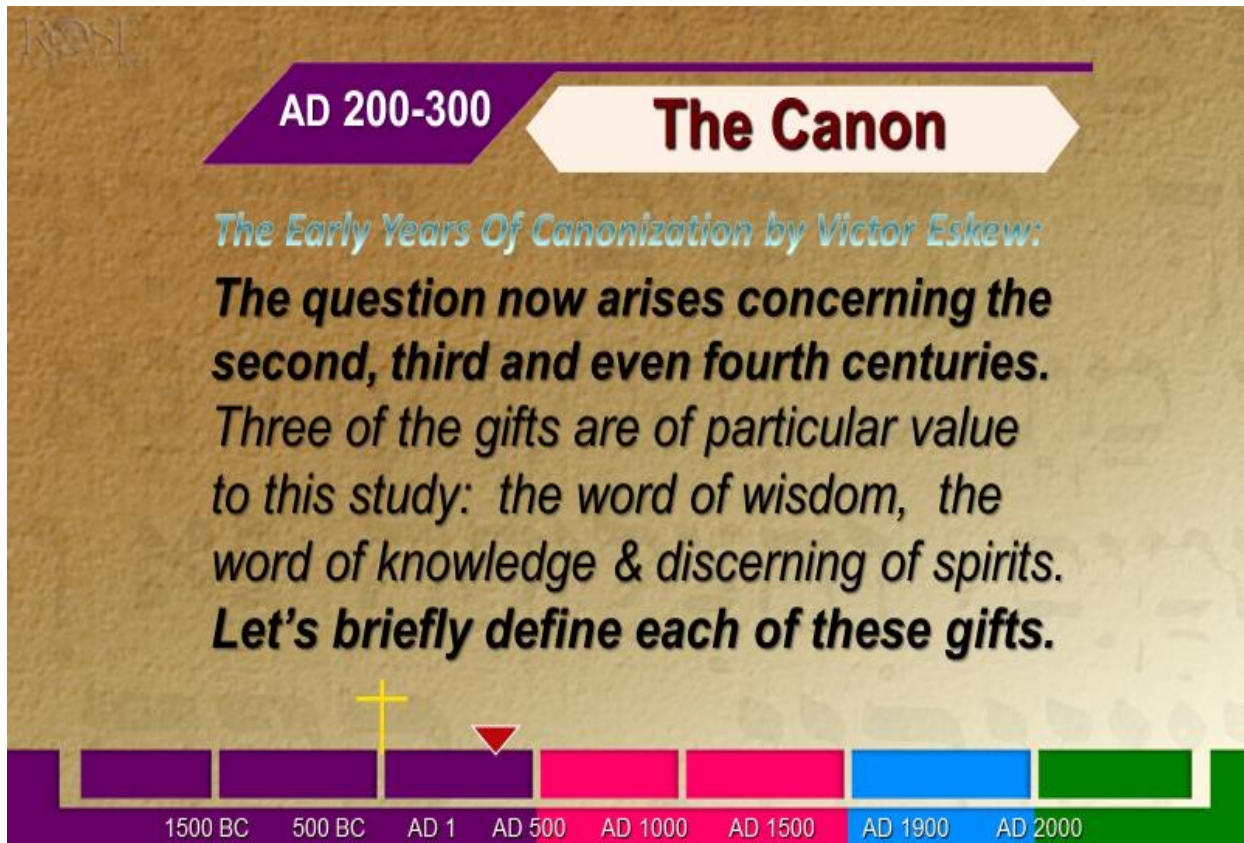


THE TWO BIG QUESTIONS OF BIBLE CANON RELIABILITY: COMPLETION & CORRUPTION

MASORETE SCRIBES – **VERNACULAR VERSIONS** – **SEMANTIC ERROR**

by David L. Burris

Books	Protestant tradition	Roman Catholic tradition	Eastern Orthodox tradition	Armenian Apostolic tradition ^[N 1]	Coptic Orthodox tradition	Orthodox Tewahedo traditions	Syriac Christian traditions
<i>Canonical gospels^[N 2]</i>							
Matthew	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes ^[N 3]
Mark ^[N 4]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes ^[N 3]
Luke	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes ^[N 3]
John ^{[N 4][N 5]}	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes ^[N 3]
<i>Apostolic history</i>							
Acts ^[N 4]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Acts of Paul and Thecla ^{[N 6][S0][S1]}	No	No	No	No (early tradition)	No	No	No (early tradition)
<i>Pauline epistles</i>							
Romans	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1 Corinthians	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2 Corinthians	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Corinthians to Paul and 3 Corinthians ^{[N 6][N 7]}	No	No	No	No – inc. in some mss.	No	No	No (early tradition)
Galatians	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ephesians	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Philippians	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Colossians	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Laodiceans	No – inc. in some eds. ^[N 8]	No – inc. in some mss.	No	No	No	No	No
1 Thessalonians	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2 Thessalonians	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1 Timothy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2 Timothy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Titus	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Philemon	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>General epistles</i>							
Hebrews	Yes ^[N 9]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
James	Yes ^[N 10]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1 Peter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2 Peter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes ^[N 10]
1 John ^[N 4]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2 John	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes ^[N 10]
3 John	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes ^[N 10]
Jude	Yes ^[N 9]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes ^[N 10]
<i>Apocalypse^[N 11]</i>							
Revelation	Yes ^[N 9]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes ^[N 10]
<i>Apostolic Fathers^[N 12] and Church Orders^[N 13]</i>							
1 Clement ^[N 14]	No (Codices Alexandrinus and Hierosolymitanus)						
2 Clement ^[N 14]	No (Codices Alexandrinus and Hierosolymitanus)						
Shepherd of Hermas ^[N 14]	No (Codex Sinaiticus)						
Epistle of Barnabas ^[N 14]	No (Codices Hierosolymitanus and Sinaiticus)						
Didache ^[N 14]	No (Codex Hierosolymitanus)						
Ser'ata Seyon (Sinodos)	No	No	No	No	No	Yes (broader canon)	No
Te'ezaz (Sinodos)	No	No	No	No	No	Yes (broader canon)	No
Gessew (Sinodos)	No	No	No	No	No	Yes (broader canon)	No
Abtelis (Sinodos)	No	No	No	No	No	Yes (broader canon)	No
Book of the Covenant 1 (Mashafa Kidan)	No	No	No	No	No	Yes (broader canon)	No
Book of the Covenant 2 (Mashafa Kidan)	No	No	No	No	No	Yes (broader canon)	No
Ethiopic Clement (Qalēmentos) ^[N 15]	No	No	No	No	No	Yes (broader canon)	No
Ethiopic Didascalia (Didesqelya) ^[N 15]	No	No	No	No	No	Yes (broader canon)	No



AD 200-300 **The Canon**

The Early Years Of Canonization by Victor Eskew:
The question now arises concerning the second, third and even fourth centuries. Three of the gifts are of particular value to this study: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge & discerning of spirits. Let's briefly define each of these gifts.



AD 200-300 **The Canon**

The Early Years Of Canonization by Victor Eskew:
Let's briefly define each of these gifts:

- The gift of **Knowledge** had to do with insight into 'things lawful and unlawful for Christians' (Strong). Robertson says: 'This gift is insight (illumination) according to (kata) the same Spirit.'

AD 200-300

The Canon

The Early Years Of Canonization by Victor Eskew:

Let's briefly define each of these gifts:

- The gift of **Discerning of Spirits** dealt with the ability to distinguish and to judge. Vincent notes that it was the ability to so distinguish 'between the different prophetic utterances, whether to proceed from true or false spirits. See – 1st Timothy 4:1; 1st John 4: 1 & 2

1500 BC 500 BC AD 1 AD 500 AD 1000 AD 1500 AD 1900 AD 2000

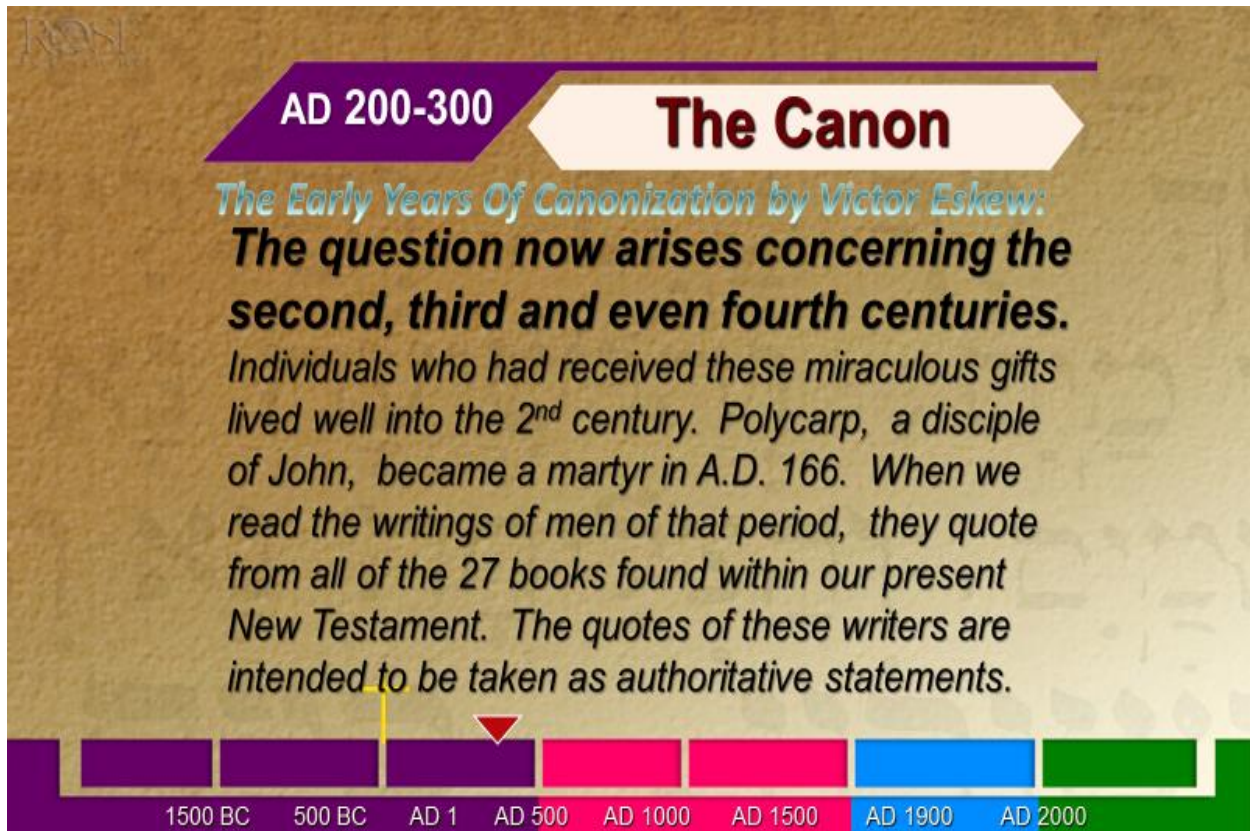
AD 200-300

The Canon

The Early Years Of Canonization by Victor Eskew:

The question now arises concerning the second, third and even fourth centuries. It is not difficult to see how these three gifts would be of great value in determining whether a letter sent to the church was inspired or not. These miraculous abilities enabled the early churches to collect, as authoritative, only those writings which God desired for them to have.

1500 BC 500 BC AD 1 AD 500 AD 1000 AD 1500 AD 1900 AD 2000



AD 200-300 **The Canon**

The Early Years Of Canonization by Victor Eskew:
The question now arises concerning the second, third and even fourth centuries. Individuals who had received these miraculous gifts lived well into the 2nd century. Polycarp, a disciple of John, became a martyr in A.D. 166. When we read the writings of men of that period, they quote from all of the 27 books found within our present New Testament. The quotes of these writers are intended to be taken as authoritative statements.

Timeline: 1500 BC, 500 BC, AD 1, AD 500, AD 1000, AD 1500, AD 1900, AD 2000



AD 200-300 **The Canon**

The Early Years Of Canonization by Victor Eskew:
WE NOW COME TO OUR THIRD POINT

➤ In the 2nd century, the Muritorian Fragment was written. 'The **Muritorian Fragment** is the oldest known list of New Testament books. It was found by Ludovico Antonio Muratori in a manuscript in the Ambrosian Library in Milan, and published by him in 1740. It is called a fragment because the beginning is missing...

Timeline: 1500 BC, 500 BC, AD 1, AD 500, AD 1000, AD 1500, AD 1900, AD 2000

AD 200-300 **The Canon**

The Early Years Of Canonization by Victor Eskew:

WE NOW COME TO OUR THIRD POINT

➤ Although the manuscript in which it appears was copied during the seventh century, the list itself is dated to about 170 because its author refers to the episcopate of Pius One of Rome (died 157) as recent'. There are two things that are of importance about this fragment -

1500 BC 500 BC AD 1 AD 500 AD 1000 AD 1500 AD 1900 AD 2000

AD 200-300 **The Canon**

The Early Years Of Canonization by Victor Eskew:

WE NOW COME TO OUR THIRD POINT

The two items of focus about this fragment are

➤ First, the date is important. The fragment dates back to A.D. 170.

➤ Second, the list is important. This was a list of books the church considered to be divinely inspired and authoritative.

1500 BC 500 BC AD 1 AD 500 AD 1000 AD 1500 AD 1900 AD 2000

AD 200-300 **The Canon**

The Early Years Of Canonization by Victor Eskew:

WE NOW COME TO OUR THIRD POINT

➤ *In an article on the Muratorian Partial by James R. Adair, we find which books were included on this list. Mr. J.R. Adair writes; 'The fragment begins with what is probably a mutilated reference to Mark, and Luke and John are mentioned as the third & fourth gospels - It is probable that Matthew's gospel was mentioned in a missing portion of the original document. ...*


Timeline: 1500 BC, 500 BC, AD 1, AD 500, AD 1000, AD 1500, AD 1900, AD 2000

AD 200-300 **The Canon**

The Early Years Of Canonization by Victor Eskew:

*In an article on the Muratorian Partial by James R. Adair, we find which books were included on this list. Mr. Adair continues, ...Thirteen letters are attributed to Paul and are enumerated in the following order: **Corinthians/Ephesians/Philippians/Colossians/Galatians Thessalonians, Romans, Philemon, Titus, and Timothy (the two letters to the Corinthians, Thessalonians, and Timothy are acknowledged). ...Finally, Jude and the two letters of John are mentioned approvingly, as also are the Wisdom of Solomon, and the apocalypses of John and Peter (although the latter is said to be rejected by some)'. Every book of our New Testament, except for Hebrews & one of the letters of John is on this list!***

Timeline: 1500 BC, 500 BC, AD 1, AD 500, AD 1000, AD 1500, AD 1900, AD 2000



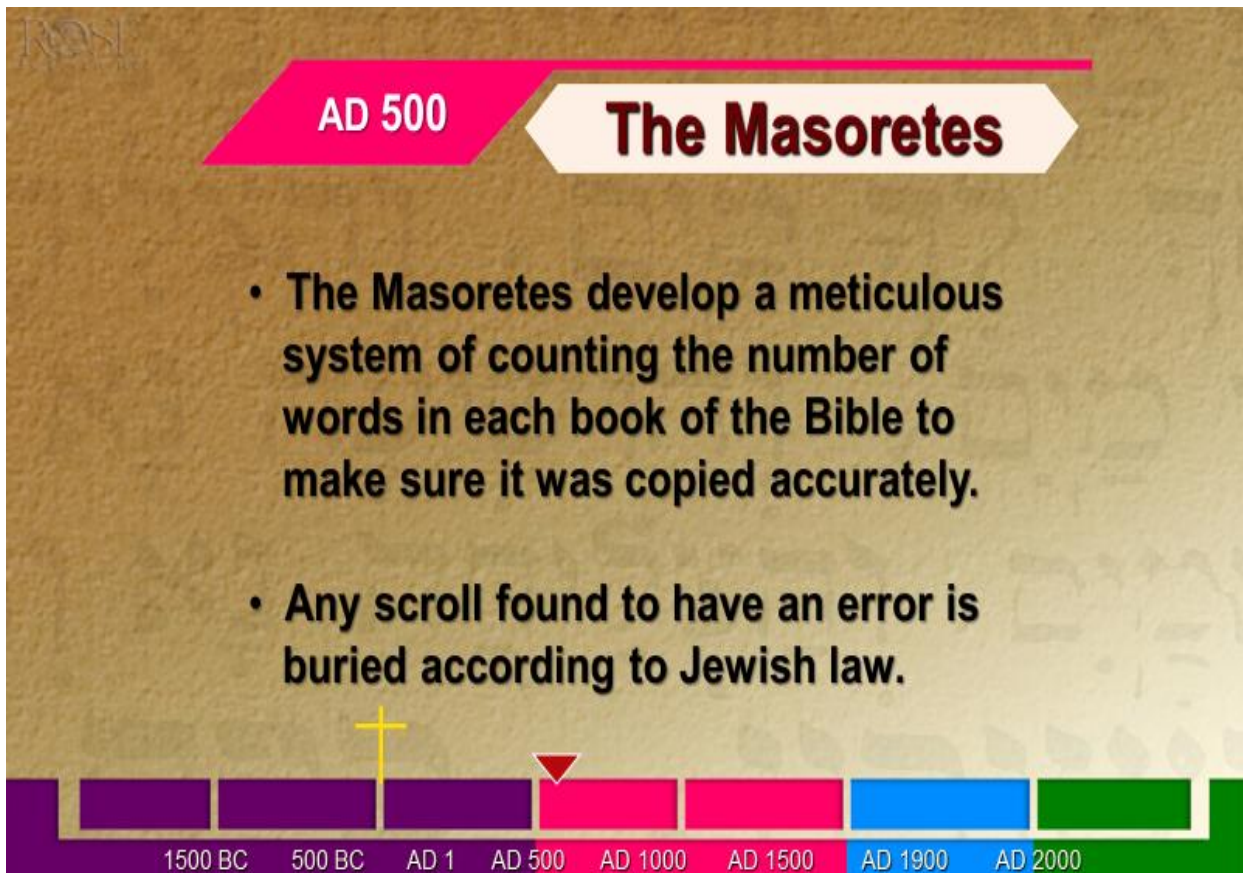
AD 500 **The Masoretes**

Special Jewish scribes (Masoretes) are entrusted with the sacred task of making copies of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament).

