the closest affinity with Codex Sinaiticus. ℘<sup>103</sup> may be part of the same manuscript as ℘<sup>77</sup>.

℘<sup>90</sup> (*P. Oxy. 3523*) This late-second-century manuscript contains John 18:36-19:7. The handwriting (an upright, rounded, elegant script) is much like that found in ℘<sup>66</sup>. Furthermore, ℘<sup>90</sup> has more affinity with ℘<sup>66</sup> than with any other single manuscript, though it does not concur with ℘<sup>66</sup> in its entirety.

℘<sup>104</sup> (*P. Oxy. 4404*) Containing Matthew 21:34-37, 43, 45, this manuscript could be the earliest extant manuscript of the New Testament. ℘<sup>104</sup> is a carefully executed manuscript in what could be called the rounded, decorated style. In this style, every vertical stroke finishes with a serif or decorated roundel. This style began during the Ptolemaic period (323 to 30 B.C.) and extended to the second century A.D. Whatever the date of ℘<sup>104</sup>, it is textually pure and accurate. It does not include Matthew 21:44, thus making it the earliest witness to the exclusion of this verse.

ⲡ<sup>115</sup> (*P. Oxy. 4499*) This manuscript, dated ca. A.D. 300, contains many portions of Revelation 2–15 (with **lacunae**). It tends to agree with Codices Alexandrinus and Ephraemi Rescriptus, the best witnesses to Revelation. One remarkable reading is found in Revelation 13:18—ⲡ<sup>115</sup> has the number of the beast as “616” instead of “666.”

### The Chester Beatty Papyri

In 1931 it was announced that twelve manuscripts were found in a **Coptic** graveyard in Egypt, stowed away in jars—eight books of the Old Testament and three of the New Testament. It is generally believed that the manuscripts came from the ruins of an ancient church or monastery—perhaps in Aphroditopolis (modern Atfih, Egypt). These manuscripts were likely hidden during the Diocletian persecution.

The three Greek New Testament manuscripts said to be found in the Coptic graveyard were the earliest manuscripts to contain large portions of the New Testament text. The first manuscript, ⲡ<sup>45</sup> (early third century), is a codex of the four Gospels and Acts; the second, ⲡ<sup>46</sup> (second century), is a codex of the Pauline Epistles; and the third, ⲡ<sup>47</sup> (third century), is a codex of Revelation. A dealer from Cairo sold the manuscripts in different batches to two different parties—Chester Beatty and the University of Michigan.

The ten leaves in the Beatty collection were first published in Fasciculus III of *The Chester Beatty Papyri* (1936). The thirty leaves in the Michigan collection were published in 1935 by H. A. Sanders in *A Third-Century Papyrus Codex of the Epistles of Paul*.

### Significant Chester Beatty Papyrus Manuscripts

ⲡ<sup>45</sup> (*Chester Beatty Papyrus I*) This codex has the four Gospels and Acts (Matt. 20:24–32; 21:13–19; 25:41–26:39; Mark 4:36–

9:31; 11:27–12:28; Luke 6:31–7:7; 9:26–14:33; John 4:51–5:2, 21–25; 10:7–25; 10:30–11:10, 18–36, 42–57; Acts 4:27–17:17). According to Frederic Kenyon, the order of books in the original intact manuscript was probably as follows: Matthew, John, Luke, Mark, Acts. This manuscript was dated by Kenyon to the early third century, a date which was confirmed by other papyrologists.

The scribe of  $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$  was very free in making his copy of the text. Instead of copying the text verbatim, he reproduced the basic thought of the text. In short, he liked to paraphrase and edit as he went. He had a penchant for pruning and for harmonizing the gospels. The text of  $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$  varies with each book. In Mark,  $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$  shows a strong affinity with those manuscripts which used to be called Caesarean.<sup>1</sup> In Matthew, Luke, and John,  $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$  stands midway between the “Alexandrian” manuscripts and so-called “Western” manuscripts (see page 87). In Acts,  $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$  shows the greatest affinity with the Alexandrian uncials—as over against the manuscripts with a “Western” text.

$\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  (*Chester Beatty Papyrus II*) This codex has most of Paul’s epistles (excluding the Pastorals) in this order: Rom. 5:17–6:14; 8:15–15:9; 15:11–16:27; Heb. 1:1–13:25; 1 Cor. 1:1–16:22; 2 Cor. 1:1–13:13; Eph. 1:1–6:24; Gal. 1:1–6:18; Phil. 1:1–4:23; Col. 1:1–4:18; 1 Thess. 1:1; 1:9–2:3; 5:5–9, 23–28 (with minor lacunae in each of the books).

Kenyon dated  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  to the first half of the third century. Kenyon’s dating was largely influenced by the handwriting of the **stichometrical notes** at the end of several of the epistles, which he dated to the early part of the third century.<sup>2</sup> Ulrich

<sup>1</sup> The supposed “Caesarean” family is represented by  $\Theta$ ,  $f^1$ , and the Armenian and Georgian versions. Textual scholars now doubt the existence of this text type as a coherent family of manuscripts.

<sup>2</sup> See introductory pages in Kenyon, *Chester Beatty Papyri fasciculus III*.

Wilcken thought  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  belonged to the second century and said it could be dated safely to ca. A.D. 200.<sup>1</sup> Other papyrologists date it to the middle of the second century.<sup>2</sup>

The scribe who produced  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  used an early, excellent exemplar. He was a professional scribe because there are **stichoi** notations at the end of several books (Romans, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Philippians). The stichoi were used by professionals to note how many lines had been copied, for commensurate pay. Most likely, an official at the **scriptorium** paginated the codex and indicated the stichoi. The scribe himself made a few corrections as he went, and then several other readers made corrections here and there.

Codex Vaticanus shows strong affinities with  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  (especially in Ephesians, Colossians, and Hebrews), and so does Codex Sinaiticus, to a lesser extent.  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  is proto-Alexandrian. In Hebrews,  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  displays nearly the same text as  $\mathfrak{P}^{13}$ .

$\mathfrak{P}^{47}$  (*Chester Beatty Papyrus III*) This third-century codex contains Revelation 9:10–17:2; it is the earliest manuscript preserving this portion of Revelation. Codex Sinaiticus frequently agrees with  $\mathfrak{P}^{47}$ .

### The Bodmer Papyri

The most significant discovery of biblical manuscripts since the Dead Sea Scrolls is that of the Dishna Papers, several of which are known as the Bodmer Biblical Papyri and a few of which are also in the Chester Beatty collection. Most of these manuscripts were purchased by Martin Bodmer (founder of the Bodmer Library of World Literature) from a dealer in Cairo, Egypt, in the 1950s and 1960s. The four important New Testament papyri in this collection are  $\mathfrak{P}^{66}$  (ca. 150, containing almost all of

<sup>1</sup> Wilcken, *Archiv*, 113.

<sup>2</sup> See the full discussion in Comfort and Barrett, eds., *Earliest New Testament Manuscripts*, 193–197.

John); P<sup>72</sup> (third century, having all of 1 and 2 Peter and Jude); P<sup>74</sup> (ca. 600, containing Acts and the General Epistles); and P<sup>75</sup> (ca. 175–200, containing large parts of Luke 3—John 15).

James Robinson, an expert in **Nag Hammadi manuscripts**, was able to pinpoint the place of discovery while attempting to find out where the Nag Hammadi manuscripts came from. The Bodmer Biblical Papyri (or Dishna Papers) were discovered seven years after the Nag Hammadi codices in close proximity. They were found in the Dishna Plain, midway between Panopolis and Thebes, Egypt, east of the Nile River. In 1945 the Nag Hammadi manuscripts were found in Jabal Al-Tarif (just north of Chenoboskion—near Nag Hammadi, the city where the discovery was first reported). In 1952 the Bodmer Papyri were found in Jabal Abu Manna, which is also located just north of the Dishna Plain, twelve kilometers east of Jabal Al-Tarif.<sup>1</sup>

It is quite likely that all these manuscripts belonged to a library of a monastery started by Pachomius. Within a few kilometers of Jabal Abu Manna lie the ruins of the ancient basilica of Pachomius (in Faw Qibli). Pachomius (287–346) brought monasticism to this area around 320. By the time of his death, there were thousands of monks in eleven monasteries within a radius of sixty miles along the Nile River. A century later, there were nearly fifty thousand monks in the area. As part of their daily regimen, these monks read and memorized the Scriptures—especially the New Testament and Psalms. Pachomius himself took an active role in this practice in that he read the Scriptures aloud to his first congregation (i.e., he was the **lector**). As Pachomius knew both Coptic (Egyptian) and Greek (as did other monks in his

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<sup>1</sup> James Robinson, *Pachomian Monastic Library*.

monasteries), some of the monks he taught must have also read the Scriptures in both languages. Of course, more monks read Coptic than Greek, and with the passing of time (beginning in the fifth century) almost all read only Coptic. Because the library in the Pachomian monastery could not have started until after 320, all earlier manuscripts—especially the New Testament papyri—must have been produced in another scriptorium (probably in Alexandria) and given to the library.

### Significant Bodmer Papyrus Manuscripts

Ⲣ<sup>66</sup> (*Papyrus Bodmer II*) This manuscript contains most of John's Gospel (1:1–6:11; 6:35–14:26, 29–30; 15:2–26; 16:2–4, 6–7; 16:10–20:20, 22–23; 20:25–21:9). It does not include the pericope of the adulteress (7:53–8:11), making it the earliest witness not to include this passage that is now generally considered spurious. The manuscript is usually dated ca. 200, but the renowned paleographer Herbert Hunger has argued that Ⲣ<sup>66</sup> should be dated to the first half, if not the first quarter, of the second century.<sup>1</sup>

With a practiced calligraphic hand, the scribe of Ⲣ<sup>66</sup> wrote in larger print as he went along in order to fill out the codex. The large print throughout indicates that it was written to be read aloud. The scribe of Ⲣ<sup>66</sup> was very likely a Christian. The text exhibits his knowledge of other portions of Scripture (he harmonized John 6:66 to Matt. 16:16 and John 21:6 to Luke 5:5), his use of standard *nomina sacra*, and his special use of *nomina sacra* for the words “cross” and “crucify.”

The scribe of Ⲣ<sup>66</sup> was quite free in his interaction with the text; he produced several **singular readings**, which reveal his independent interpretation of the text. While the numerous

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<sup>1</sup> Hunger, “Zur Datierung.”

scribal mistakes would seem to indicate that the scribe was inattentive, many of the singular readings—prior to correction—reveal that he was not detached from the narrative of the text. Rather, he became so absorbed in his reading that he often forgot the exact words he was copying. His task as a copyist was to duplicate the exemplar word for word, but this was subverted by the fact that he was reading the text in logical semantic chunks and often became a coproducer of a new text. As a result, he continually had to stop his reading and make many in-process corrections. But he left several places uncorrected, which were later corrected by the **diorthotes**. Many of these corrections bring the manuscript into line with a proto-Alexandrian type of text.<sup>1</sup>

ⲡ<sup>72</sup> (*Papyrus Bodmer VII-VIII*) This manuscript, dated ca. 300, has an interesting collection of writings in one codex: 1 Peter 1:1–5:14; 2 Pet. 1:1–3:18; Jude 1-25; the *Nativity of Mary*; the **apocryphal** correspondence of Paul to the Corinthians; the eleventh ode of Solomon; Melito’s *Homily on the Passover*; a fragment of a hymn; the *Apology of Phileas*; and Psalms 33 and 34.

Scholars think four scribes produced the entire manuscript. 1 Peter has clear Alexandrian affinities—especially with B (Codex Vaticanus) and then with A (Codex Alexandrinus). The copies of 2 Peter and (especially) Jude in ⲡ<sup>72</sup> display more of an uncontrolled type text (usually associated with the “Western” text), with several independent readings.

ⲡ<sup>74</sup> (*Papyrus Bodmer XVII*) This seventh-century codex contains Acts and the General Epistles (with lacunae). Despite the late date, this manuscript is important because it presents an Alexandrian text and is an excellent witness for the book of Acts.

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<sup>1</sup> Comfort and Barrett, *Earliest New Testament Manuscripts*, 371-378.

ⲡ<sup>75</sup> (*Papyrus Bodmer XIV-XV*) This codex contains most of Luke and John (Luke 3:18–4:2; 4:34–5:10; 5:37–18:18; 22:4–24:53; John 1:1–11:45, 48–57; 12:3–13:1, 8–9; 14:8–30; 15:7–8.) The manuscript does not include the pericope of the adulteress (John 7:53–8:11). ⲡ<sup>75</sup> can be dated to the late second century (ca. 175–200).

The copyist of ⲡ<sup>75</sup> was a literate scribe trained in making books. His craftsmanship shows through in his tight calligraphy and controlled copying. The scribe's Christianity shows in his abbreviations of the *nomina sacra*, as well as in his abbreviation of the word "cross." These are telltale signs of a scribe who belonged to the Christian community. Furthermore, the large typeface indicates that the manuscript was composed to be read aloud. The scribe even added a system of sectional divisions to aid any would-be lector. Thus, we have a manuscript written by a Christian for other Christians.