Approximately AD 500-900

Timeline: 1500 BC, 500 BC, AD 1, AD 500, AD 1000, AD 1500, AD 1900, AD 2000

A horizontal timeline at the bottom of the slide is divided into colored segments: purple (1500 BC to 500 BC), dark purple (500 BC to AD 1), pink (AD 1 to AD 500), light pink (AD 500 to AD 1000), blue (AD 1000 to AD 1500), and green (AD 1500 to AD 2000). A yellow vertical line is positioned at AD 500, and a red downward-pointing triangle is also at AD 500.



AD 500 **The Masoretes**

- The Masoretes develop a meticulous system of counting the number of words in each book of the Bible to make sure it was copied accurately.**
- Any scroll found to have an error is buried according to Jewish law.**

Timeline: 1500 BC, 500 BC, AD 1, AD 500, AD 1000, AD 1500, AD 1900, AD 2000

A horizontal timeline at the bottom of the slide is divided into colored segments: purple (1500 BC to 500 BC), dark purple (500 BC to AD 1), pink (AD 1 to AD 500), light pink (AD 500 to AD 1000), blue (AD 1000 to AD 1500), and green (AD 1500 to AD 2000). A yellow vertical line is positioned at AD 500, and a red downward-pointing triangle is also at AD 500.

"The Bible consists of sixty-six books written by about forty different men over a period of sixteen hundred years. It was written by kings, soldiers, shepherds, farmers, and fishermen. It was begun by Moses in the lonely desert of Arabia and finished by John on the Isle of Patmos.



CANON:
which books belong?

**Some of it was written in King's
palaces, some in shepherd's
tents, some beside still waters,
and part of it was written in
prison. Part of the Bible was
written by highly educated men
and part of it was written by
unlettered fishermen.**



CANON:
which books belong?

It was written in different languages and different countries. Yet, when all the books of the Bible are brought together they blend into one great whole. They are a unit, hence *The Book*. There are no contradictions; there is no discord.



CANON:
which books belong?

It is never necessary to rewrite the Bible and bring it up to date. It is always up to date and was free from error from the beginning. These men could have written such a book only by divine guidance...



CANON:
which books belong?

Just as the materials for Solomon's Temple joined perfectly together because they were prepared under the direction of a great architect, so the books of the Bible blend harmoniously because they were written under the direction of the Holy Spirit of God" (DeHoff, 102-103).



CANON:
which books belong?

Have the Canon Books Become Corrupted?

Does the Hebrew Masoretic text underlying the KJV have any errors?

Contents

- 1. [1 The Masoretic Text](#)
- 2. [2 Masoretic Readings Defended](#)
 - 1. [2.1 No Copyist Errors](#)
 - 2. [2.2 No Numerical Contradictions](#)
 - 3. [2.3 No Missing Words](#)
 - 4. [2.4 Not Inferior to the Dead Sea Scrolls](#)
 - 5. [2.5 Not Inferior to the Septuagint](#)

The Masoretic Text

The Hebrew text underlying the KJV is reliable and does not have any demonstrable error. By God's grace and providence there are not as many variant readings among the Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts as there are among the Greek New Testament manuscripts. Most of the variants concern pronunciations which do not affect translation. Many believe that the KJV is based on the Hebrew Masoretic text of the Second Rabbinic Bible, edited by Jacob Ben Chayyim and printed by Daniel Bomberg in 1525. However, the KJV appeared to follow the First Rabbinic Bible, edited by Felix Pratensis in 1517-1518, as this first edition includes Joshua 21:36-37 and Nehemiah 7:68 whereas the second edition omits these verses. Except for these two passages, the KJV appeared to follow the Ben Chayyim text. Many recent versions of the Bible are based on the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, the third edition of the Masoretic text edited by Rudolph Kittel. There are eight places where differences between the two texts (the Ben Chayyim and the Rudolph Kittel) affect translation – they are: 1 Kings 20:38, Proverbs 8:16, Isaiah 10:16, Isaiah 27:2, Isaiah 38:14, Ezekiel 30:18, Zephaniah 3:15, and Malachi 1:12.

Verse	Ben Chayyim	Rudolph Kittel
1 Kings 20:38	“ashes upon his face”	“bandage over his eyes”
Proverbs 8:16	“all the judges of the earth”	“all who judge rightly”
Isaiah 10:16	“Lord”	“LORD”
Isaiah 27:2	“vineyard of red wine”	“pleasant vineyard”
Isaiah 38:14	“LORD”	“Lord”
Ezekiel 30:18	“Be darkened”	“Be held back”
Zephaniah 3:15	“see evil”	“fear evil”
Malachi 1:12	“table of the LORD”	“table of the Lord”

With only eight significant variants between the Jacob Ben Chayyim and the Rudolph Kittel editions, the Hebrew texts underlying the KJV and modern translations are fairly similar. However, modern textual critics believe that some verses in the Bible are erroneous in all editions of the Masoretic text. These critics believe that a Bible translation must consult the Masoretic text as well as other ancient witnesses such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, Samaritan Pentateuch, Aramaic Targum, Septuagint, and the Latin Vulgate. The prefaces of some of the leading translations have the following to say about the translators' view of a deficient Masoretic text:

NIV:

“The translators also consulted the more important early versions – the Septuagint; Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion; the Vulgate; the Syriac Peshitta; the Targums; and for the Psalms the Juxta Hebraica of Jerome. Readings from these versions were occasionally followed where the Masoretic Text seemed doubtful and where accepted principles of textual criticism showed that one or more of these textual witnesses appeared to provide the correct reading.”

ESV:

“In exceptional, difficult cases, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Syriac Peshitta, the Latin Vulgate, and other sources were consulted to shed possible light on the text, or if necessary, to support a divergence from the Masoretic text.”

NASB:

“In the present translation the latest edition of Rudolf Kittel’s Biblia Hebraica has been employed together with the most recent light from lexicography, cognate languages, and the Dead Sea Scrolls” (The NASB then lists these witnesses of cognate languages under its Abbreviations page: Aramaic, Septuagint, Latin, Syriac)”

These scholars consult these other sources because they believe that some passages are corrupt in all editions of the Hebrew text. For more on this, please read: [Question: Aren't some Textus Receptus readings based on little or no Greek manuscript evidence?](#). A careful study, however, will reveal that the Masoretic readings underlying the KJV are demonstrably inerrant.

Masoretic Readings Defended

No Copyist Errors

The following are supposed copyist errors in the Masoretic text. Each link will take you to a separate page describing why there is no error in the Masoretic text:

- [Leviticus 20:10](#) Does the Masoretic text erroneously repeat a line?
- [1 Samuel 6:19](#) Did God slay "50,070" or "70" men?
- [2 Samuel 8:4](#) 700, 7,000 or 1,700 horsemen?
- [2 Samuel 15:7](#) "Forty years" or "Four years"?
- [2 Samuel 24:13](#) "Seven years" or "Three years"?
- [1 Kings 4:26](#) "40,000" or "4,000"?
- [2 Chronicles 22:2](#) "Forty and two years old" or "Twenty-two years old"?
- [2 Chronicles 36:9](#) "Eight years old" or "Eighteen years old"?
- [Psalm 22:16](#) "They pierced" or "Like a lion"?
- [Isaiah 9:3](#) "Not increased the joy" or "Increased the joy"?

No Numerical Contradictions

The following are alleged numerical contradictions in the Masoretic text, in addition to those in 1 Samuel 6:19, 2 Samuel 8:4, 2 Samuel 15:7, 2 Samuel 24:13, 1 Kings 4:26, 2 Chronicles 22:2, 2 Chronicles 36:9 noted above. The following alleged contradictions generally appear even in versions other than the KJV:

- [2 Samuel 10:18 and 1 Chronicles 19:18](#) "700" or "7000" of the Syrians?
- [1 Kings 7:15 and 2 Chronicles 3:15](#) Were Solomon's pillars "18 cubits high" or "35 cubits high"?
- [1 Kings 7:26 and 2 Chronicles 4:5](#) "2000" or "3000" baths?
- [1 Kings 9:28 and 2 Chronicles 8:18](#) "420" or "450" talents of gold?
- [2 Kings 15:30 and 2 Kings 15:33](#) How many years did Jotham reign?

No Missing Words

The following are places where the Masoretic text supposedly is missing some words. Each link will take you to a separate page describing why there are no missing words in the Masoretic text:

- [Genesis 4:8](#) "*Let us go into the field.*"
- [Joshua 21:36-37](#) "And out of the tribe of Reuben, Bezer with her suburbs, and Jahazah with her suburbs, Kedemoth with her suburbs, and Mephaath with her suburbs; four cities."
- [1 Samuel 13:1](#) "One year" or "[missing number]"? (How old was Saul when he began to reign?)
- [Nehemiah 7:68](#) "Their horses, seven hundred thirty and six: their mules, two hundred forty and five:"
- [Psalm 145:13](#) "*The LORD is faithful in all his words and kind in all his works.*"

Not Inferior to the Dead Sea Scrolls

The following is a place where critics believe that the Dead Sea Scrolls provide a better reading. The link will take you to a separate page describing why the Masoretic text reading is good:

- [Deuteronomy 32:8](#) "Sons of Israel" or "Sons of God"?
- [Isaiah 49:12](#) "Sinim" or "Syrene/Aswan"?

Not Inferior to the Septuagint

The following is a place where critics believe that Jesus preferred the Septuagint reading over the Masoretic text reading. The link will take you to a separate page describing why Jesus was not preferring the Septuagint reading over the Masoretic text reading:

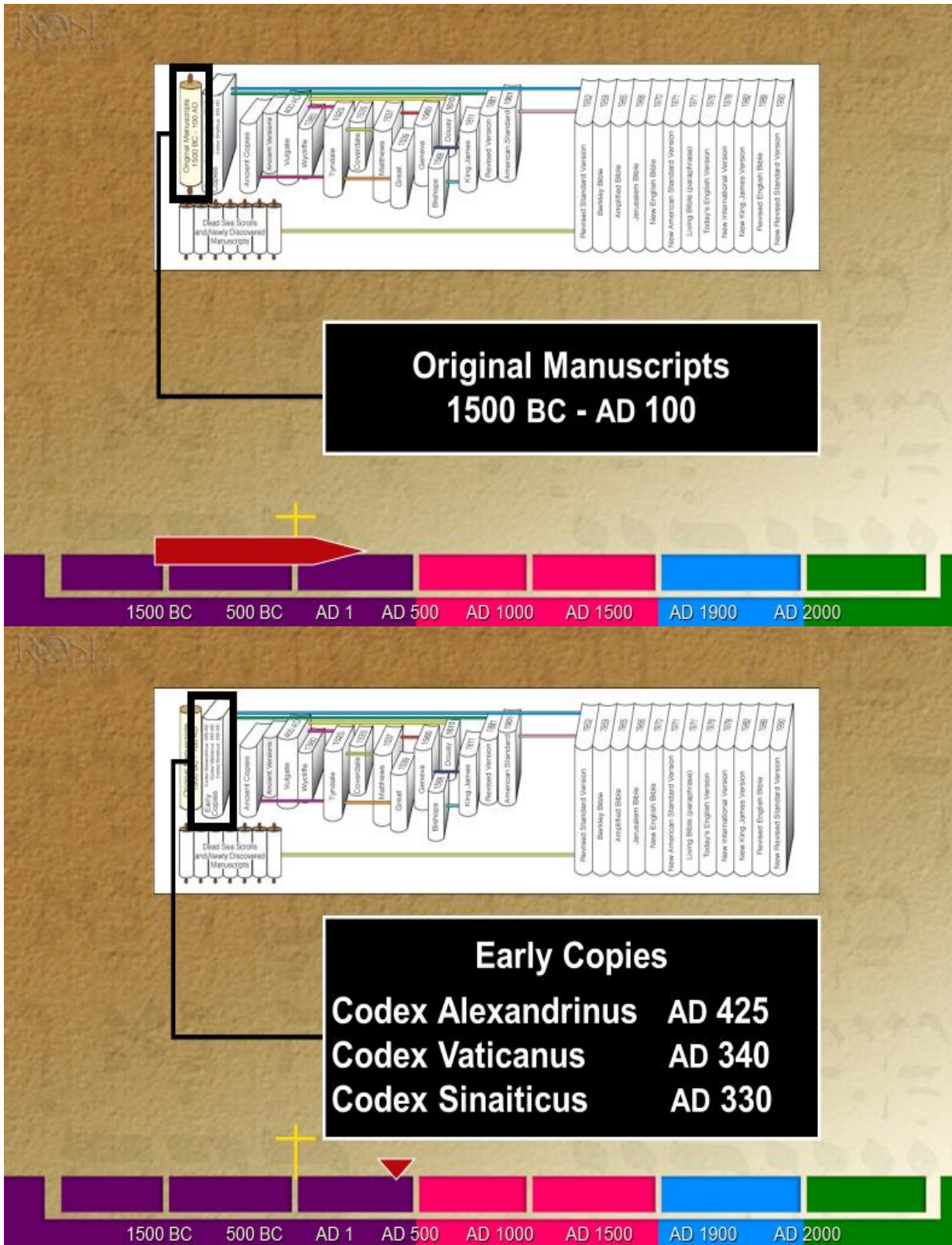
- [Luke 4:18-19](#)

The following is a place where critics believe that the New Testament author preferred the Septuagint reading over the Masoretic text reading. The link will take you to a separate page describing why the author was not preferring the Septuagint reading over the Masoretic text reading:

- [Luke 3:36](#)

Conclusion

Having considered the above, there is no reason to question the reliability of the Hebrew text underlying the KJV. – *KJV Today*



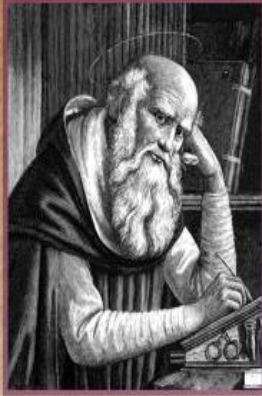
Part_Two

BISHOP SUPREMACY	ROMAN ADVANTAGE
POPULATION CITY OF ROME	Size Of City Size Of Church
IMPERIAL CAPITAL	After Milan Edict Emperors' Advisor
LANGUAGE	Latin Lesser Ability Express Subtle Nuance
LOCATION	Of The Five Patriarchs Only Rome In The West
MISSIONARY OUTREACH	West Converted Tribes Eastern Persians Not
BARBARIAN INVASIONS	Western Empire Falls Church Only Stability


AD 400

Jerome

Jerome starts translating the Scriptures into Latin in AD 410 and finishes 25 years later. This translation, called the Latin Vulgate, remains the basic Bible for many centuries.



Jerome



1500 BC 500 BC AD 1 AD 500 AD 1000 AD 1500 AD 1900 AD 2000

Jerome and the Latin Vulgate

Chapter 3

- Jerome lived in the desert for two years before he realized he was not called to live alone.
- When he returned to Rome, the bishop asked him to create a reliable Latin Bible.



Jerome

AD 247 - AD 420

ROSE PUBLISHING

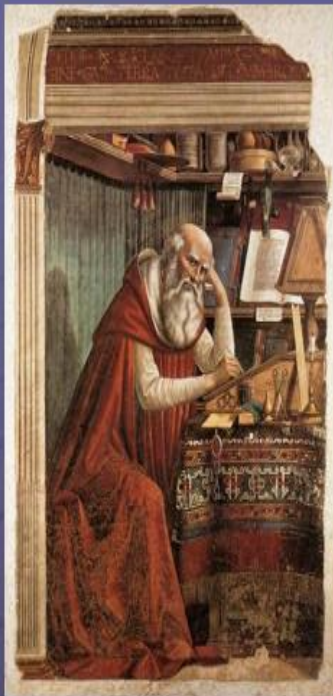
Jerome and the Latin Vulgate

Chapter 3

- A wealthy widow named Marcella financed Jerome's translation.
- Jerome, Marcella, and a friend named Paula embraced extreme self-denial—even to the point of refusing ever to bathe.

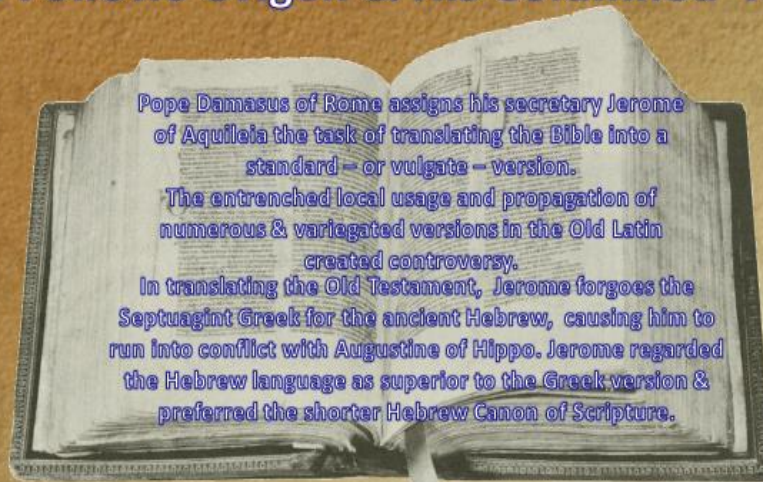


Jerome



- ca. 400: Jerome translates the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin (called the "Vulgate").
- He knows that the Jews have only 39 books, and he wants to limit the Old Testament to these.
- The 7 he would leave out (Tobit, Judith, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach [or "Ecclesiasticus"], and Baruch) he calls "apocrypha," that is, "hidden books."
- But Pope Damasus wants all 46 traditionally-used books included in the Old Testament, so the Vulgate has 46.

Jerome Follows Origen & His Columned Hexapla.



Pope Damasus of Rome assigns his secretary Jerome of Aquileia the task of translating the Bible into a standard – or vulgate – version.

The entrenched local usage and propagation of numerous & variegated versions in the Old Latin created controversy.

In translating the Old Testament, Jerome forgoes the Septuagint Greek for the ancient Hebrew, causing him to run into conflict with Augustine of Hippo. Jerome regarded the Hebrew language as superior to the Greek version & preferred the shorter Hebrew Canon of Scripture.

THIS DECISION HAD ENORMOUS CONSEQUENCES HISTORICALLY!

The Latin Vulgate

The Latin Vulgate:

The Need for New Translations

Matthew 4:17 and Penance

do penance (outward practice)

repent (inward psychological state)

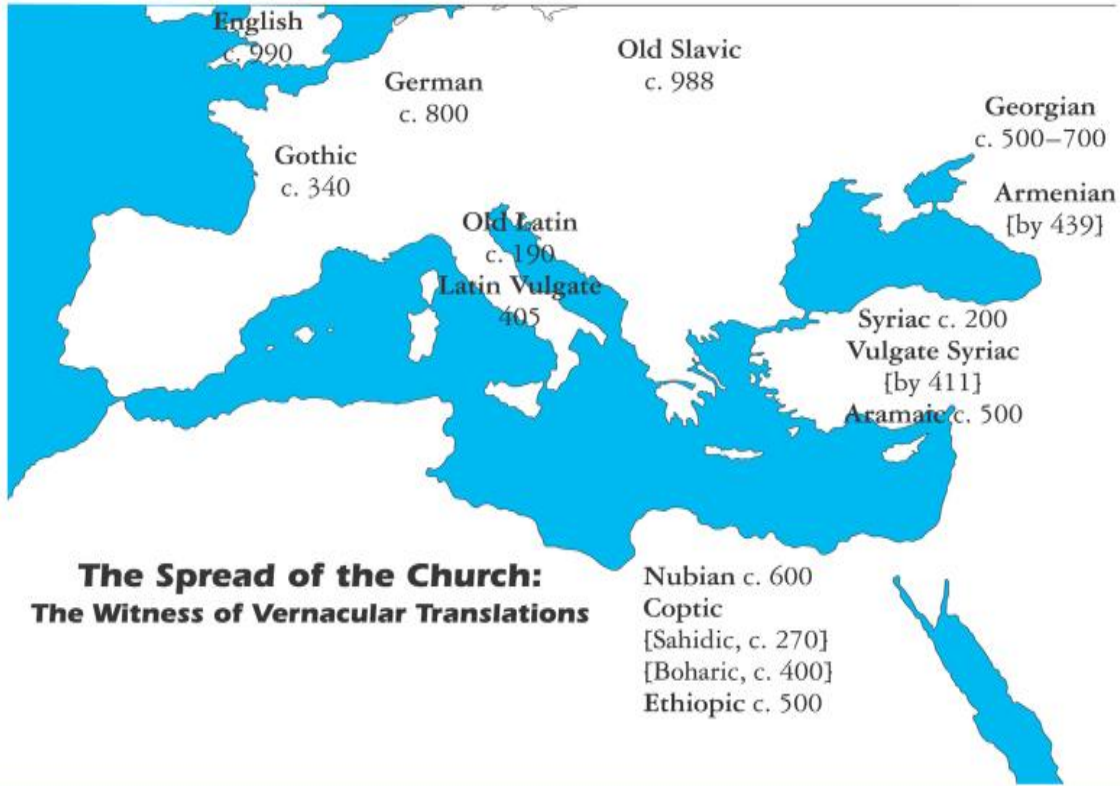
Luke 1:28 and Mary

grata plena (full of grace, or favored one)

Ephesians 5:31–32 and Marriage

sacramentum (sacrament)

mysterion (mystery)



“Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light.” – Miles Smith

**POSSESSING A
VERNACULAR
VERSION WAS
PUNISHABLE
BY DEATH**

www.PowerpointBackgrounds.com

Catholic Theologian Johann Cochlaeus:

“The New Testament translated into the vulgar tongue, is in truth the food of death, the fuel of sin, the veil of malice, the pretext of false liberty, the protection of disobedience, the corruption of discipline, the depravity of morals, the termination of concord, the death of honesty, the well-spring of vice, the disease of virtues, the instigation of rebellion, the milk of pride, the nourishment of contempt, the death of peace, the destruction of charity, the enemy of unity, the murderer of truth.”

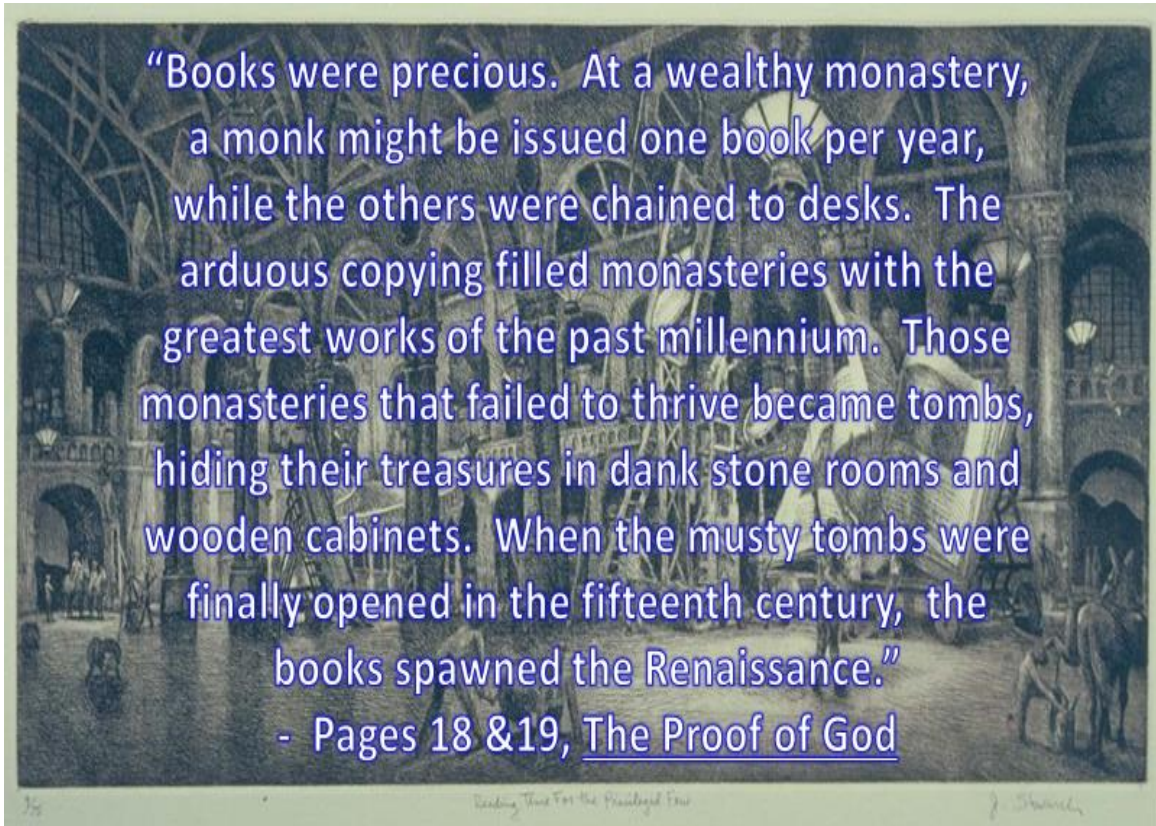
AD 400

Bible Copies

Fine quality animal skins from calves or antelope (vellum) and sheep or goats (parchment) are used for over 1,000 years to make copies of the Bible. (approximately AD 300-1400)



1500 BC 500 BC AD 1 AD 500 AD 1000 AD 1500 AD 1900 AD 2000



Printing the Bible changed everything.

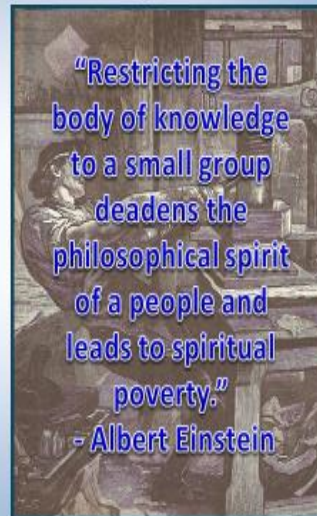
Gutenberg Invention
Gutenberg Invention
Fused Four Separate
TECHNOLOGIES
TECHNOLOGIES



Printing the Bible changed everything.

- Metallurgy
- Oil Based Inks
- Metal Type
Mold Casting
- Advanced
Technology
Printing Press

The invention of a printing press with movable metal type in Mainz, Germany, makes the Bible accessible to more people – those who previously couldn't afford handmade copies, which cost a year's wage.



How the Reformation Came About: Three Essentials

MILIEU



trouble inside
and outside

MESSAGE



sola scriptura + *sola gratia*
sola fide

MEANS



printing press

Chart 148



Church in 1500's was ruled by money, not worship.



Printing the
Bible changed
everything.



When one scholar read the Bible
for the first time he said:

Either this is not the
Gospel, or we are
not Christians!

A Bible was placed
in every church.



Fifth Century Latin Vulgate Reflected Errors Of Early Church
Vulgate Reflected Errors Of Two Linguistic Shifts

THE GENEVAN VERSIONS

1. Events from 1541–1557. 2. Whittingham’s Testament of 1557. 3. The Genevan Bible of 1560.
4. Marginal Notes. 5. Popularity of the Genevan Bible. 6. The Bassandyne Bible.

§ 1. **Events from 1541–1557.** — For some years after the publication of the Great Bible there was a time of suspense in the external history of our English Bible. No new versions appeared, a proposed revision by the Bishops falling through, owing to Gardiner’s pressing the retention of so many Latin words in the text that it would have been practically unintelligible. Nor, which is far more serious, were the older versions left undisturbed. In 1543 Parliament passed an Act for the “Advancement of True Religion,” in which all books of Tindale’s translation were “clearly and utterly abolished and extinguished, and forbidden to be kept or used”; and no one belonging to the class of apprentices, servants, husbandmen, or labourers was permitted to read the Old or New Testament at all either in public or in private. The reason for such an absurd enactment it is difficult now to understand, but it doubtless arose out of King Henry’s complaint that the book was “disputed, rhymed, sung & jangled in every alehouse & tavern, contrary to the true meaning and doctrine of the same.” Three years later the proscription was extended in still more rigorous terms to the writings of Wycliffe, Coverdale, and many others, so that practically only the Great Bible was left. And such was the state of the times that even its use must have been attended with a certain amount of danger.

By Henry’s death on 28th January 1547, and the accession of Edward VI. to the throne, all this was changed. According to a well-known story, the English Bible was then for the first time used at a royal coronation, for when three swords were brought, signs of his being king of three kingdoms, Edward said there was yet one wanting. “And when the nobles about him asked what that was, he answered, *The Bible*. ‘That book,’ added he, ‘is the Sword of the Spirit, and to be preferred before these swords.’ ... And when the pious young King had said this, and some other like words, he commanded the Bible with the greatest reverence to be brought and carried before him.” One of Edward’s first acts, moreover, was to issue an order requiring that all beneficed persons “shall provide within three months next after this visitation, one book of the whole Bible of the largest volume in English”; and that, so far from discouraging its use, they “shall rather conform & exhort every person to read the same, as the very lively word of God & the special food of man’s soul.” That these enactments proved no dead letter is evidenced by the fact that during Edward’s short reign at least thirteen editions of the Bible and thirty-five editions of the New Testament were printed. The same reign saw also the introduction of the Book of Common Prayer, which, with slight alterations, is still used in the Church of England & of the Forty-two, afterwards reduced to Thirty-nine, Articles of Religion, which form that Church’s doctrinal standard.

Amidst such signs of religious zeal, we may be sure that the work of Bible-translation was not lost sight of; but still no new version appeared. A revision contemplated by Cranmer came to nothing, because the two scholars whom he had secured for the purpose “fell sick, which gave a very unhappy stop to their studies”; while a translation of the New Testament by Sir John Cheke did not get farther than the middle of the first chapter of St. Mark. It is not even certain that his version was ever intended for publication; but in any case the death of Edward VI. & accession of “Bloody” Mary gave a new turn to the ever-varying fortunes of our Bible’s history. Cranmer soon followed Rogers to the stake, and the public, though apparently not the private, use of the Scriptures was strictly forbidden.

Foreseeing what was coming, a number of leading Reformers had contrived to escape to the Continent; and of these a small band eventually settled at Geneva, attracted doubtless by the fame of Calvin. There, as they themselves tell us, “we thought we could bestow our labors and study in nothing which could be more acceptable to God, and comfortable to His Church, than in the translating of the Scriptures into our native tongue.”

§ 2. **Whittingham’s Testament of 1557.**—We shall see the result of their combined labors directly, but in the meantime we have to notice that in 1557 there appeared a translation of the New Testament alone, apparently the unaided work of their own William Whittingham. In his Address to the Reader, Whittingham describes his work as specially intended for the “simple lambs which partly are already in the fold of Christ, and partly wandering, through ignorance.” And it was doubtless the thought of the same readers that led to the numerous annotations, in which he claims to have left “nothing unexpounded, whereby he that is anything exercised in the Scriptures of God might justly complain of hardness.”³ The text, according to the title-page, had been “conferred diligently with the Greek, and best approved translations,” and was for the first time in English translation divided into verses. In the previous translations no other subdivision had ever been attempted than into paragraphs of various lengths, but Whittingham now “for the profit of the reader” adopted the shorter sections prepared by R. Stephens for one of his editions of the Greek Testament. These verse-divisions were afterwards applied to the whole Bible in 1560, from which they have passed into our own Authorized Version. They can only be defended on the ground of convenience of reference, for their whole tendency is to destroy the connection, and so to obscure the sense of the original.