There are several indications of the scribe's Alexandrian orientation. First and foremost is his **scriptorial** acumen. He is the best of all the early Christian scribes, and his manuscript is an extremely accurate copy. ⲡ<sup>75</sup> is the "result of a single force: namely the disciplined scribe who writes with the intention of being careful and accurate. There is no evidence of revision of his work by anyone else, or in fact of any real revision, or check. . . . The control had been drilled into the scribe before he started writing."<sup>1</sup>

Calvin Porter established the fact that ⲡ<sup>75</sup> displays the kind of text that was used in making Codex Vaticanus. Porter demonstrated 87 percent agreement between ⲡ<sup>75</sup> and Vaticanus.<sup>2</sup> In general, textual scholars have a high regard for the textual fidelity of ⲡ<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Colwell, "Scribal Habits," 119–121.

<sup>2</sup> Porter, "Papyrus Bodmer XV."

### Other Important Papyrus Manuscripts

℘<sup>4</sup> + ℘<sup>64</sup> + ℘<sup>67</sup> (*fragments of the same codex*) ℘<sup>4</sup> was discovered in Coptos (modern Qift), Egypt, on the east bank of the Nile, by Fr. V. Scheil during his expedition to Upper Egypt in 1889. This codex, the work of an accomplished scribe, displays a text which was very much like the exemplar used for Codex Vaticanus.

℘<sup>64</sup> was first purchased by Rev. Charles B. Huleatt in Luxor, Egypt, in 1901 and then given to the Magdalene College Library in Oxford, where it was examined by Colin Roberts, who then published it in 1953. A few years later, P. Roca-Puig published a papyrus fragment known as ℘<sup>67</sup>. Colin Roberts realized that ℘<sup>67</sup> was from the same manuscript as ℘<sup>64</sup>. Further analysis by various scholars has revealed that ℘<sup>4</sup>, ℘<sup>64</sup>, and ℘<sup>67</sup> all belong to the same codex, which can be dated to the mid-second century (ca. 150). Thus, this is one of the earliest Gospel codices. The textual character of this codex is clearly proto-Alexandrian. Where ℘<sup>4</sup> and ℘<sup>75</sup> overlap, there is great agreement.

℘<sup>4</sup> contains portions of Luke (1:58-59; 1:62-2:1, 6-7; 3:8-4:2, 29-32, 34-35; 5:3-8; 5:30-6:16). ℘<sup>64</sup> and ℘<sup>67</sup> preserve small portions of Matthew (Matt. 3:9, 15; 5:20-22, 25-28; 26:7-8, 10, 14-15, 22-23, 31-33).

℘<sup>32</sup> (*Papyrus Rylands 5*) This manuscript, preserving Titus 1:11-15; 2:3-8, is dated ca. 150-175, making it the earliest extant copy of any of the Pastoral Epistles. Codex Sinaiticus largely agrees with ℘<sup>32</sup>.

℘<sup>40</sup> (*Papyrus Heidelberg 645*) This third-century manuscript has portions of Romans (1:24-27; 1:31-2:3; 3:21-4:8; 6:2-5, 15-16; 9:16-17, 27). A previously unidentified fragment (Rom. 6:2-4a and 6:15) has been reconstructed by Comfort and Barrett.<sup>1\*</sup> ℘<sup>40</sup> shows a proto-Alexandrian text type.

<sup>1</sup> Comfort and Barrett, *Earliest New Testament Manuscripts*, 140-144.

ⲩ<sup>52</sup> (*Papyrus Rylands 457*) This fragment, containing John 18:31-34, 37-38, is noteworthy because of its date: ca. A.D. 110–125. Many scholars (Kenyon, H. I. Bell, Deissmann, and W. H. P. Hatch) have confirmed this dating. And remarkably, it resembles many manuscripts with dates around 90–120: P. Fayyum 110 (94), P. Egerton 2 (110–130), and P. London 2078 (reign of Domitian, ca. 81–96). ⲩ<sup>52</sup> came from Fayyum or from Oxyrhynchus. It was acquired in 1920 by Grenfell, but it remained unnoticed among hundreds of papyri until 1934, when C. H. Roberts recognized that this scrap preserves a few verses from John's Gospel.<sup>1</sup>

ⲩ<sup>87</sup> (*P. Col theol. 12*) This small fragment preserves Philemon 13-15, 24-25. It has to be dated concurrently with ⲩ<sup>46</sup> (early second century), because the handwriting of the two manuscripts is virtually identical. ⲩ<sup>87</sup>, therefore, is the earliest extant fragment of Philemon.

ⲩ<sup>98</sup> (*P. IFAO inv. 237b, from Institut Francais d'Archeologie Orientale*) This fragment contains Rev. 1:13–2:1. Dated to the second century, it is the earliest fragment of Revelation.

## UNCIAL MANUSCRIPTS

The manuscripts typically classified as **uncial** (meaning written in capital letters) are so designated to differentiate them from papyrus manuscripts. This is actually a misnomer, because the real difference has to do, not with the kind of lettering used, but with the material they are written on—vellum or parchment (treated animal hide), rather than papyrus. The papyri were also written in uncials (capital letters), but the

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<sup>1</sup> Roberts, *Unpublished Fragment*. This was republished with a few alterations in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* XX (1936), 45-55; and then again in the *Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library* III (Manchester: 1938), 1-3. The last publication contains critical notes and bibliography of scholarly reviews.

term *uncial* typically describes the **majuscule** (capital) lettering that was prominent in fourth-century biblical texts written on parchment or vellum.

### Significant Uncial Manuscripts

*0189 (Parchment Berlin 11765)* This manuscript, containing Acts 5:3-21, is dated late second or early third century, making it the earliest parchment manuscript of the New Testament. The manuscript was produced by an experienced scribe, and the text nearly always agrees with the Alexandrian witnesses.

*Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲛ or Aleph)* Codex Sinaiticus contains the entire Old Testament, and the entire New Testament in this order: Four Gospels, Pauline Epistles (including Hebrews), Acts, General Epistles, Revelation. It also includes the *Epistle of Barnabas* and the *Shepherd of Hermes*. The manuscript contains 346 leaves of fine parchment, written in four columns. The codex cannot be earlier than 340 (the year Eusebius died) because the Eusebian sections of the text are indicated in the margins of the Gospels by a contemporary hand. Most scholars date it ca. 350–375.

Codex Sinaiticus was discovered by Constantin von Tischendorf in St. Catherine's Monastery (situated at the foot of Mount Sinai). On a visit to the monastery in 1844, he noticed in

ΠΑΡΑΚΑΛΩ ΔΕ ΥΜΑΣ  
 ΑΔΕΛΦΟΙ ΑΝΕΧΕ  
 ΣΘΕΤΟ ΥΛΟΓΟΥΤΗ  
 ΠΑΡΑΚΛΗΣΕΩΣ ΚΑΙ ΤΩ  
 ΔΙΑΒΡΑΧΕΩΝ ΕΠΕ  
 ΣΤΙΛΑ ΥΜΙΝ

FIGURE 2.2: Codex Sinaiticus. Fourth Century. Hebrews 13:22.

a wastebasket some parchment leaves that were being used to light the lamps. He was allowed to take this wastepaper, which proved to be forty-three leaves from various parts of the Greek translation of the Old Testament. He was shown other sections of the Old Testament but was not allowed to have them.