Another innovation which Whittingham introduced, and which has also come down to us, was the use of different type to indicate words that had no place in the original, but which were added to make the meaning clear; for example: Luke 6:40, “The disciple is not above his master: but whosoever *will be* a perfect *disciple* shall be as his master is”; 2 Cor. 5:13, “For whether we be fools, *we are fools* to God; or whether we be in our right mind, *we are* in our right mind for your *commodity*”

Of the translation itself, it is not necessary to say more just now than that it is founded not so much on the Great Bible as on Tindale. A few verses from the Epistle to the Philippians will make this clear, as well as illustrate the general character of the translation.

PHIL. 2:5–11 (WHITTINGHAM, 1557)

5. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.
6. Who being in the shape of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God.
7. But He made Himself of no reputation, and took on Him the shape of a servant, and was made like unto men, and was found in appearance as a man.
8. He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto the death, even the death of the cross.
9. Wherefore, God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name above all names.
10. That at the Name of Jesus should every knee bow, both of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under earth.
11. And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* the Lord, unto the praise of God the Father.

In these verses, Whittingham agrees with the Great Bible as against Tindale (1534) in only one place, but with Tindale as against the Great Bible in no fewer than seven places. He differs from both moreover in other seven places, of which the most important are: “was made” for “became,” “in appearance” for “in his apparell,” “at the Name of Jesus” for “in the Name of Jesus,” and “every tongue” for “all tongues.” With one exception (“in appearance”) these changes have all found their way into the A.V., and it is curious to think that by the erroneous substitution of “at the Name” for “in the Name of Jesus should every knee bow,” this version has actually been the means of establishing one of those outward ceremonies against which the Genevan Reformers so strongly set themselves.

§ 3. **The Genevan Bible of 1560.**—Three years after the appearance of Whittingham’s Testament, a new translation of the whole Bible was issued at Geneva, which in one important particular differed from all preceding versions. It was the work of no single scholar, but of a small body of men banded together for the purpose, amongst whom we may specially mention William Whittingham, Thomas Sampson, and Anthony Gilby. Others of the exiles, such as the veteran translator Miles Coverdale, and John Knox, may have taken part in the work for a time, but they did not remain at Geneva to see its completion. The translators had also the benefit of the advice of Calvin and Beza.

The title of this Bible, which in more ways than one was to exercise a marked influence on our own A.V., ran as follows:—

“The Bible and Holy Scriptures conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament. Translated according to the Ebrue and Greke, and conferred with the best translations in diuers languages. With moste profitable annotations vpon all the hard places, and other thinges of great importance, as may appeare in the Epistle to the Reader.”

In size, the volume was a moderate quarto, unlike the huge folio editions of the Great Bible, and the cost of its production was met by members of the congregation at Geneva.

In their introductory epistle, as we have already seen in similar instances, the translators give us a clear glimpse into their spirit and aims. After speaking of previous translations as requiring greatly “to be perused and reformed,” they go on to speak of the advantages that they enjoy for this task “by reason of so many godly and learned men, and such diversities of translations in diuers tongues.” “And this,” they continue, “we may with good conscience protest, that we have in every point and word, according to the measure of that knowledge which it pleased Almighty God to give us, faithfully rendered the text, and in all hard places most sincerely expounded the same. For God is our witness, that we have by all means endeavoured to set forth the purity of the word and right sense of the Holy Ghost, for the edifying of the brethren in faith and charity.”

That the Genevan translators are entitled to make this claim, scholars who have critically examined their work are fully agreed. Every page proves no efforts were spared to follow as correct a text as possible & that the best available aids were freely consulted. Thus, to confine ourselves to the New Testament, which started naturally from Whittingham’s Testament as a basis, the student will do well to compare the following verses with the earlier version given above. The differences between the two versions are again indicated by italics.

PHIL. 2:5–11 (GENEVAN, 1560)

5. Let the same mind be in you that was *even* in Christ Jesus.
6. Who being in the *form* of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God:
7. But He made Himself of no reputation, and took on Him the *form* of a servant, and was made like unto men, and was found in *shape* as a man.
8. He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto the death, even the death of the Cross.
9. Wherefore God hath *also* highly exalted Him, and given Him a name above *every* name.
10. That at the Name of Jesus should every knee bow, both of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.
11. And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, unto the *glory* of God the Father.

The changes here may not at first appear of great importance; but their very minuteness is in itself a striking proof of the care bestowed upon the work, and of the way in which step by step our English version has been perfected.

Indeed, the accuracy of both versions is very remarkable, and, if space permitted, many examples might be brought forward of passages in which they showed themselves the first of all the English translators to seize the exact meaning of the original; as Matthew 28:14, where Whittingham's Testament renders rightly, "And if this come *before the Governor*, we will pacify him," with reference to a judicial hearing, and not merely, as in Tindale and the Great Bible, "*to the ruler's ears*," which might be the result of chance hearsay; or again, James 1:13, where both versions correctly translate "God cannot be tempted with evil," instead of "God tempteth not unto evil" (Wycliffe and Tindale). In this same chapter the Genevan have caught the full sense of the figure, which is missed by all English versions except the R. V. of 1881, "with whom is no variableness, neither *shadowing by turning*" (ver. 17).

Apart too from the exact scholarship which these renderings display, we owe to the Genevan translators many happy terms of expression, as the following selection from Dr. Edgar's table of comparison will prove.

GREAT BIBLE, 1540

GENEVAN BIBLE, 1560

Deut. 32:7, "Remember the days of the world that is past, consider the years from time to time."

"Remember the days of old, consider the years of so many generations."

Eccles. 12:1, "Remember thy Maker the sooner in thy youth, or ever the days of adversitythy youth, whiles the evil days come."

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, whiles the evil days come not."

Isa. 11:3, "He shall not give sentence after the thing that shall be brought before his eyes."

"He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes."

Isa. 32:2, "The shadow of a great rock in a dry land."

"The shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

Other renderings are interesting rather for their quaintness, as when in Gen. 3:7 we read, “They sewed fig-tree leaves together, and made themselves breeches”—the translation which has given the Genevan Bible the common name of the **Breeches Bible**.

§ 4. **Marginal Notes.**—The same scholarship and care which distinguish the text reappear in the marginal notes with which it is provided. Some of them, indeed, as might be expected in the circumstances, display a strongly Calvinistic bias, and others are bitterly antipapal; but the great majority are simply explanatory or hortatory. The following are specimens:—

Exodus 1:19, “Their disobedience herein was lawful, but their dissembling evil.”

Psalms 89:12, “Tabor is a mountain westward from Jerusalem, and Hermon eastward: so the prophet signifieth that all parts and places of the world shall obey God’s power for the deliverance of His Church.”

Romans 6: 5, “The Greek word meaneth, that we grow up together with Christ, as we see moss, ivy, mistletoe, or such like grow up by a tree, and are nourished with the juice thereof.”

Romans 9: 15, “As the only will and purpose of God is the chief cause of election and reprobation: so His free mercy in Christ is an inferior cause of salvation, and the hardening of the heart an inferior cause of damnation.”

Rev. 9:3, “Locusts are false teachers, heretics, and worldly subtil prelates, with monks, friars, cardinals, patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, doctors, bachelors, and masters, which forsake Christ, to maintain false doctrine.”

§ 5. **Popularity of the Genevan Bible.**—These notes, as well as the convenient form in which it was issued, tended as much as anything else to the warm welcome which was at once given to the new version on its arrival in England. Though never sanctioned for public use, it quickly established its place as the *household* copy of the Scriptures amongst Bible students, passing in all through more than 130 editions, several of which appeared even after the publication of the A. V. in 1611.

The Genevan was, indeed, peculiarly the Puritan’s Bible, one interesting proof of which need alone be mentioned. It has long been a tradition that each soldier in the Commonwealth army was provided with a pocket-bible, and there have been various conjectures as to which edition was used. Recent investigations have however established that this Bible consisted simply of appropriate quotations from the Scriptures, printed in pocket form, and that these quotations were taken from the Genevan Version. The first two will show their character.

A SOULDIER MUST NOT DOE WICKEDLY

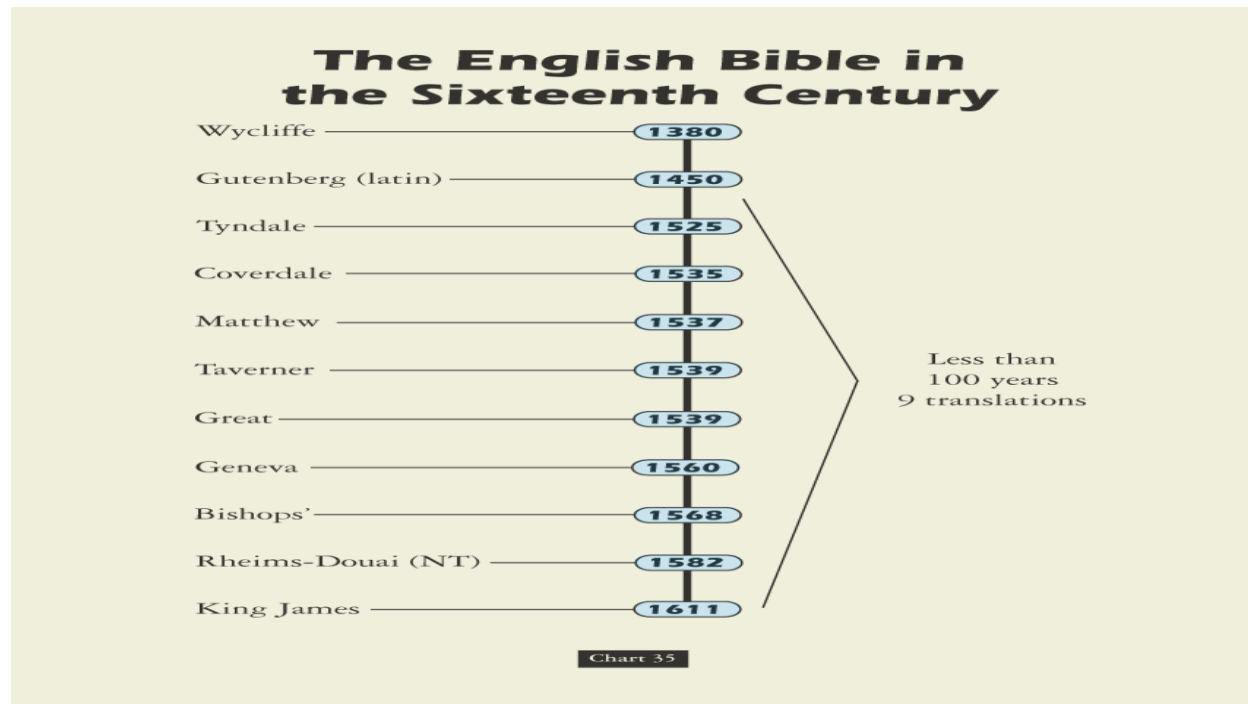
Deut. 23:9, “When thou goest out with the host against thine enemies, keepe thee then from all wickednesse.”

Luke 3:14, “The souldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, and what shall we do? And he said unto them, doe violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages.”

§ 6. **The Bassandyne Bible.**—The Genevan Bible was the first edition of the Bible printed in Scotland. This was in 1579—the New Testament alone had already appeared in 1576—and it is usually described as the *Bassandyne Bible*, from the printer’s name, Thomas Bassandyne. He, however, died before publication & his name in consequence does not appear on the completed work. The cost of this Bible, as fixed by the General Assembly, was £4:13:4 pennies Scottis; and by an Act of Parliament every householder possessed of a certain sum was bound to have a copy.

Nor was this a mere idle letter; for in June 1580 one John Williamson was commissioned to visit and search every house in the realm, “and to require the sight of their Bible and Psalm-buke, gif they ony have, to be marked with their awn name, for eschewing of fraudulent dealing in that behalf.” And about the same time the Magistrates of Edinburgh issued a proclamation on their own behalf, commanding all citizens to have Bibles in terms of the Act of Parliament, and announcing that copies are to be “sauld in the merchant buith of Andrew Williamson, on the north side of this burgh, besyde the Meill Mercat.”

We can only further notice that the text of the Genevan version, unlike the text of most previous versions, was never subjected to a complete revision; though in 1576 one Laurence Tomson brought out an amended edition of the New Testament in which influence of Beza is so marked, that it may be taken as explaining the misleading statement on the title-page, “translated out of Greek by Theodore Beza.” After 1587, Tomson’s Testament generally took the place of the earlier version in fresh issues of the Bible.¹



¹ Milligan, G. (1895). [The English Bible: A Sketch of Its History](#) (pp. 77–87). London: A. & C. Black.

King James I and the Puritans

Chapter 9

AD 1510 - AD 1767

ROSE PUBLISHERS



Geneva Bible with study notes

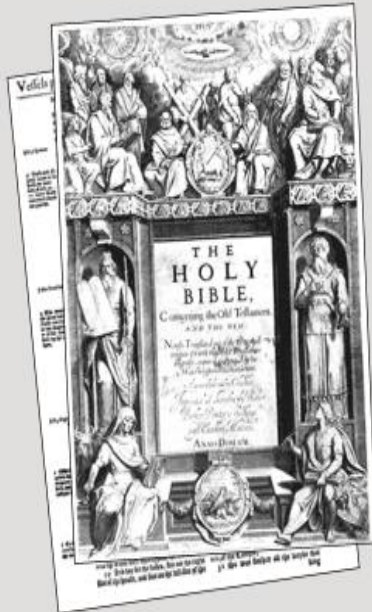
- King James I disliked the Puritans' Geneva Bible because of its Calvinistic study notes.
- When one Puritan suggested a new Bible translation, James quickly agreed.

King James I and the Puritans

Chapter 9

AD 1510 - AD 1767

ROSE PUBLISHERS



King James' translation of the Bible

- King James I gathered 54 scholars who worked 33 months on a new Bible translation.

For six years, six teams of scholars using the *Textus Receptus*, Bishops Bible, and Tyndale's Bible, complete the new version in AD 1611.

THE AUTHORISED VERSION—HISTORY OF THE UNDERTAKING

1. Origin of the Authorised Version. 2. Work of translation. 3. Title and Contents. 4. The Preface. 5. Marginal Notes—References—Headings—Italics. 6. In what sense authorised.

AT the close of the sixteenth century, leaving out of sight the older translations, we are met with three Protestant versions of the Bible in more or less general use. There was the **Great Bible** of Henry the VIII., still to be seen chained to the desk in many country churches; there was the **Genevan Bible**, the favourite Bible of the people; and there was the **Bishops' Bible**, supported by ecclesiastical authority. Such a state of things could not well continue & we might naturally have expected a general movement on the part of clergy or the people towards securing greater uniformity. So far however as we can learn no such movement took place, and it was left to a casual utterance at a Conference summoned for a different purpose to start the idea of the version which was gradually to supersede all its rivals, and for two hundred and fifty years hold its place unchallenged as the Bible of all English-speaking peoples.

§ 1. **Origin of the Authorised Version.**—King James I., on succeeding to the throne of England in 1603, found himself face to face with two great parties in the Church. There was the High Church or Ritualistic party, and there was the party of the Puritans, who were continually complaining of certain grievances to which they said they were subjected. In the “Millenary Petition” presented to the King on his way to London, and signed by several hundreds of clergy, “groaning under a common burden of human rites and ceremonies,” these grievances found distinct voice. Accordingly one of James’ first acts was to summon a Conference which met at Hampton Court Palace on the 14th, 16th, and 18th of January 1604, to hear and determine “things pretended to be amiss in the Church.”

On most points the Puritans can hardly have been satisfied with the Conference result; but in one, for us, vitally important particular the King acceded to their wishes. During the second day’s proceedings, in the course apparently of some general conversation on a portion of the Apocryphal Books, Dr. Reynolds, the Puritan leader, threw out the suggestion “that there might be a new translation of the Bible because those which were allowed in the reign of King Henry VIII. and Edward VI. were corrupt & not answerable to the truth of the original.” The instances of mistranslation which he cited in support of this allegation were neither very numerous nor important; and we can hardly wonder at the grumble of the Bishop of London, that “if every man’s humour should be followed, there would be no end of translating.” But the King was of a different mind. He had always delighted in theological disputations, and had even at one time commenced a new translation of the Psalms himself. Reynolds’ proposal therefore quite fell in with his views & he expressed the wish that “some especial pains should be taken in that behalf for one uniform translation; professing he could never yet see a Bible well translated in English, but the worst of all his Majesty thought the Geneva to be.” James further proposed that the new translation should be undertaken by “the best learned in both the universities, after them to be reviewed by the bishops and the chief learned of the Church; from them to be presented to the Privy Council; and lastly to be ratified by his royal authority; and so this whole Church to be bound unto it and none other.”

On the suggestion of the Bishop of London he gave this caveat “that no marginal notes should be added,” having found, so he said, in a Genevan Bible given him by an English lady, “some notes very partial, untrue, seditious, and savouring too much of dangerous and traitorous conceits.” In evidence he pointed to the notes on Exodus 1:19, which “alloweth disobedience unto the King”; and on 2nd Chronicles 15:16, which “taxeth Asa for deposing his mother only; and not killing her.”

It is impossible to believe that James’ acquaintance with the Genevan version was so recent as this account pretends. On the contrary, it was the Bible in the use of which, in Scotland, he had been brought up, and on portions of which he had actually published certain expositions. At the same time his dislike to its notes seems to have been genuine & probably tended as much as anything else to his persevering in the new undertaking. For a few months later we find him writing to Bancroft, then representing the See of Canterbury, announcing that he had appointed (probably at the suggestion of the Universities) “certain learned men, to the number of four and fifty, for the translating of the Bible” & requiring him to provide for their recompense by church preferment. The immediate expenses of the undertaking Bancroft was also commissioned to see to, for though His Majesty, so it was said, was very ready “of his most princely disposition” to have borne these, “some of my lords, as things now go, did hold it inconvenient.”

The new version, accordingly, though it bears his name, cost the King himself nothing. And, as a matter of fact, the only money recompense that any of the translators received was the sum of thirty shillings a week which the Company of Stationers paid to each of the scholars engaged in the final revision.

§ 2. **Work of Translation.**—The Hampton Court Conference had met in the beginning of 1604, but three years seem to have elapsed before the work was formally entered upon, and then, from whatever cause, we hear only of forty-seven instead of fifty-four translators. A full list of their names and the special portions assigned to each company will be found in any of the larger Bible histories. Here it is enough to notice that amongst the translators were many men justly famed for their scholarship, such as Launcelot Andrews, of whom it was said he might have been “interpreter-general at Babel”; Edward Lively, reputed “one of the best linguists in the world”; Miles Smith, author of the Preface, who “had Hebrew at his finger-ends”; and Andrew Downs, described as “one composed of Greek and industry.”

Fourteen rules had been drawn up for the translators’ guidance, to the most important of which we shall have occasion to refer in connection with the different points with which they deal; but of the general history of the undertaking almost nothing is known. “Never,” says Dr. Scrivener, who is principal authority on all that concerns this version, “was a great enterprise like the production of our Authorized Version carried out with less knowledge handed down to posterity of the labourers, their method & order of working.” In accordance, however, with the instructions laid down, translators were divided into 6 companies, two meeting at Westminster, Cambridge, and Oxford respectively, and after each company had gone over its own portion, the result went the round of the other companies “to be considered of seriously & judiciously.” The whole was finally revised by a select committee of six, or, according to another account, twelve, who met in London for the purpose. To this last revision an often-quoted anecdote is probably to be referred. **“The translation in King James’ time took an excellent way. That part of the Bible was given to him who was most excellent in such a tongue (as the Apocrypha to Andrew Downs), and then they met together, and one read the Translation, the rest holding in their hands some Bible, of the learned Tongues, or French, Spanish, Italian, etc.; if they found any fault they spoke, if not he read on.”**

According to the translators' own account the whole work was carried through in two years and three-quarters—no very long time for so important an undertaking.

§ 3. **Title and Contents.**—The full title of the new Bible ran as follows:—

“The Holy Bible, conteyning the Old Testament and the New: Newly Translated out of the Originall tongues: with the former Translations diligently compared and reuised by his Maiesties Speciaall Comandement. Appointed to be read in Churches. Imprinted at London by Robert Barker, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majestie. Anno Dom. 1611.”

After the title-page came the fulsome Dedication to King James, which still appears in our modern editions, followed by “The Translators to the Reader,” a noble Preface of considerable length, which unfortunately is almost universally omitted. Then we have a Kalendar; Almanack for xxxix yeares, etc.; Table of Proper Lessons, etc.; and “The Names & Order of all the Books.” In many copies there was inserted a map of Canaan, and also a copy of “Genealogies of Holy Scripture,” by one John Speed, to whom the King had sold the right of inserting his work in the Authorised Version. *At the bottom of the last page was the single word FINIS.*

§ 4. **The Preface.**—The Translators' Preface is a singularly interesting document, generally understood to be chiefly the work of Dr. Miles Smith. To do it justice it must be studied in its entirety, but the following brief abstract may give an idea of its character.

After some introductory remarks on the calumnies that follow all reformers and revisers, the translators pass to a beautiful eulogy in praise of the Holy Scriptures. “But now,” they ask, “what piety without truth? What truth, what saving truth, without the word of God? What word of God, whereof we may be sure, without the Scripture? The Scriptures we are commanded to search. . . . If we be ignorant, they will instruct us; if out of the way, they will bring us home; if out of order, they will reform us; if in heaviness, comfort us; if dull, quicken us; if cold, inflame us. And what marvel? the original thereof being from heaven, not from earth; the author being God, not man; the inditer, the Holy Spirit, not the wit of the Apostles or Prophets; the penmen, such as were sanctified from the womb, and endued with a principal portion of God's Spirit.”

“But how,” they continue, “shall men meditate in that which they cannot understand? How shall they understand that which is kept close in an unknown tongue? Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that pulleth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most holy place.” A long account of previous translations follows, and the labours of English workers in this field are held to be deserving of “everlasting remembrance.” “Yet for all that,” they say, “as nothing is begun & perfected at the same time & latter thoughts are thought to be the wiser: so, if we building upon their foundation that went before us, and being holpen by their labours, do endeavour to make that better which they left so good; no man, we are sure, hath cause to mislike us; they, we persuade ourselves, if they were alive, would thank us.” Certain cavils of their adversaries are then met and after again alluding to their own purpose in translating, they conclude: “It remaineth that we commend thee (gentle Reader) to God, and to the Spirit of His grace, which is able to build further than we can ask or think. He removeth the scales from our eyes, the vail from our hearts, opening our wits that we may understand His word, enlarging our hearts, yea, correcting our affections, that we may love it above gold and silver, yea, that we may love it to the end. The Lord work a care and conscience in us to know Him and serve Him, that we may be acknowledged of Him at the appearing of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, to whom with Holy Ghost be all praise & thanksgiving. Amen.”

Other statements from the Preface will meet us again in speaking of the character of the translation: in the meantime we may notice one or two general features of the version.

§ 5. **Marginal Notes — References — Headings — Italics.** — It will be remembered when the question of a new version was first mooted the King forbade all such annotations as had appeared in the Genevan Bible; and to the same effect the sixth instruction to the translators enjoined, “No marginal notes at all to be affixed, but only for the explanation of the Hebrew or Greek words which cannot, without some circumlocution, so briefly and fitly be expressed in the text.” The first part of this rule was closely followed & all notes of a theological or controversial character were rigidly excluded; but at the same time the permission extended in its latter part was liberally interpreted & taken advantage of. In the original edition of our Authorised Version, excluding the Apocrypha, over seven thousand brief **Marginal Notes** are to be found, of which fully two-thirds in the Old Testament give the more literal meaning of the Hebrew or Chaldee, while in the New Testament about the same proportion suggest alternative translations of the Greek. It has been said that the marginal renderings of the Authorised Version are as a rule more to be trusted than those in the text; but with this verdict no scholar now will probably be found to agree. At the same time the excellence of many of them is shown by having been transferred by the recent revisers from the margin to the text.² Others notes are helpful for the information they convey regarding distances, weights, and measures. But the usefulness of the notes as a whole is much marred by their being so mixed up with the host of marginal references, as in consequence to be frequently lost sight of by the reader.

These **References** are computed not to have exceeded nine thousand in 1611, though in some modern editions they have risen to the enormous total of sixty thousand. They are all, at least in the original edition with which alone we are at present concerned, intended to facilitate the study of the Bible comparing one passage with another and as a rule they fulfil that purpose admirably. Occasionally however the reference is obscure, if not actually misleading, as when John 4: 24, “God *is* a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth,” is paralleled with 2 Corinthians 3:17, “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty.”

Headings of chapters and columns had existed both in the Genevan and in the Great and Bishops’ Bibles; but the translators of the Authorised Version introduced an entirely new set, which with only twelve exceptions have kept their place in most of the Bibles now in use. Thus for the pithy heading to Jer. 10:21 in the Bishops’ Bible, “Of evil Curates,” we have now “He lamenteth the spoil of the tabernacle by foolish pastors”; while the quaint column-heading of the Genevan at Mark 6, “Inconvenience of dancing,” has given place to “John the Baptist beheaded.”

One other point which may be fittingly noticed here is the use of **Italics** in the Authorised Version to mark words not directly represented in the original. In this the translators of 1611 were simply following the example already set them in previous versions, more particularly in the Genevan, and the practice has been warmly commended as serving to mark distinctly that the work is a translation. But against this it may be urged that if the words italicised do no more than represent the sense of the original, there is no reason for specially distinguishing them: while, if they go beyond that, they are of the nature of a gloss or explanation, and have no right to be there at all. In any case if italics are to be admitted it is much to be regretted that greater care was not taken in 1611 to secure uniformity of practice in their use. In no particular have corrections in subsequent editions been more required. One example must suffice. In 1st Peter 4: 11, “*let him speak*” is italicised in 1611; but the clause immediately following, which stands on exactly the same footing, “*let him do it,*” not until 1629.

§ 6. **In What Sense authorised.**—There remains still the question, In what sense can we speak of this new version as the **Authorised Version**? The name has been sometimes traced to the words on the title-page, “Appointed to be read in Churches,” as if its use was at once formally enjoined by the King, soon as it was published. But, whatever the words may mean, “no evidence has yet been produced to show that the version was ever publicly sanctioned by Convocation or by Parliament, or by the Privy Council, or by the King.” The Bishops’ Bible, so long as the old copies lasted, continued to be used in the churches: the Genevan was for still a generation the favourite in the home. Only slowly, and by the force of superior merit, did the King James’ version attain the position now enjoyed. It became the “authorised” version simply because it was the best.²

² Milligan, G. (1895). [*The English Bible: A Sketch of Its History*](#) (pp. 108–116). London: A. & C. Black.

THE AUTHORISED VERSION—CHARACTER OF THE TEXT

1. The Authorised Version a revision rather than a translation.
2. Dependence on earlier versions.
3. General excellence and reception of the Authorised Version.

FROM the foregoing general account of the Authorised Version we must turn to the character of the text, and notice briefly one or two points that bring out its peculiar excellences.

§ 1. **The Authorised Version a Revision rather than a Translation.**—From inscription on the title-page, “Newly translated out of the Originall Tongues,” we might be led to think that the Authorised Version was an altogether independent translation; but the words must be understood directly qualified by what follows “with the former Translations diligently compared & reuised.” Our received version was in fact, like its immediate predecessors, revision rather than translation. The King himself showed that he contemplated nothing else when in his opening instruction he laid down: “The ordinary Bible, read in the Church, commonly called the Bishops’ Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the truth of the Original will permit.” While the men engaged in the work bear testimony to the same effect: “Truly, good Christian Reader, we never thought from the beginning that we should need to make a new translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one ... but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones one principal good one, not justly to be excepted against; that hath been our endeavour, that our mark.”

So far, therefore, from being dissociated from previous versions, the Authorised Version only represents a fresh stage in the process of polishing and correcting which our English version of the Scriptures had been undergoing from the days of Tindale. Based upon the Bishops’ Bible, it reached back through that to the Great Bible of 1539, and thence to Matthew’s Bible of 1537; this in turn was derived from the Coverdale Bible of 1535, in the composition of which Tindale’s versions played so large a part. In other words, the Authorised Version is a revision five times revised.

In this work of revision King James’ translators naturally depended in the first instance upon a careful comparison of the Bishops’ renderings with the original Hebrew and Greek. “These,” in their own words, “are the two golden pipes, or rather conduits, where through the olive branches empty themselves into the gold... If truth be to be tried by these tongues, then whence should a translation be made, but out of them?” In consequence we find in the Authorised Version many exact and literal renderings now introduced for the first time, as when in Isa. 53:12 the Hebrew verb in the first clause is translated “divide” instead of as in the Bishops’ Bible “give”; or in Hebrews 4:1 the participial clause gets its true meaning “a promise being left us,” not “forsaking the promise,” as in the earlier versions. Apart too from correction of actual errors the translators show their clear grasp of the original by many graphic turns of expression, as in this same Epistle to the Hebrews—“*Captain* of their salvation” (2:10); “Let us *labour*, therefore, to enter into that rest” (4:11); and “The sin *which doth so easily beset us*” (12:1).

§ 2. **Dependence on earlier Versions.**—On the whole, however, to return to the relation of the Authorised Version to earlier English versions, its points of agreement with them, considered collectively, are more noticeable than its divergences. Wherever King James’ translators found what seemed to them a specially happy rendering they appropriated it, so that their work became a kind of mosaic of the best results of previous versions.

In doing this they were again only carrying out the King's wishes, for his fourteenth instruction especially provided: "These translations to be used when they agree better with the text than the Bishops' Bible: Tindale's, Matthew's, Coverdale's, Whitchurch's [the Great Bible, so named from one of its printers], Geneva." And one of the most interesting exercises of the study in which we have been engaged is to take a passage of the Authorised Version, and to trace back its words and phrases to their different sources. The short extracts scattered through our pages will provide the reader with a certain amount of material for doing this; but it may be well again to draw pointed attention to two versions, which, though not occupying places in the direct line of descent of the Authorised Version, were largely made use of by its translators. These were the Genevan and Rhemish versions.

It may appear strange that the Genevan Bible should have exercised any influence on the new version when we remember that the King had already condemned it as the worst of all the translations; but the fact is beyond dispute. Thus, for example, Dr. Westcott has pointed out that of the variations from the Bishops' Bible in Isa. 53 "about seven-eighths are due to the Genevan version," either alone or in agreement with one of the Latin versions. And though he warns us this is an extreme instance, he adds that it "only represents on an exaggerated scale the general relation in which the Authorised Version stands to the Genevan and the Bishops' Bibles in the Prophetical books." In the Historical books of the Old Testament the influence of the Genevan is less marked; but in the New Testament it supplies us with many familiar phrases, such as—

Luke 9:33, "It is good for us to be here" ("It is good being here for us," Tindale and subsequent versions).

Acts 14:15, "Men of like passions with you" ("Mortal men like unto you," Tindale, etc.)

1 Cor. 13:12, "We see through a glass darkly" ("We see in a glass even in a dark speaking," Tindale, etc.)

2 Cor. 5:20, "Ambassadors for Christ" ("Messengers in the room of Christ," Tindale, etc.)

Heb. 4:13, "The eyes of him with whom we have to do" ("The eyes of him of whom we speak," Tindale, etc.)

In the same way, although at the opposite pole doctrinally and ecclesiastically from the Genevan, and not mentioned at all in the King's instructions, the Rheims New Testament has left its mark in many unsuspected ways on our English Bible. Examples have already been given, but a few more may be of interest. It will be understood that the second rendering within brackets represents the general rendering in versions other than the Rhemish.

Matt. 26:26, "Jesus took bread and *blessed* it" ("gave thanks").

John 9:22, "He should be *put out* of the synagogue" ("excommunicate").

Acts 14:23, "When they had *ordained* them elders" ("ordained by election").

2 Cor. 5:18, "Hath given to us *the ministry of reconciliation*" ("the office to preach the atonement").

Heb. 12:16, "*Profane* person as Esau" ("unclean").