In 1853 he made a second trip to the monastery and found nothing. In 1859, however, on his third trip, he found not only other parts of the Old Testament, but also the complete New Testament. He was finally able to persuade the monastery authorities to present the manuscript to the Czar, the great patron of the Greek Catholic Church, who placed it in the Imperial Library in St. Petersburg. The Czar gave great honors to the monastery and its authorities, and everybody seemed well pleased. Later, Tischendorf was charged with having stolen the manuscript from its lawful owners, but the better textual scholars do not accept that story.

The manuscript remained in the Imperial Library until 1933, when it was purchased by the British Museum for the huge sum of one hundred thousand pounds. Textual criticism made the headlines when one manuscript was bought for a half million dollars, raised largely by public subscription during the Great Depression. The manuscript is now on display in the manuscript room of the Museum, where it is considered one of the Museum's most prized possessions.<sup>1</sup>

The text of Sinaiticus is very closely related to that of Codex Vaticanus. They agree in presenting the purest type of text, usually called the **Neutral** (sometimes Alexandrian) type. Tischendorf greatly used the textual evidence of Codex Sinaiticus in preparing his critical editions of the Greek New

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<sup>1</sup> Tischendorf issued an edition of this codex printed in facsimile type in 1862: *Codex Sinaiticus Petropolitanus*. Other important volumes on this manuscript are Scrivener, *Full Collation of Codex Sinaiticus*; Lake and Lake, *Codex Sinaiticus*; Milne and Skeat, *Scribes and Correctors of Codex Sinaiticus*; and Milne and Skeat, *Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus*.

Testament. Codex Sinaiticus provides a fairly reliable witness to the New Testament; however, the scribe was not as careful as the scribe of Vaticanus. He was more prone to error and to creative emendation.

*Codex Alexandrinus (A)* Codex Alexandrinus is one of the three most important codices preserving an early copy of the whole Bible in Greek (the other two being the Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus). The name “Alexandrinus” comes from ancient records suggesting that it was copied in Alexandria, Egypt, during the early part of the fifth century A.D.

The early history of this manuscript and its Egyptian provenance is partially revealed by its flyleaves. A note by Cyril of Lucar (patriarch of Alexandria, and then of Constantinople in the 1620s) states that, according to tradition, it was written by Thecla, a noble lady of Egypt, shortly after the council of Nicea (325), and that her name was originally inscribed at the end of the volume, but the last page was lost due to mutilation. An Arabic note of the thirteenth or fourteenth century also says that the manuscript was written by “Thecla the martyr.” Another Arabic note says that it was presented to the patriarchal cell of Alexandria (ca. 1098). Cyril of Lucar took the manuscript from Alexandria to Constantinople in 1621 and then gave it to Charles I of England in 1627, where it became part of the Royal Library, then later the British Museum.

Only 773 of the original estimated 820 pages still exist.

ΤΤΡΟΣ ΕΧΕΤΕ ΕΑΥΤΟΙΣ ΚΑΙ ΤΑΝΤΩ  
 ΤΤΟΙΜΝΙΩ ΕΝΩΨΜΑΣΤΟ ΤΗΝ ΑΘ  
 ΑΓΙΟΝ ΕΘΕΤΟ ΕΤΙ ΚΟΤΤΟΥΣ  
 ΤΤΟΙΜΑΙΝΕΙΝ ΤΗΝ ΕΚ ΚΛΗΣΙΑΝ

FIGURE 2.3: Codex Alexandrinus. Fifth Century. Acts 20:28.

The rest were lost as the book was passed down through the centuries. The surviving parts of Alexandrinus contain a Greek translation of the whole Old Testament, the Apocrypha (including four books of Maccabees and Psalm 151), most of the New Testament, and some early Christian writings (of which the First and Second Epistles of Clement to the Corinthians are the most important).

Evidently, the scribe(s) of this codex used exemplars of varying quality for various sections of the New Testament. The exemplar used for the Gospels was of poor quality, reflecting a Byzantine text type. Alexandrinus's testimony in the Epistles is much better, and in Revelation it provides the best witness to the original text.<sup>1</sup>

*Codex Vaticanus (B)* This manuscript has been in the Vatican's library since at least 1475, but it was only made available to scholars, such as Tischendorf and Tregelles, in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Certain textual evidence points to Egypt (and Alexandria) as the place of production. Vaticanus's order and inclusion of New Testament books completely coincides with that found in the description provided by Athanasius (bishop of Alexandria), as found in his *Festal Letter* (dated 367): Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1—3 John, Jude, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Hebrews, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Revelation. Also, the titles of some of the books in Codex Vaticanus contain letters of distinctly Coptic character.

At one time, the codex originally contained the whole Greek

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<sup>1</sup> E. M. Thompson published the *Facsimile of the Codex Alexandrinus*. See also Milne and Skeat, *Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus*.



In 1881, B. F. Westcott and A. J. Hort published their critical edition of the Greek New Testament, largely based on the evidence of Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus. Virtually all textual scholars since that time have recognized this “Neutral” type of text as a very early and very pure text, an extremely accurate reproduction of what the original text must have been. Westcott and Hort called it a second century text accurate in 999 out of 1,000 words, so far as any matter of translatable difference is concerned. Codices Sinaiticus (Ⲙ) and Vaticanus (B) are the finest examples of this type of text, but this text type is also found in a few other Greek uncial manuscripts, a few of the early translations (called **versions**), and in the writings of a few of the early church fathers. Westcott and Hort’s theory has since been confirmed by the discovery of papyrus manuscripts, notably the Bodmer Papyri.

The scribe of Codex Vaticanus did his task with rote fidelity. This is underscored by Westcott and Hort’s comments about this scribe’s copying habits:

The final impression produced by a review of all the trustworthy signs is of patient and rather dull or mechanical type of transcription, subject now and then to the ordinary lapses which come from flagging watchfulness, but happily guiltless of ingenuity or other untimely activity of brain, and indeed unaffected by mental influences except of the most limited and unconscious kind.<sup>1</sup>

*Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (C)* This codex is a **palimpsest** (the original writing was erased and different words written on the same material). It originally contained the entire Bible, but now has only parts of six Old Testament books and portions of every

<sup>1</sup> Westcott and Hort, *Introduction*, 321.

FIGURE 2.5: Codex Bezae (Greek). Fifth Century. Luke 6:1.

New Testament book except 2 Thessalonians and 2 John. The single-column Bible text, written in the fifth century A.D., was erased in the twelfth century and replaced by a two-column text of a Greek translation of sermons or treatises by a certain Ephraem, a fourth-century Syrian church leader. Such practice was common in periods of economic depression or when parchment was scarce. Using chemicals and ultraviolet light, Tischendorf was able to read much of the erased documents.<sup>1</sup>

The text of this manuscript is mixed—it is compounded from all the major text types, agreeing frequently with the later Byzantine type, which most scholars regard as the least valuable type of New Testament text.

*Codex Bezae (D)* This is a Greek-Latin **diglot** containing Matthew—Acts and 3 John, with lacunae. Most scholars date it to the late fourth or early fifth century (ca. 400). Some scholars think this codex was produced in either Egypt or North Africa by a scribe whose mother tongue was Latin. D. C. Parker argues that it was copied in Beirut, a center of Latin legal studies during the fifth century, where both Latin and Greek were used. Evidently, it was produced by a scribe who knew Latin better than Greek, and then was corrected by several scribes.<sup>2</sup> The codex ended up in the hands of Theodore Beza, French scholar and successor to John Calvin. Beza gave it to the Cambridge University Library in 1581.

<sup>1</sup> See Tischendorf, *Ephraemi Syri rescriptus*. See also Lyon, "Ephraemi Rescriptus." Lyon provides a list of corrections to Tischendorf's work.

<sup>2</sup> See Parker, *Codex Bezae*.

This codex is probably the most controversial of the New Testament uncials because of its marked independence. Its many additions, omissions, and alterations (especially in Luke and Acts) are the work of a significant theologian. A few earlier manuscripts (P<sup>29</sup>(?), P<sup>38</sup>, P<sup>48</sup>, and 0171) appear to be precursors to the type of text found in D, which is considered the principal witness of the Western, or D-type, text. (The fifth-century papyrus, P<sup>112</sup>, also has a D-text.) Thus, Codex Bezae could be a copy of an earlier revised edition. The redactor must have been a scholar who had a propensity for adding historical, biographical, and geographical details. More than anything, he was intent on filling in gaps in the narrative by adding circumstantial details.

*Codex Freerianus or the Washington Codex of Paul's Epistles (I)* This fifth-century codex contains Paul's epistles and Hebrews (1 Cor.—Heb.). The manuscript, which was a blackened and decayed lump of parchment as hard and brittle on the exterior as glue, was in the hands of a Gizeh dealer, Sheikh Ali Abdel Hai el Arabi, in the autumn of 1906, according to Grenfell and Hunt. It was purchased in December of 1906 by Charles Freer, then carefully separated and examined by H. A. Sanders.<sup>1</sup> The manuscript is Alexandrian, showing more agreement with Codices Sinaiticus (S) and Alexandrinus (A) than with Codex Vaticanus (B).

*Codex Washingtonianus or The Freer Gospels—named after its owner, Charles Freer (W)* This codex, dated to ca. A.D. 400, has the four Gospels and Acts. The handwriting is quite similar to that found in a fifth-century fragment of the book of Enoch found at Akhmim in 1886.

Codex W was copied from a parent manuscript (exemplar) that had been pieced together from several different manu-

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<sup>1</sup> See Sanders, *Freer Collection: Part II*.

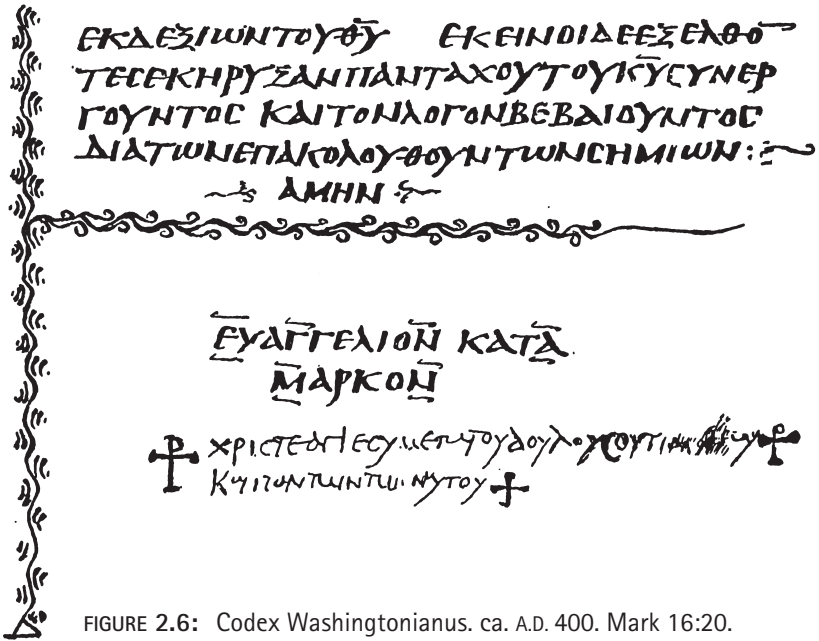


FIGURE 2.6: Codex Washingtonianus. ca. A.D. 400. Mark 16:20.

scripts. Sanders suggested that the parent manuscript was probably put together shortly after the Diocletian persecution, when manuscripts of the New Testament were scarce. The text came from North Africa (the “Western” text) for the first part of Mark, and the scribe of W used manuscripts from Antioch for Matthew and the second part of Luke to fill the gaps in the more ancient manuscript, which he was copying. Detailed textual analysis reveals the variegated textual stratifications of W, as follows: in Matthew the text is Byzantine; in Mark the text is first Western (1:1–5:30), then Caesarean in Mark 5:31–16:20 (akin to  $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$ ); in Luke the text is first Alexandrian (1:1–8:12) then Byzantine. John is more complicated. This first section of John has a mixture of Alexandrian and Western readings, as does the rest of John.

The extreme textual variation in this manuscript reveals the tremendous liberties the scribes (of the exemplar and of W

itself) exerted in producing the codex. They not only selected various exemplars of various portions of each Gospel (as many as seven different exemplars), they also harmonized and filled in textual gaps.<sup>1</sup>

## ASSESSING THE MANUSCRIPTS

Westcott and Hort, followed by Colwell,<sup>2</sup> urged that knowledge of documents must precede all decisions about textual variants. They insisted that a textual critic must know the scribal tendencies at work in each manuscript before using that manuscript to make a decision about a reading. For example, if the scribe for a particular manuscript was prone to prune phrases, a textual critic should be wary about citing this manuscript in support of a shorter reading as being original. Each scribe, as a reader of a manuscript, tended to treat that manuscript a particular way. Some scribes tended to lengthen a text with explanatory phrases. Other scribes tended to shorten a text by editing. Still others tended to make certain types of unintentional errors in the process of copying the manuscript. Clearly, knowledge about the particular scribal tendencies of the scribe who produced a particular manuscript must precede all decisions about readings. A textual critic can then take this knowledge and apply it to the task of textual criticism.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, textual critics have been able to identify some of the very best manuscripts—with respect to textual purity. At the top of the list is  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$ . It is well-known that the text produced by the scribe of  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$  is very pure. The scribe was a trained professional, who made very few errors and who refrained from making intentional changes. The text of  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$ ,

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<sup>1</sup> See Sanders, *Freer Collection: Part I*.