We cannot carry this comparison farther, but on the whole question of the pedigree of the Authorised Version we may sum up in the concise words of Dr. Eadie: "The Authorized Version has in it the traces of its origin, and its genealogy may be reckoned. For while it has the fulness of the Bishops' without its frequent literalisms or its repeated supplements, it has the graceful

vigour of the Genevan, the quiet grandeur of the Great Bible, the clearness of Tyndale, the harmonies of Coverdale, and the stately theological vocabulary of the Rheims. It has thus a complex unity in its structure — all the earlier versions ranging over eighty years having bequeathed to it contributions the individuality of which hasn't been in all cases toned down."

§ 3. **General Excellence and Reception of the Authorised Version.** —While, however, the work of King James' translators was thus mainly one of revision, we must not fail to accord to them the full praise to which they are entitled for the care which they exercised. "Neither did we disdain," they tell us, "to revise that which we had done, and to bring back to the anvil that which we had hammered ... fearing no reproach for slowness, nor praise for expedition." Their method of working in companies prevented their version from showing marks of individuality by which certain previous translations had been disfigured; while their combined responsibility for the whole, not merely for their own several parts, gave a general smoothness & consistency to the work, in which the Bishops' Bible, for example, was lacking. To other points connected with the Authorised Version, such as the appropriateness of its vocabulary, beauty of its style, its subsequent influence upon our language and literature, and the part it has played in forming the national character, it is impossible to refer at length here; but it is necessary to emphasise what has been more than once alluded to, that the new version, notwithstanding its excellences, did not at once meet with general acceptance. On the contrary it had to work its way slowly & gradually in the face of much bitter criticism. One eminent scholar went the length of saying that he "had rather be rent in pieces with wild horses than any such translation, by my consent, should be urged on poor churches." Other charges, such as those of an undue ecclesiastical or doctrinal bias on the part of the translators in certain of their renderings, though now in the main disproved, could not fail to have considerable weight at the time. The translators themselves had expected nothing else. "Was there ever anything projected," they ask, "that savoured any way of newness or renewing, but the same endured many a storm of gainsaying or opposition?"

As regards Scotland it is strange, and not altogether to our credit, that the country of Knox & Melville never produced a translation of the Bible of its own. Copies of the Wycliffite versions and of Tindale's Testaments had found their way into the Northern Kingdom, and in 1579, as we have already seen, the Genevan Bible was reprinted in Edinburgh; but no indigenous version was ever thought of, and in the beginning of the seventeenth century, notwithstanding national and other antipathies, Scotland had still to look to England for her Bible. According to the "Canons and Constitutions Ecclesiasticall" of 1636 it was enacted that there should be provided for every Parish "a Bible of the largest volume," and further, that "the Bible shall be of the translation of King James." And though two years later these canons were rejected, the way was at least paved for the general circulation of the Authorised Version.

If, however, the new version was thus slow in establishing itself, the hold of which, once acquired, it has since maintained is unparalleled in the history of any other English translation. None have been more ready to admit this than the men who in 1870 were appointed to revise it. "We," so the New Testament revisers tell in their Preface, "have had to study this great Version carefully and minutely, line by line; and the longer we have been engaged upon it the more we have learned to admire its simplicity, its dignity, its power, its happy turns of expression, its general accuracy & we must not fail to add, the music of its cadences & felicities of its rhythm."

The previous independent testimonies of two of their number to the same effect may well be quoted. “We in this land,” said Dean Alford, when advocating the necessity of revision in a sermon in St. Paul’s, “possess a version of Holy Scriptures which may challenge comparison for faithfulness, for simplicity & for majesty with any that the world has ever seen. And when we intensify all these claims to our affection by the fact that it has been for centuries & is now, the vehicle to this great English race of all that is pure, holy, lovely, and of good report, — the first lesson of infancy, the guide of mature life, the comforter of sickness and death, — we can hardly be surprised that many & some of the best among us refuse to see its faults & are unable to contemplate with any content the prospect of their being corrected.”

And another great Biblical critic still happily spared to us, Bishop Westcott, to whose *History of the English Bible* we have made so many references in the preceding pages, writes: “Our version is the work of a Church and not of a man. Or rather, it is a growth and not a work. Countless external influences, independent of the actual translators, contributed to mould it; and when it was fashioned the Christian instinct of the nation, touched, as we believe, by the Spirit of God, decided on its authority.” He adds—and the words have an important bearing on the subject of our next chapter: “Our Bible in virtue of its past is capable of admitting revision, if need be, without violating its history. As it gathered into itself, during the hundred years in which it was forming, the treasures of manifold labours, so it still has the same assimilative power of life.”³

³ Milligan, G. (1895). [*The English Bible: A Sketch of Its History*](#) (pp. 117–123). London: A. & C. Black.

Problem of Pseudonymity (people writing forgeries):

The Removal of Mark 16:9-20 from both Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.

“Concealing and destroying evidence is one thing. But manufacturing false evidence is quite another. Here, we are about to consider what is perhaps one of the greatest and most serious scandals in the depressingly long history of Vatican forgery. It is so blatant an attempt to deceive that we can only wonder firstly at the sheer audacity of the scheme along with the unashamed readiness with which the world has been deceived by it; and secondly, at the reluctance if not refusal of our more conservative scholars to even challenge or discuss the matter. It’s not as if it has been hidden in a dark corner and unavailable for study. And it was, moreover, a feature of both Sinaiticus and Vaticanus that Tischendorf himself drew attention to no less than three times! Yet it is ignored on all fronts, liberal and conservative. But that has not always been the case.

The nature of the scandal is this. The bifolia [quires] on which the omission of Mark 16:9-20 is contained in both Sinaiticus and Vaticanus were written out in both instances by the same scribe! The hand and even the peculiarities of spelling are identical. Writing in 1893, James Rendell Harris has this to say on the matter: “It is generally held today that Tischendorf was justified recognizing in the Sinaitic Codex traces of the same hand as wrote the N. T. portion of the Codex Vaticanus. As this is an important point, and one that settles, if it be correctly inferred, both the unity of time & of place in the two Codices, I spend a few moments in the statement of the case. According to Tischendorf there are in the Codex Sinaiticus six cancel leaves of the New Testament which have been rewritten by another hand....

The evidence for this is Tischendorf’s eyes and Tischendorf’s judgment. The (two) hands are apparently the same, and there are concurrent peculiarities in spelling, etc., which persuade the judgment to finally identify [sic]. There is nothing unreasonable in the occasional change from one scribe to another when occupied on the same book. It is a priori likely enough. On such a matter, Tischendorf’s opinion is of the greatest weight; he did not know much about papyrus hands or cursive hands, but he knew more about vellum-uncial hands than anybody else. Consequently, most people, even if they have not seen the Codex, accept his judgment. But after Tischendorf had come to his conclusion he took the argument a step further, and said that the hand in question was the same hand that wrote the New Testament portion of the Vatican Codex. The argument is as before a palaeographical one and depends on shapes of letters, spellings, etc.

Dr. Hort, who completely accepted Tischendorf’s judgment, remarked that its accuracy was confirmed by the fact that the six cancel leaves were conjugate leaves in the quire, so that they were really three double leaves. This is as it should be, for in a MS. in which the quire is the foundation, one cannot cancel a single leaf....

The interest of the question is much intensified by the fact that one of the cancelled leaves is that which contains the closing passages of S. Mark, where both Aleph [Sinaiticus] and B [Vaticanus] show a remarkable omission. The coincidence is a curious one, and many people, naturally enough, refuse to believe that it is accidental. They say 'we have the scribe of B [Vaticanus] twice over for the omission, and not two separate authorities.' This is a matter of truly immense importance, so let's think carefully about what it is we are looking at here.

For the past hundred and fifty years or so, the public have been told that between them, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus are ancient and independent witnesses to the fact that the verses of Mark 16:9-20 are a late addition to the Gospel of Mark. These verses did not, it is alleged, belong to the original text of the New Testament, and the fact that they are missing from both Sinaiticus and Vaticanus proves that to be true. Both Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, it is said, are independent witnesses to that fact. But not a word is said about the fact that the pages of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus which contain the omission of these verses, were written out by the same hand – that the same individual is responsible for the omission in both cases. Not a word, even though our critics have been aware of this fact ever since Tischendorf himself pointed it out not once but three times!

Exactly what is going on here? Without a doubt, this forged insertion into the text of both Sinaiticus and Vaticanus was instigated by Cardinal Mai. He it was who was responsible for seeing the Vaticanus facsimile through the press in 1857. What we do not know at this stage is who did the actual forgery. It was not, I suspect, Tischendorf, because he voiced some surprise at the fact that the bifolia were in the same hand, whereas had he been the forger he would never have drawn attention to that fact. Perhaps we shall never know (not on this side of Eternity), but we do know by this evidence that the world has been mightily deceived by this insertion.

Whoever it was who instigated and forged the deception, they were on pretty safe ground. There was in those days virtually no chance of the forgery being detected. When, in 1845, critic Samuel Prideaux Tregelles spent five months in Rome to examine Codex Vaticanus, he was, like many others, obstructed at every turn: "They would not let me open it without searching my pockets, and depriving me of pen, ink, and paper; and at the same time two prelati kept me in constant conversation in Latin, and if I looked at a passage too long, they would snatch the book out of my hand." And even if more general doubts were voiced, as voiced they were in certain newspapers & journals of the time, they could safely be ignored and forgotten.

Newspaper interest in any story is fatally limited both in time and scope, for the next day brings new headlines and new issues, and so matters move on. Meanwhile, a host of 'scholarly' publications by Skeat et al would flood the schools and universities with the constant reassurance that Sinaiticus and Vaticanus are indeed as ancient as the Vatican says they are and are yet independent witnesses against the cherished Textus Receptus. And so, it was fondly hoped, the battle would be won.

But one notorious fact in all this is that in both Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, space was provided by the forger that would have been sufficient for the accommodation of the twelve missing verses (Mark 16:9-20) had he included them. And the space for accommodation had to be precise and not approximate. So why - knowing that he was going to omit the verses - did our forger bother to provide this space? Why not instead begin Luke's Gospel immediately after Mark 16:8 so that the omission of verses 9-20 would not be evident?

The answer is simple. In the world of palaeography, where manuscripts often survive only in fragments, there is a science known as stichometry. Stichometry is the measure of letter sizes, space sizes & frequency, the number of letters to a line, number of lines & columns to a page, and so on. It was important in this case that the stichometry was kept as continuous as possible when the bifolia containing Mark 16:9-20 were removed, and new ones omitting these verses were inserted to replace them. Otherwise the space taken by the verses would have occurred later when the new pages had to marry up to the old.

In other words, at the turn of the next page a great gap would have appeared in the first chapter of Luke. But the forger had a problem, for it was not simply a matter of removing single pages to achieve the deception. He had to remove the whole quire, and write out a new quire (in this case a bifolium) to replace it. So, he had to make sure that he followed the old pages exactly, or the replacement would be detected immediately; and this meant supplying in both cases a sufficient space after Mark 16:8 to accommodate the omitted twelve verses. What he forgot to disguise was his handwriting."

Conclusion

We began our enquiry with the observation that every forger carries within him the source of his own betrayal & we have seen that principle in action here. Very briefly, if we consider just some of the many signs that Codex Sinaiticus is a forgery, as well as claims so stridently made for its alleged antiquity, then we will think upon these seven points:

- 1) The entire manuscript is written on parchment that is unoxidised, supple and certainly not as ancient as is claimed, and whose collagen is virtually undecayed.
- 2) Almost every page of the manuscript bears telltale signs of forgery, mostly involving fading the text and discolouring the page in a most amateurish attempt to make it look much older than it truly is.
- 3) Certain pages are unnaturally and inexplicably mutilated.
- 4) Some pages display square wormholes. Others display 'normal' wormholes aplenty, yet there are no lines of ingress that a real worm would have made to reach the tastiest portions. There are also no matching wormholes in the immediately adjacent pages to account for them.
- 5) The Codex contains a text of the Epistle of Barnabas which is written in essentially modern Greek & contains many grammatical and vocabularic evidences of having been translated into Greek from a late Latin recension. It's written, moreover, in the same hand – 'Scribe A' - as most of the New Testament. It also complies with many of the scholarly emendations of that Latin text that had been suggested & recommended by scholars who lived and worked during the 18th and 19th centuries; and its text, moreover, is identical to that printed by Simonides in 1843, sixteen years before Tischendorf found it nestling inside Sinaiticus.
- 6) The Codex also contains a text of the Shepherd of Hermas which is again in modern Greek & contains many grammatical and vocabularic evidences of having been translated into Greek from a late Latin recension, most likely the Palatine. Its text is also identical to that printed by Simonides (through Leipzig University) in 1856, some three years before Tischendorf found it nestling within the pages of Sinaiticus.
- 7) And finally, there is an act of sheer fraud in the removal from Sinaiticus' pages of the ending of Mark's Gospel and its substitution with a fake ending, carried out by the same scribe who removed the ending of Mark's Gospel from Codex Vaticanus and substituted it with a fake but identical ending to that in Sinaiticus.

Scholars and modern editions of the Bible which claim the best and most ancient manuscripts omit Mark 16:9-20 are merely perpetuating a lie based upon an act of sheer fraud. Any one of these points would be damning enough proof on its own, but when all the points are brought together then they are damning evidence indeed. Codex Sinaiticus is fake & is no fit authority by which to judge or assess the Scriptures, the immutable Word of God. That Word has been preserved pure and entire in the Textus Receptus - the Received Text - of which Reformation Bibles of Europe are translations. Textus Receptus is attested and verified by more than 5000 early manuscript witnesses, against the one or two demonstrably forged manuscripts which support Sinaiticus & Vaticanus which are themselves forgeries. The Received Text, translated into English in the King James Bible, therefore has no rival. It was first translated into English by William Tyndale, then Miles Coverdale, then by Matthew (John Rogers), then by Richard Taverner, then by Geneva Bible translators, and then by the Bishops Bible of 1568. The King James Bible was merely the latest improvement.

CONSEQUENCES

“It wasn’t like any resurrection sermon we had ever heard. For one thing, he told us he was going to stick to the Gospel of Mark. That sounded intriguing! Until I learned the textual critics say, against all historical fact, that Mark was the first gospel, and that the other gospels were written later. But they claim that what’s in the other gospels was added later, and didn’t actually happen.

Picture this with me. Mark 16:1-2 sets the stage: Sometime after Saturday sunset, but before Sunday sunrise, Mary Magdalene and Mary, mother of James (sounds like Jesus’ earthly mom, Mary), and Salome come up to the tomb. They arrive just as the sun breaks over the horizon. It’s very dramatic. Follow with me, right out of the text. Mark 16:3-7: And they (Mary Magdalene, Mary & Salome) said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked, they saw the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in long white garment & they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

Now look at verse 8: And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they anything to any man; for they were afraid. They had reason to be afraid! Women’s testimony wasn’t believed. They had no proof of what happened. And they’d just gone to an opened tomb, with no guards outside & no body inside! And they had just seen an angel of God! They were the only witnesses of all this! How would you like the police to question you at this point? The body is missing, and you’re on the scene. So, they fled. Makes sense to me. What happened next?

Our professor that Sunday morning was telling this congregation about what he said was “the oldest manuscript,” Codex Sinaiticus. He said something like this: There are ...some very, very significant omissions to this early manuscript. And it ends with an expression about the women. It says, ‘For they were afraid.’ And you see there’s lots of space for them to go on. But he does not know of any other ending. And they supplied these different endings because they did not like a Gospel ending, ‘For they were afraid.’

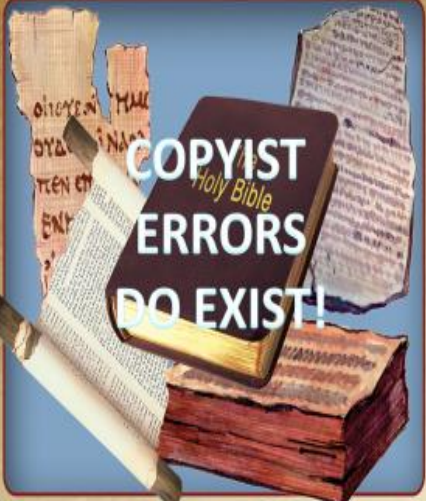
But if they’d read carefully, and I have done this, and looked through this, the word ‘phobeomai,’ which is the normal word for phobia, or fears, in Mark, more often has the idea of standing in AWE of something. And if we see that, we can see this is an appropriate ending for the gospel of Mark. They were in AWE at what they had seen, that Jesus was no longer there. Um, and that’s uh, at least that is my interpretation and my explanation. Later on, there are, as I said, two different kinds of endings that are here, okay. Earliest manuscripts do not have those verses in them.