<sup>2</sup> Westcott and Hort, *Introduction*, 17; Colwell, "Hort Redivivus," 152.

<sup>3</sup> For a complete development of this concept, see Comfort, *Scribe as Interpreter*.

when compared to other texts, is obviously superior; it represents the best of Alexandrian scribal workmanship.

It is also well-known that  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$  was the kind of manuscript used in formulating Codex Vaticanus (B)—the readings of  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$  and Vaticanus are remarkably similar. Prior to the discovery of  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$ , certain scholars thought Codex Vaticanus was the work of a fourth-century **recension** (a purposely-created edition); others (chiefly Hort) thought it must trace back to a very early and accurate copy. Hort said that Codex Vaticanus preserves “not only a very ancient text, but a very pure line of a very ancient text.”<sup>1</sup>  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$  (which was not discovered until after Hort) appears to have shown that Hort was right.

Prior to the discovery of  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$  in the late 1950s, many textual scholars were convinced that the second- and third-century papyri displayed a text in flux, a text characterized only by individual independence. The Chester Beatty Papyrus ( $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$ ) and the Bodmer Papyri ( $\mathfrak{P}^{66}$  and  $\mathfrak{P}^{72}$  in 2 Peter and Jude) show this kind of independence. Scholars thought that scribes at Alexandria must have used several such texts to produce a good recension—as is exhibited in Codex Vaticanus.

But we now know that Codex Vaticanus was not the result of a scholarly recension, resulting from editorial selection across the various textual histories. Rather, it is now quite clear that Codex Vaticanus was simply a copy (with some modifications) of a manuscript much like  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$ . Gordon Fee argued this very effectively in an article appropriately titled “ $\mathfrak{P}^{76}$ ,  $\mathfrak{P}^{66}$ , and Origen: The Myth of Early Textual Recension in Alexandria,” in which Fee showed that there was no Alexandrian recension before the time of  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$  (late second century) and Codex Vaticanus (early fourth) and that both these manuscripts

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<sup>1</sup> Westcott and Hort, *Introduction*, 250-251.

“seem to represent a ‘relatively pure’ form of preservation of a ‘relatively pure’ line of descent from the original text.”<sup>1</sup>

Some scholars may point out that this does not automatically mean that  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$  and Vaticanus represent the original text. What it does mean, they say, is that we have a second-century manuscript showing great affinity with a fourth-century manuscript whose quality has been highly esteemed. Other scholars, such as Eldon Epp,<sup>2</sup> have argued that the high esteem accredited to  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$  and to Vaticanus comes only from a subjective assessment of their relative purity in comparison to other manuscripts.

However, textual critics who have worked with many actual manuscripts, collating and doing textual analysis, and who have thereby seen firsthand the kind of errors, expansions, harmonizations, and interpolations that are present in other manuscripts, are convinced that manuscripts like  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$  and B represent the best of textual purity. This was Westcott’s and Hort’s assessment of B, after twenty years of study. This was Kurt Aland’s assessment of  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$ , after many years of study. Scores of other scholars have come to the same conclusion.

The current view about the early text is that certain scribes in Alexandria and/or scribes familiar with Alexandrian scriptural practices (perhaps such as the scribes in Oxyrhynchus) were probably responsible for maintaining a relatively pure text throughout the second, third, and fourth centuries. The work of textual preservation was probably done here and there by various individual scribes or in small Christian **scriptoria** such as the one established by Pantaneus in Alexandria around 180.

Many manuscripts were produced in accordance with Alex-

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon Fee, “ $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$ ,  $\mathfrak{P}^{66}$ , and Origen.”

<sup>2</sup> Epp, “Twentieth Century Interlude.”

andrian scriptural standards in the early centuries of the church. Other manuscripts, however, were produced with a great deal of freedom. One particular scribe/scholar in the late second century produced an edition of the Gospels and Acts that is now known as the D-text. This theologically-minded **re-dactor** (editor) created a **text type** (text family) that had short-lived popularity—reaching its culmination with Codex Bezae (denoted as D). Three third-century papyri— $\mathfrak{P}^{29}$ ,  $\mathfrak{P}^{38}$ ,  $\mathfrak{P}^{48}$ , each containing a portion from the book of Acts—may be early copies of the D-type text in Acts. But there are other papyri containing portions of Acts that provide even earlier testimony to a purer form of Acts—namely,  $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$  (early third century) and  $\mathfrak{P}^{91}$  (ca. 200), thereby showing that the D-type text of Acts did not necessarily antedate the purer form.

Another kind of text seemed to have developed in the late second century. This is known as the “Western” text. The “Western” text was given its name because this type of text circulated in western countries like North Africa, Italy, and Gaul. However, “Western” is probably a misnomer inasmuch as manuscripts that have been classified “Western” are so named usually on the basis that they are non-Alexandrian. E. C. Colwell has said, “The so-called Western text or Delta type text is the uncontrolled, popular edition of the second century. It has no unity and should not be referred to as the ‘Western text.’”<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, other scholars still speak of a Western text, and still argue that the “Western” form of text is as early as the Alexandrian, for it was used by Marcion, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Cyprian—all of whom were alive in the second century. Unfortunately, we do not possess as many early “Western” manuscripts as those called “Alexandrian.” (The climate of

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<sup>1</sup> Colwell, “Hort Redivivus.”

the western regions of the Mediterranean is hardly as good as that of Egypt for preserving ancient documents.) Though the “Western” text was early, it is characterized as being uncontrolled and interpolative. Westcott and Hort characterized the “Western” text as one in which the scribes had a “disposition to enrich the text at the cost of its purity by alterations or additions taken from traditional and perhaps from apocryphal and other non-biblical sources.”<sup>1</sup>

Some scholars, such as Epp,<sup>2</sup> have argued that the negative assessment of the Western text is subjectively biased, in that the Western text is criticized by those who favor a shorter text, as is usually found in the Alexandrian manuscripts. However, the actual practice of textual criticism has convinced the majority of scholars that the Western text is notoriously expansive. Two of the leading textual critics of our time, Kurt Aland and Bruce Metzger, have affirmed this by their experience of trying to reconstruct the original text of the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> No one yet has convincingly argued that the original text was longer and then was trimmed by editors. Instead, the opposite is the rule of thumb with ancient manuscripts, as is recognized by textual scholars working with all kinds of ancient texts, not just the New Testament.

In the final analysis, the manuscripts that represent a pure preservation of the original text are usually those called “Alexandrian.” Some scholars, such as Metzger, have called the earlier manuscripts **proto-Alexandrian**, for they (or manuscripts like them) are thought of as being used to compose an Alexandrian type text. However, this is looking at things backwards—from the perspective of the fourth century. We should look at

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<sup>1</sup> Westcott and Hort, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, 134.

<sup>2</sup> Epp, *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> See Aland and Aland, *Text of the New Testament*; and Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*.

things forwardly—from the second century onward—and then compare fourth century manuscripts to those of the second. The second-century manuscripts could still be called “Alexandrian” in the sense that they were produced under Alexandrian influences. Perhaps a distinguishing terminology could be “early Alexandrian” (pre-Constantine) and “later Alexandrian” (post-Constantine). Manuscripts designated as “early Alexandrian” would generally be purer, less editorialized. Manuscripts designated “later Alexandrian” would display editorialization, as well as the influence of other textual traditions. Generally speaking, the “Western” text is not as trustworthy as the Alexandrian text type. But because the later Alexandrian text is known as a polished text, the “Western” or popular text sometimes preserves the original wording. When a variant reading has the support of “Western” texts *and* early Alexandrian texts, it could very likely be original; but when the two are divided, the Alexandrian witnesses more often preserve the original wording.

The “early Alexandrian” text is reflected in many second- and third-century manuscripts. As has been mentioned previously, on the top of the list is  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$  (ca. 175–200), the work of a competent and careful scribe. Not far behind in quality is  $\mathfrak{P}^4 + \mathfrak{P}^{64} + \mathfrak{P}^{67}$  (ca. 150), the work of an excellent copyist. Other extremely good copies are  $\mathfrak{P}^1$  (third c.),  $\mathfrak{P}^{20}$  (early third c.),  $\mathfrak{P}^{23}$  (ca. 200),  $\mathfrak{P}^{27}$  (third c.),  $\mathfrak{P}^{28}$  (third c.),  $\mathfrak{P}^{32}$  (ca. 150),  $\mathfrak{P}^{39}$  (third c.),  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  (ca. 125),  $\mathfrak{P}^{65}$  (third c.),  $\mathfrak{P}^{66}$  (in its corrected form— $\mathfrak{P}^{66^e}$ ; ca. 150),  $\mathfrak{P}^{70}$  (third c.),  $\mathfrak{P}^{77}$  (ca. 150),  $\mathfrak{P}^{87}$  (ca. 125),  $\mathfrak{P}^{90}$  (ca. 175),  $\mathfrak{P}^{91}$  (ca. 200),  $\mathfrak{P}^{100}$  (third c.),  $\mathfrak{P}^{104}$  (ca. 150). The “later Alexandrian” text, which displays editorial polishing, is exhibited in a few manuscripts, such as A (fourth century), T (fifth century),  $\Psi$  (seventh century), L (eighth century), 33 (ninth century), 1739 (a tenth-century manuscript copied from a fourth-century Alexandrian manuscript much like  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$ ), and 579 (thirteenth century).

In addition to the “Western,” Alexandrian, and D-text types, many manuscripts fall into the Byzantine text type. The Byzantine text likely traces back to the work of Lucian of Antioch (in Syria). According to Jerome, Lucian compared different readings of the New Testament with those with which he was acquainted and produced a revised form of the text. This revised text soon became very popular, not only at Antioch, where Lucian worked, but also at Constantinople and eventually all over the Mediterranean area. From what can be judged in later manuscripts bearing a “Lucianic” text, Lucian’s work was the first major recension of the Greek New Testament. This recension involved a great deal of harmonization (especially in the Gospels), emendation, and some interpolation.

From the fourth century onward, Lucian’s recension became the most prevailing type of text throughout the Greek-speaking world. In fact, it became (with minor modifications) the received text of the Greek Orthodox Church. From the fourth until the eighth century, the Byzantine text was revised even further until it was nearly standardized. From then on, almost all Greek manuscripts followed the Byzantine text, including those manuscripts that were used by Erasmus in compiling his edition of the Greek New Testament (which became the basis of the English King James Version, discussed in later chapters).

Beginning in the fifth century, Byzantine-type manuscripts began to make their influence in Egypt. Some manuscripts dated around 400 that came from Egypt clearly reflect this influence. Codex Alexandrinus (A), in the Gospels, is probably the best example. Other Egyptian manuscripts of this era, such as Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲭ) and Codex Washingtonianus (W) display large-scale harmonization in the Gospels, which cannot be directly linked to any kind of recension.

## NEW TESTAMENT TEXTUAL CRITICISM

The primary task of the textual critic is to examine the evidence of the **extant manuscripts** in an effort to determine—among all the **variant readings**—what the original wording was. The task of textual criticism (resulting in the creation of new editions of the Greek New Testament) has been going on intensely for the past three hundred years.

I do not think there is any way to be certain of recovering the original wording of the autographs. But I do think the wording of the originally “published” texts of the New Testament can be recovered through the disciplines of textual criticism. This is a position I made clear in the very first page of *The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament*:

When I speak of the original text, I am referring to the “published” text—that is, the text as it was in its final edited form and released for circulation in the Christian community. For some books of the New Testament, there is little difference between the original composition and the published text. After the author wrote or dictated his work, he (or an associate) made the final editorial corrections and then released it for distribution. As is the case for books published in modern times, so in ancient times—the original writing of the author is not always the same as what is published, due to the editorial process. Nonetheless, the author is credited with the final edited text, and the published book is attributed to the author and considered the autograph. This autograph is the original published text.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Comfort, *Quest for the Original Text*.

When we speak of recovering the text of the New Testament, we need to go about that task on a book-by-book basis, because each book (or group of books—such as the Pauline Epistles) had its own unique history of textual transmission. The earliest extant copy of an entire New Testament text is the one preserved in Codex Sinaiticus (written about 375). Codex Vaticanus (written about 350) contains most of the New Testament but lacks the Pastoral Epistles and Revelation. Prior to the fourth century, the New Testament was circulated in its various parts as a single book or a group of books (such as the four Gospels or the Pauline Epistles). Manuscripts from the second century to the third century have been found with individual books, such as Matthew (P<sup>1</sup>, P<sup>77</sup>), Mark (P<sup>88</sup>), Luke (P<sup>69</sup>), John (P<sup>5, 22, 52, 66, 90</sup>), Acts (P<sup>91</sup>), Revelation (P<sup>18, 47, 98, 115</sup>). Manuscripts have also been found containing groups of books, such as the four Gospels with Acts (P<sup>45</sup>), the Pauline Epistles (P<sup>30, 46, 92</sup>), or Peter's epistles and Jude (P<sup>72</sup>). Each of the books of the New Testament has had its own textual history and has been preserved with varying degrees of accuracy. Nonetheless, all of the books were altered from their original state due to the process of manual copying decade after decade and century after century. So the text of each of the books, individually, needs to be recovered.