So, our Greek professor, who was colorful and vibrant and alive, left us without any resurrection appearances of Christ. The women left the tomb after they saw an angel, wouldn’t talk to anyone, and they were afraid... or, “in AWE...” The End. I walked out of that Sunday service so confused. It was Resurrection Sunday, with no resurrection.”

Daniels, David W.. Is The "World's Oldest Bible" A Fake? . Chick Publications. Kindle Edition.

TODAY **Accuracy & Precision**

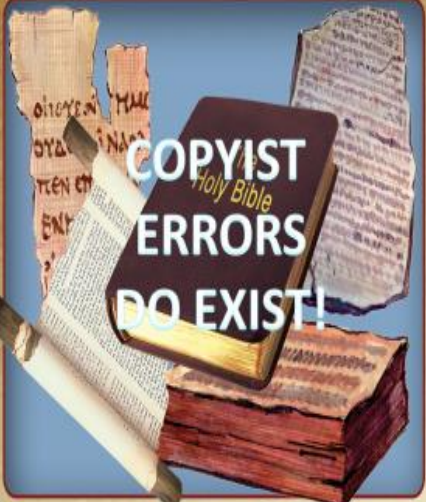
For most the time the Bible has been in existence, manuscripts were copied by hand. Many times the words being copied are very close in appearance, and it is easy to make a mistake in a handwritten manuscript.



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TODAY **Accuracy & Precision**

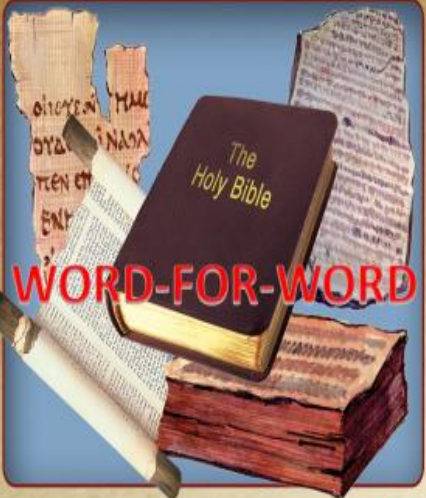
The number 4, for example, is rbh in Hebrew while the number 40 is rbym. In the King James translation of 1st Kings 4:26, we are told that Solomon had 12,000 horses. Second Chronicles says there were 4,000 stalls and 1st Kings says there were 40,000 stalls. Any honest reader is going to realize that 40,000 stalls for 12,000 horses does not make much sense. Thus, somewhere in copying there was an error made as the words rbym and rbh were confused and the error copied.



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TODAY **Translation Typology**

The word-for-word versions most accurately follow the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts. Generally speaking, the King James Version and its modern counterpart, the New Kings James Version, are word-for-word translations. About 98% of the 4,500 Greek manuscripts known agree with the basic text of the King James Bible. Even the variations that do exist rarely affect the basic meaning of the remaining two percent of those manuscripts.

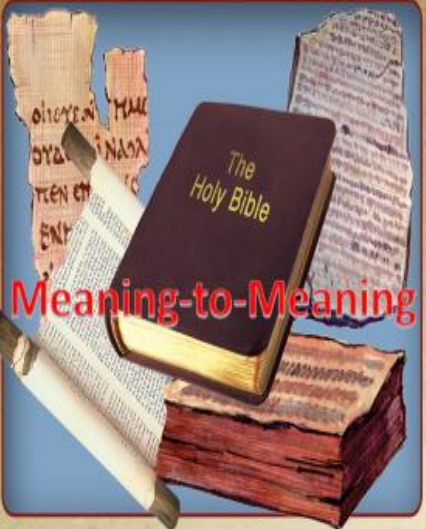


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TODAY **Translation Typology**

The thought-for-thought translation is helpful in conveying the point of ancient figures of speech – idioms – that would make sense to us in our modern language.

In general, meaning-to-meaning versions use up-to-date language and thus are easier to understand – although they are not the best choice for establishing doctrine because they at times involve some interpretation of what the original writers intended to say.




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TODAY

Translation Typology

We should be cautious working with these because the authors exercised considerable 'poetic license' in interpreting biblical terms and passages according to their own personal religious ideas.

Paraphrased types often can be consulted to better grasp the story flow but should also be considered inadequate sources for accurately determining the meaning of a text.



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Robert R. Taylor Jr. Wrote in 2010 Church Bulletin:

They have tampered with it by making it contradict itself. Any number of them, including the highly heralded English Standard Version, will have Christ declare in Matthew 5 & verse 17 that He did not come to abolish or annul Mosaic law and yet have the apostle Paul affirm in Ephesians 2:15 that Christ did abolish or annul it.

They have tampered with the marvelous word *monogenes* of John 1:14, 18; 3:16 & 1st John 4, verse 9. Older translations like the KJV and the ASV retain 'only begotten.' So does the new King James Version, which is a fairly new version. The newer ones will have Jesus as the 'only' Son or the 'One and only' Son. This deals with the 'mono' portion of the word. *Mono* means one or only. What does *genes* mean? It has to mean something, else it would not have been used. I have traced and researched this word in the first century, among the anti-Nicene fathers, the post-Nicene fathers, the Reformation greats, the Restoration scholars... 'Only begotten' received the favorable vote of countless hundreds of such Bible students.

Jesus Christ is God's only begotten Son, but **He is not God's only Son. John 1:12 tells us how we may become the sons of God. John in 1st John 3:1 calls the saints of God the 'sons of God.'**

Scribal Error in Biblical Manuscripts

Since the reproduction of manuscripts in the ancient world required individual hand copying by scribes, the transmission of texts was often liable to corruption. By examining the different manuscripts of a particular passage, textual critics are able to discern the common errors. Since extant manuscripts of biblical texts, specifically the New Testament, exist in such a great number, they are a good place to look for scribal errors. The following is a list of common types of scribal errors one may encounter in these manuscripts:

Unintentional Errors

1. Confusing similarly shaped letters: Some letters in the Greek alphabet were easy to confuse when handwritten. For example, the round letters epsilon (ε), theta (Θ), omicron (Ο), and sigma (Σ) all have similar shapes.

Alpha (Α), delta (Δ), and lambda (Λ) all have triangular shapes and were sometimes confused.

Sometimes two letters written closely together were mistaken for one letter. For instance, a tau followed by an iota (ΤΙ) could end up looking like a pi (Π); a lambda followed by an iota (ΛΙ) could look like a nu (Ν).

2. Dittography and haplography: These terms describe errors that result in repeating text or omitting text. They frequently occur when a word, phrase, or line begins with a similar string of letters (homoeoarcton) or ends with a similar string of letters (homoeoteleuton), causing the eyes to skip forward or backward. One example of haplography resulting from homoeoteleuton can be found in Matthew 5:19-20 of the Codex Sinaiticus.* The first sentence of verse 19 ends with ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν & the end of the verse also ends with ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν. Thus, the scribe of the Codex Sinaiticus has accidentally omitted everything from the first occurrence to the end of the verse. The scribe of the Codex Bezae has gone further by skipping from the end of the first sentence of verse 19 to the end of verse 20 which also ends with ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν.

3. Confusing similar sounding letters: Sometimes scribes would write from dictation or would read the words aloud to themselves while copying. The blog post “Papyrus as Evidence of Linguistic Change,” has already presented some of the changes in pronunciation that occurred in the Greek language over time which often resulted in spelling variations.

This is evident in many biblical papyri as scribes who relied on hearing often mixed up similar sounding diphthongs and vowels of that period. One excellent example of this confusion can be found in Rom. 5:1 where the manuscript evidence is quite equally divided between ἔχομεν and ἔχωμεν.

4. Word substitutions: Errors could also occur when scribes trying to retain a line in their memory accidentally replaced some words with close synonyms. Prepositions like ἐκ and ἀπό, or conjunctions like ὅτι and διότι are some examples of synonyms which mistakenly get replaced.

5. Transposition of words: Sometimes scribes would unintentionally reorder a string of words, especially if the sense of the phrase remained virtually the same. This is another type of error related to faulty memory.

6. Assimilation of marginalia: Some manuscripts contained notes or glosses in the margins from earlier scribes. These notes sometimes found their way into the actual text of the manuscript.

Intentional Changes

1. Harmonization: The wording of a particular phrase or sentence was sometimes altered to reflect the wording of another similar but more familiar one. This was especially common with quotations that had a longer form in a different book or quotations from the Septuagint that did not conform to the exact wording of the Septuagint.

2. Conflation of readings: Conflation tended to happen more often in biblical manuscripts than elsewhere. A scribe would sometimes make his copy using more than one manuscript. Where the wording of the exemplars differed from each other, a scribe would sometimes conflate both readings into one.

3. Grammatical adjustments: Although the New Testament was written in Koine Greek, the rise of Atticism in the 2nd century AD led scribes to try to improve the style of a text. Other times, they would tend to make slight adjustments to improve clunky grammar. A good illustration of the tendency to correct can be found in Mark 1: 37 which reads, “καὶ εὔρον αὐτὸν καὶ λέγουσιν.” One variant that occurs in a majority of manuscripts attempts to improve the Greek grammar with the following: “καὶ εὔροντες αὐτὸν λέγουσιν.”

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*For more information about the codices Sinaiticus and Bezae, see

<http://codexsinaiticus.org/en/codex/> and

http://legacy.earlham.edu/~seidti/iam/tc_codexb.html

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The Significance of the Scribal Corruptions to the New Testament Text

Related Media

Ancient scribes who copied the handwritten texts of the New Testament frequently changed the text intentionally. Although *unintentional* changes account for the vast majority of textual corruption, intentional alterations also account for thousands of corruptions. In some cases, to be sure, it does seem that the scribes were being malicious. But these instances are few and far between. The majority of the intentional changes to the text were done by scribes who either thought that the text they were copying had errors in it or by scribes who were clarifying the meaning, especially for liturgical reasons. Some of the commonest intentional changes involve parallel passages. This is where the passage that the scribe is copying out has a parallel to it of which the scribe is aware. For example, about 90% of the pericopes (or stories) in Mark's Gospel are found in Matthew. When a scribe was copying Mark, after he had just finished copying Matthew, he would frequently remember the parallel in Matthew and make adjustments to the wording of Mark so that it would conform to the wording of Matthew. This alteration is known as harmonization. Occasionally, the wording in Matthew would be conformed to that of Mark or Luke. Or when the New Testament quotes from the Old Testament, especially when the quotation is from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament abbreviated LXX), scribes tended to conform the wording in the NT to the LXX. Parallels between letters of Paul also suffer from this kind of alteration. But when certain manuscripts disagree with such parallels, they are usually considered to reflect the wording of the original text better. A part of the reason for this is that virtually *all* manuscripts harmonize passages. This shows that there was a concern for the wording of the text and the historical reliability of the text. Consequently, when a manuscript does not harmonize while most others do, it is usually considered to reflect the original wording.

Scribes also were prone to clarify passages, especially for liturgical reasons. For example, 89 *successive* verses in Mark do not mention the name of Jesus once nor refer to him by any noun at all. But in the lectionary cycle, a portion of Mark's Gospel would be read for the assigned day. It would be a bit confusing if the passage began with, "And he went out from Galilee." Who is the 'he'? The lectionaries would add the name of Jesus (and they did so in

three well-placed locations in these 89 verses) to give a little context to the reader. The lectionaries exercised a great influence on the later manuscripts especially. What was part of the prescribed reading of scripture became so ingrained in the scribes' minds that they naturally added the words that they knew from such recitations.

Scribes also were prone to clarify what they thought the text meant. Sometimes they were right, sometimes they were wrong. There could be theological issues involved, or issues of mere orthopraxy (proper conduct in the church). An understanding of early church history helps us to get a better grasp on which reading is most likely to be authentic and which is not. But we can't always be sure, and one of the great problems with this kind of approach is pinpointing when a reading arose and matching it to a theological agenda. Some have attempted this as a primary explanation for the apparent theological changes in the NT, but what they haven't done is sufficiently anchor a particular reading to a particular time and place in which such a reading would probably arise. Thus, the theological argument must give way to the textual evidence, since the textual variants are capable of being explained by several different factors.

Two or three examples are in order to illustrate the above points. In [Mark 3:21](#) most manuscripts (including early and important ones) read, "When his family heard this they went out to restrain him, for they were saying, 'he is out of his mind.'" The 'they' here is ambiguous: it might refer back to 'his family,' in which case Jesus' family was calling him nuts; or it might refer to a general 'they.' Manuscripts of the Western text-type changed 'his family' to 'the scribes and the rest' to remove the potential embarrassment. Yet this is precisely why 'his family' is probably authentic: what scribe would change the text to make it *more* ambiguous, and capable of embarrassment?

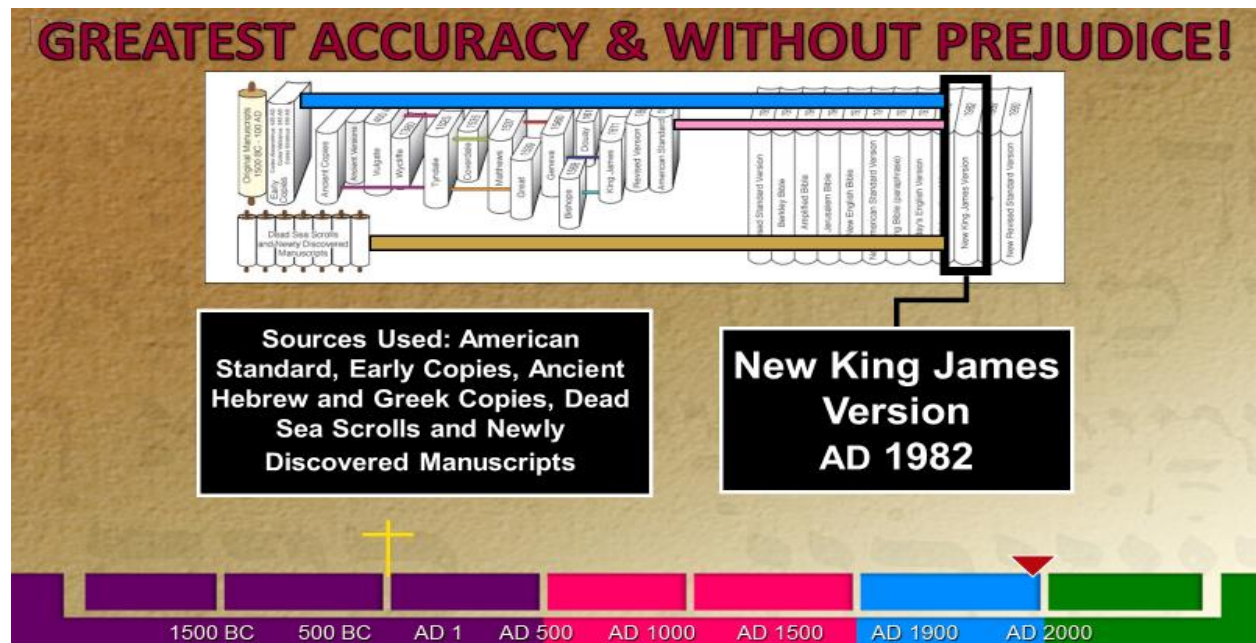
In [John 4:17](#), Jesus quotes the Samaritan woman's words back to her: "Correctly you have said, 'I don't have a husband.'" However, in the Greek text, he didn't quote her exactly. The word order is reversed: "A *husband* I don't have." The emphasis seems to be that she had someone at home but he was not her husband, a point Jesus will make explicit in the next verse. However, a few manuscripts change the word order to make both statements conform to each other---however, they don't change Jesus' word order but the *woman's*! It's as if the scribes were thinking, "He quoted her correctly; she just didn't say it right in the first place so we need to adjust her words"! Other manuscripts both changed the word order of what the woman had to say *and* turned Jesus' statement into an indirect statement ("Correctly you have said that *you* don't have a husband"), to safeguard the Lord's speech. Here is an instance in which the parallel is in the same verse rather than between two Gospels.

In [Mark 9:31](#) and 10:34, most manuscripts change the wording of Jesus' prediction of his own death and resurrection to say that he would rise from the dead 'on the third day' instead of 'after three days.' However, several important and diverse witnesses read 'after three days' in these verses. Why the change? Because Matthew and Luke spoke of Jesus' resurrection as occurring *on* the third day, not *after* three days. Mark consistently referred to Jesus' resurrection as occurring after three days, while Matthew and Luke almost consistently speak of it as occurring on the third day. There is but one instance in Matthew in which 'after three days' is used, and that on the lips of would-be witnesses against Jesus ([Matt 27:63](#)). Without getting into the details of these parallels, suffice it to say that both Matthew and Luke seemed to want to clarify that 'after three days' meant 'on the third day'; and most later scribes, not recognizing the Jewish idiom, also changed the wording in Mark to reflect the wording in Matthew and Luke.