Since none of the autographs for any of the New Testament books are extant, scholars have to rely on copies to recover or reconstruct the original wording. Some scholars think it is impossible to recover the original text of the Greek New Testament because they have not been able to reconstruct the early history of textual transmission. Other modern scholars are less pessimistic but still guarded in affirming the possibility. And yet others are optimistic because we possess many

early manuscripts of excellent quality and because our view of the early period of textual transmission has been getting clearer and clearer.

### THE CANONS OF CRITICISM

Most modern textual critics use one rule of thumb or **canon** as they go about doing the task of recovering the original wording of the text. They try to abide by the rule that *the reading that is most likely original is the one that best explains the variants*. This canon is actually a development of Bengel's maxim (1855:xiii), *proclivi scriptoni praestat ardua* ("the harder reading is to be preferred"), a maxim he formulated in responding to his own question as to which variant reading is likely to have arisen out of the others.

This overarching canon for **internal criticism** involves several criteria, which various scholars have posited and implemented during the past three hundred years of New Testament textual criticism. Having made a thorough historical survey of the development of canons for internal criticism, Eldon Epp summarized all the criteria as follows:

1. A variant's status as the shorter or shortest reading.
2. A variant's status as the harder or hardest reading.
3. A variant's fitness to account for the origin, development, or presence of all other readings.
4. A variant's conformity to the author's style and vocabulary.
5. A variant's conformity to the author's theology or ideology.
6. A variant's conformity to koiné (rather than Attic) Greek.
7. A variant's conformity to Semitic forms of expression.

8. A variant's lack of conformity to parallel passages or to extraneous items in its context generally.
9. A variant's lack of conformity to Old Testament passages.
10. A variant's lack of conformity to liturgical forms and usages.
11. A variant's lack of conformity to extrinsic doctrinal views.<sup>1</sup>

It should be admitted that some of these criteria are problematic when implemented. Two textual critics, using the same principle to examine the same variant, will not always agree. For example, with respect to the fourth canon, one critic will argue that a particular variant was produced by a copyist attempting to emulate the author's style; the other critic will claim the same variant has to be original because it accords with the author's style. And with respect to the fifth canon, one will argue that one variant was produced by an orthodox scribe attempting to rid the text of a reading that could be used to promote heterodoxy or heresy; another will claim that the same variant has to be original because it is orthodox and accords with Christian doctrine (thus a heterodox or heretical scribe must have changed it).

Furthermore, internal criticism allows for the possibility that the reading selected for the text can be taken from any manuscript of any date. This produces subjective eclecticism. Those who advocate "thoroughgoing eclecticism," such as Kilpatrick and Boismard, have argued for the legitimacy of certain variant readings on the basis of internal criticism alone. The readings they favor do have some manuscript support, but often those readings come from one Latin version (versus all

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<sup>1</sup> Epp, "Eclectic Method," 243.

Greek witnesses), or a late minuscule, or the testimony of some church father.

Modern textual scholars try to temper the subjectivism of purely internal criticism by employing a method called “reasoned eclecticism.” According to Michael Holmes,

Reasoned eclecticism applies a combination of internal and external considerations, evaluating the character of the variants in light of the manuscript evidence and vice versa in order to obtain a balanced view of the matter and as a check upon purely subjective tendencies.<sup>1</sup>

Kurt Aland favors the same kind of approach, calling it the **local-genealogical method**, which is defined as follows (italics mine):

It is impossible to proceed from the assumption of a **manuscript stemma**, and on the basis of a full review and analysis of the relationships obtaining among the variety of interrelated branches in the manuscript tradition, to undertake a **recensio** of the data as one would do with other Greek texts. Decisions must be made one by one, instance by instance. This method has been characterized as eclecticism, but wrongly so. After carefully establishing the variety of readings offered in a passage and the possibilities of their interpretation, it must always then be determined afresh on the basis of external and internal criteria which of these readings (and frequently they are quite numerous) is the original, from which the others may

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<sup>1</sup> Holmes, “New Testament Textual Criticism,” 53.

be regarded as derivative. From the perspective of our present knowledge, this local-genealogical method (if it must be given a name) is the only one which meets the requirements of the New Testament textual tradition.<sup>1</sup>

The local-genealogical method assumes that for any given **variation unit**, any manuscript (or manuscripts) may have preserved the original text.

The danger of doing textual criticism on the basis of the local-genealogical method is that the editors must decide on a word-by-word basis what the authors most likely wrote. This, of course, verges on claiming knowledge of the author's original intentions. But no one can do this with any degree of certainty. Those who say they can, run the risk of falling prey to the well-known **intentional fallacy**, as postulated by Wimsatt and Beardsley.<sup>2</sup>

The other problem with the local-genealogical method is that it produces an uneven documentary presentation of the text. For the first half of a verse, the evidence of Codex Vaticanus is followed; for the second half, Vaticanus is rejected in favor of Beza. And so on.

## EDITIONS OF THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT USED TODAY

Most scholars and translators today use one of two modern critical editions of the Greek New Testament: the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* and/or the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament*. These editions are described as **critical editions** because the text they contain is not a copy of any one manuscript; instead, the text is the result of modern textual scholarship.

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<sup>1</sup> Aland *et al.*, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (26<sup>th</sup> ed.), 43.

<sup>2</sup> Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy."

It must be remembered that the modern critical editions of the Greek New Testament were never read by any ancient reader. Nonetheless, these are the two critical editions of the Greek New Testament that scholars and translators use today because most modern scholars, endorsing the eclectic method, believe that these editions most accurately represent the original text of the New Testament.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Eberhard Nestle used the best editions of the Greek New Testament produced in the nineteenth century to compile a text that represented the majority consensus. The work of making new editions was carried on by his son for several years, and then came under the care of Kurt Aland. The latest edition (the 27<sup>th</sup>) of Nestle-Aland's *Novum Testamentum Graece* appeared in 1993. The same Greek text appears in another popular volume published by the United Bible Societies, called the *Greek New Testament* (fourth revised edition, 1993). These two volumes, which have the same text but differ as to punctuation and textual notes, represent the best in modern textual scholarship.

Aland has argued that the Nestle-Aland text, 27<sup>th</sup> edition (denoted as NA<sup>27</sup>), comes closer to the original text of the New Testament than did Tischendorf or Westcott and Hort. And in several writings he intimates that NA<sup>27</sup> may very well be the original text. Though few, if any, scholars would agree with this, the twenty-seventh edition of the Nestle-Aland text is regarded by many as representing the latest and best in textual scholarship. One can be assured that most of the wording in the text is what the writers of the New Testament actually wrote; and if the editors got it wrong, the correct reading can be found in the critical apparatus. Though many modern English translators use these texts, none does so

slavishly. The translators usually apply their own eclecticism in adopting or rejecting what is printed in these critical editions. Marginal notes usually inform the attentive reader about variant readings in other manuscripts.