It is remarkable, however, that the scribes seemed to be more concerned with harmonizations, both literary and historical, than in protecting Jesus' divine status—even if they embraced his full deity. A classic example of this is the parallel between [Matthew 19:17](#) and [Mark 10:18](#). In [Mark 10:17](#), the rich young ruler says to Jesus, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" To this Jesus responds, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." The answer must have startled the young man—and certainly would have startled the readers of this gospel! Was Jesus here declaring that he was not divine? That certainly seems to be the implication—at least on the surface. Most likely, however, Jesus was attempting to get the young man to recognize that by calling Jesus good he was saying something about him that was ontological, intrinsic to his nature. Was he really prepared to call Jesus divine? If so, then he should definitely do whatever the Lord told him because this man from Nazareth was God in the flesh.

In characteristic fashion, Matthew softens this line of thought because his goal is not so much to get his readers to wrestle with who Jesus is as it is to instruct them who he is. While Mark is attempting to get his readers to come to their own conclusions about Jesus, Matthew is attempting to get them to come to his conclusions. (This, by the way, explains why Mark ends his gospel at 16:8 rather than at 16:20: the reader is invited to think through the death and resurrection and consider whether he should embrace Jesus as *both* the suffering servant and the resurrected Lord. Mark, however, does not give him the option of *just* accepting Jesus in his glory. This is what Peter and the disciples originally wanted, and for this reason Mark leaves off any resurrection appearance to Peter and the disciples.) Hence, in [Matt 19:16](#), the young man says, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to gain eternal life?" To this Jesus responds, "Why do you ask me about the good? There is only one who is good." The full response here is almost a *non sequitur*. The man, in

Matthew, did not call Jesus good, so ‘there is only one who is good’ does not seem to directly answer his question. However, it does reveal a *seam*, a vestige of Mark’s wording that has carried over into Matthew’s gospel. What is most remarkable about this parallel, however, is this: later, orthodox scribes changed the wording in Matthew rather than in Mark. In fact, the majority of scribes changed Matthew’s wording to conform to Mark. Well after orthodoxy was established, these scribes continued to fix the text of Matthew and leave Mark untouched. Now, to be sure, the wording in Mark is the same as the wording in Luke. But since Matthew was the most copied and read gospel in the ancient church, one would especially expect Mark’s gospel to be changed to conform to Matthew. Further, concerning Christology, where Mark asks a question, Matthew gives an answer. It may have been the near *non sequitur* in [Matt 19:17](#) that tipped the scales, or the parallel in Luke, but regardless of the reason the fact that later scribes changed the text of Matthew to conform to Mark shows at least that they were more concerned about verbal harmonization than about any implications this might have for Christology. And this is something we see frequently in the synoptic gospels: harmonizations simply for the sake of smoothing out historical and literary parallels, regardless of the consequences for other theological issues. Nevertheless, such harmonizations are easy to spot. And scribes were not entirely consistent. Thus, the ‘after three days’ in [Mark 8:31](#) is virtually untouched. Even this strong motive to alter the text was never done systematically and was never done completely. For this reason, we can have a great deal of confidence that the essential message of the original text can be recovered, for there is always a witness to it.



Is the Doxology of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:13 a late addition?

Contents

1 External evidence

- 1.1 Codex Washingtonensis
- 1.2 Patristic Evidence

2 Internal evidence

- 2.1 Why Matthew has the doxology and Luke does not
- 2.2 The teaching that the kingdom of heaven belongs to God
- 2.3 The teaching on denouncing self-glorification
- 2.4 The teaching on laying up treasures in heaven

3 Early manuscripts may not be reliable

4 Reasons for the omission

- 4.1 Hypothesis 1: mistake
- 4.2 Hypothesis 2: harmonization
- 4.3 Hypothesis 3: the oral tradition overrode the written word

External evidence

"Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."
(Matthew 6:9-13b, KJV)

The underlined portion above is called the doxology of the Lord's prayer, or the ending to the Protestant version of the Lord's prayer. Roman Catholic and modern Bible versions of the prayer do not have this ending. This powerful doxology has been falsely characterized as a late addition as it is not found in the two earliest Greek witnesses of Matthew 6:13 - Sinaiticus and Vaticanus both from the 4th century. Yet it is found in the third earliest Greek witness of Matthew 6:13, Codex Washingtonensis from the 4th to 5th century. Hence a

manuscript testifying for the doxology is preceded by only two adverse manuscripts, and that by just one or a half century. The doxology exists in the majority of Byzantine manuscripts (*Nestle-Aland: Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th revised edition (2006)).

Codex Washingtonensis

Codex Washingtonensis is housed at the Freer Gallery, Sackler Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. and the passage of the Lord's Prayer can be viewed at the website of The Center for the Study of New Testament

Manuscripts: http://www.csntm.org/Manuscript/View/GA_032 . Since uncials can be difficult to read, a photograph of the leaf containing the Lord's Prayer has been reproduced here (for non-profit educational fair use purposes) with the prayer underlined and the doxology in particular underlined in blue. The words of the Lord's Prayer in Codex Washingtonensis match the words of the Textus Receptus word for word, letter by letter for the most part.



Please click on the image to see the full size view

Patristic Evidence

Some early Church fathers, such as Origen, Tertullian and Cyprian, omit the doxology, proving that some or perhaps many early Christians did not accept the doxology. However, these early omissions do not prove that the doxology was invented at a later time. Roman Catholics throughout history have omitted the doxology even during times when the doxology was prevalent in manuscripts or printed editions of the Gospel of Matthew. The Roman Catholic rejection of the doxology has had more to do with tradition rather than conclusions based on contemporaneous manuscript evidence. Likewise, the omissions by some early Christians could have been due to an early tradition rather than the absence of the doxology in their contemporaneous manuscripts.

We know that the doxology is very ancient because John Chrysostom (347–407) expounded the doxology in his homily, *Homily 19 on St. Matthew*, at paragraph 10 [[Download a PDF of the Lord's Prayer portion of the Homily HERE](#)]. He treats the words as those of Christ himself and says nothing of the alleged spuriousness of the words. This 4th century Archbishop of Constantinople would have had manuscripts that were earlier than what we have today. The earliest variant of the doxology appears in the Didache, an anonymous late first century treatise ([click here to read it in Greek](#)). It reads, "ὅτι σοῦ ἐστὶν ἡ δύναμις καὶ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας", thereby omitting "ἡ βασιλεία καὶ" and "ἀμην". Some critics claim that this incomplete variant of the doxology proves the evolution of a spurious doxology. Such a conclusion is unwarranted, however, because the Didache is a slightly different version of the prayer to begin with. Instead of "τοῖς οὐρανοῖς" (literally, "the heavens") the Didache has "τῷ οὐρανῷ" ("the heaven") - this change suggests that an editor converted the Hebraic expression of a plural heavens, as in שָׁמַיִם (shamayim), to the Greek idea of heaven as a singular location of God's dwelling-place. Also, instead of "τα οφειλήματα ἡμῶν" ("our debts") the Didache has "τὴν ὀφειλὴν" ("debt"). The fact is that the Lord's prayer in the Didache has the doxology, albeit as an erroneous variant.

Internal evidence

Why Matthew has the doxology and Luke does not

The Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 has the doxology whereas the Lord's prayer in Luke 11:2-4 does not. The version in Luke says:

Our Father which art in heaven,
 Hallowed be thy name.
 Thy kingdom come.
 Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.
 Give us day by day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.
 And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

The above is Luke's version as it appears in the KJV based on the Textus Receptus. Luke's version as it appears in translations according to the Nestle-Aland 27th Edition Greek text omit many words and are drastically different from Matthew's version. The Nestle-Aland 27th follows the readings in early Alexandrian manuscripts, P75, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. Luke's version in the ESV says:

Father,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread,
and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
And lead us not into temptation.

These early Alexandrian readings may have been influenced by the corrupted version of the Lord's prayer by the second century heretic Marcion, which after "Father" introduces the erroneous line, "thy Holy Spirit come upon us and cleanse us", and thereafter generally makes the same omissions as in the Alexandrian manuscripts (*Nestle-Aland: Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th revised edition (2006)). In any event, if one were to begin with the supposition that the Nestle-Aland reading of Luke's version is original, then it is easy to explain why Matthew's version contains the doxology: Luke's version is a shorter version and Matthew's version is a longer version. Being a longer version, Matthew includes a doxology. However, the reason for the inclusion of the doxology in Matthew's version is more difficult to explain to critics if one were to believe that the Textus Receptus reading of Luke's version is original. In the Textus Receptus, both versions of the Lord's prayer, in Matthew and in Luke, are nearly identical except for the doxology. So what is it about Matthew's version that necessitates the doxology? The answer can be found by examining the context of Matthew 6 in contrast with the context of Luke 11. The context of Luke's version at Luke 11:1-2 is as follows:

"¹ And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. ² And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven...."

In Luke we read that our Lord was in prayer; and when he had ceased, his disciples asked for instructions on how to pray. Whereas the prayer in Luke is given in response to the disciples' request for instruction, the prayer in Matthew is given in the context of the sermon on the mount. The sermon on the mount included the following three teachings (among others):

1. the kingdom of heaven belongs to God
2. the folly of self-glorification; and
3. the laying up of treasures in heaven.

The doxology is included in Matthew's version of the prayer because the doxology relates to these teachings.

The teaching that the kingdom of heaven belongs to God

In the Bible we see two phrases, "the kingdom of heaven" and "the kingdom of God". The question of whether or not the two signify the same thing will not be dealt with here. There is an interesting debate on this subject. In any case, the two are different from a purely linguistic viewpoint. The phrase "kingdom of God" explicitly describes the owner of this kingdom as God. On the the hand, the phrase "kingdom of heaven" does not refer to the owner as God. It seems obvious that God is the rightful owner of this kingdom of heaven from a theological viewpoint, but we are simply looking at the word from a linguistic viewpoint.

Luke's Gospel never refers to the kingdom of heaven whereas Matthew refers to it a total of 32 times. As Luke refers to the kingdom as "the kingdom of God" a total of 12 times before the introduction of the Lord's prayer at Luke 11:2-4, by the time we get to the prayer it has already been established that the kingdom belongs to God. The same cannot be said of Matthew's Gospel. In Matthew's Gospel, we do not see the phrase, "the kingdom of God" until after our Lord finishes his teaching on how to pray. The first mention is at the verse, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33). Before the Lord's prayer in Matthew, our Lord only refers to the kingdom as "the kingdom of heaven", a total of 7 times. In this context where the connection between the "kingdom" and "God" has not been made yet, it is more necessary than in the context of Luke 11 to declare that the kingdom belongs to God, our Father which art in heaven. It is fitting then that once it is declared, "For thine is the kingdom..." at Matthew 6:13, our Lord makes a sudden switch from using the phrase "the kingdom of heaven" to "the kingdom of God" immediately at Matthew 6:33.

The teaching on denouncing self-glorification

The statement, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." is a recognition and declaration that God alone deserves credit and glory. The kingdom is not ours. The power is not ours. The glory is not ours. The doxology affirms to God that "It's not about me, it's all about you." Nothing else in the Lord's prayer affirms this doctrine as clearly as the doxology. Consider this meaning of the doxology as you examine the context of Matthew chapter 6:1-18:

Matthew 6:

¹ Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. ² Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. ³ But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: ⁴ That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

⁵ And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. ⁶ But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. ⁷ But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. ⁸ Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. ⁹ After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. ¹⁰ Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. ¹⁴ For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: ¹⁵ But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

¹⁶ Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. ¹⁷ But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; ¹⁸ That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

The hypocrites' attitude of glorifying the self stands in stark contrast with the attitude of glorifying God expressed in the doxology. Throughout Matthew 6, the Lord exposes the hypocrites' conduct of seeking self-glory and each time provides a counterexample of what to do instead. Being a reactionary model prayer to the hypocrites' and heathens' misguided prayers of self-glorification, Matthew's version of the Lord's prayer must necessarily provide a counterexample in the form of a doxology - a statement that gives glory to God. Luke 11 makes no mention of this issue regarding self-glorification so Luke's version of the prayer makes no mention likewise.

The teaching on laying up treasures in heaven

The doxology echoes David's prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:11, which says, "Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all." Many textual critics see this resemblance and thereby conclude that a Byzantine scribe incorporated David's prayer into the Lord's prayer. Such a superficial analysis fails to consider the contexts of 1 Chronicles 29 and Matthew 6.

David's prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:11 appears in the context of the Israelites' giving of treasures to the temple of God. We read as follows:

¹ Furthermore David the king said unto all the congregation, Solomon my son, whom alone God hath chosen, is yet young and tender, and the work is great: for the palace is not for man, but for the LORD God. ² Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God

the gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood; onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistening stones, and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance. ³ Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, ⁴ Even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses withal: ⁵ The gold for things of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and for all manner of work to be made by the hands of artificers. And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the LORD? ⁶ Then the chief of the fathers and princes of the tribes of Israel, and the captains of thousands and of hundreds, with the rulers of the king's work, offered willingly, ⁷ And gave for the service of the house of God of gold five thousand talents and ten thousand drams, and of silver ten thousand talents, and of brass eighteen thousand talents, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. ⁸ And they with whom precious stones were found gave them to the treasure of the house of the LORD, by the hand of Jehiel the Gershonite. ⁹ Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the LORD: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy.

¹⁰ Wherefore David blessed the LORD before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. ¹¹ Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. ¹² Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. ¹³ Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. ¹⁴ But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee. ¹⁵ For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding. ¹⁶ O LORD our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own. ¹⁷ I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee.

This theme of 1 Chronicles 29 - that of giving treasures to God - is echoed in Matthew 6:19-21, just six verses after the Lord's prayer. Matthew 6:19-21 says:

¹⁹ Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: ²⁰ But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: ²¹ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Immediately prior to preaching on the importance of laying up treasures in heaven, it is no coincidence that our Lord first alluded to a doxology associated with the Old Testament passage that most extravagantly portrays the act of giving treasure unto God. Luke 11 makes

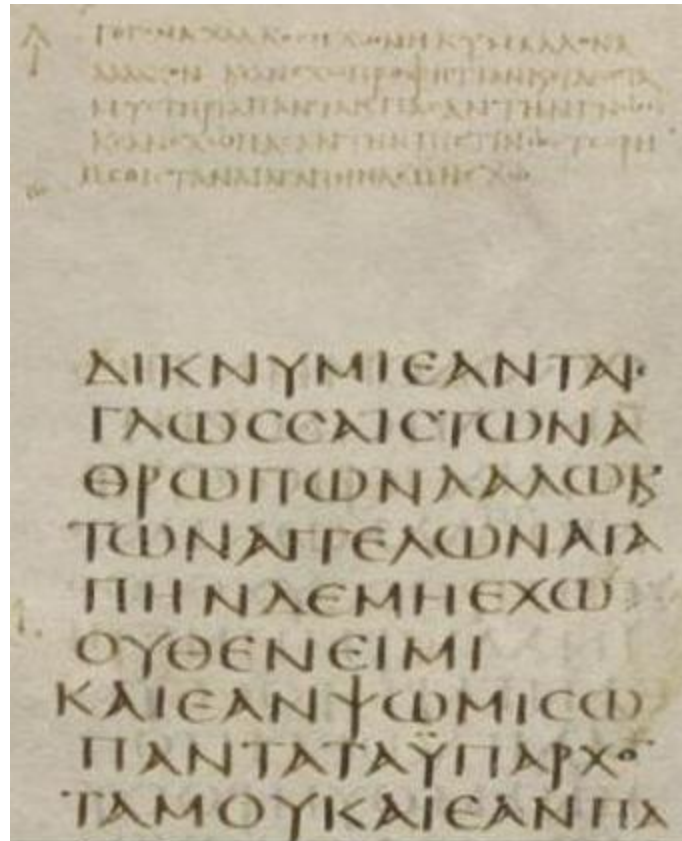
no mention of this issue regarding laying up treasures in heaven so Luke's version of the prayer does not have the doxology which alludes to 1 Chronicles 29:11. With careful study of the context we can see why Matthew's version includes the doxology while Luke's version does not.

Early manuscripts may not be reliable

The absence of the doxology in early Alexandrian manuscripts poses no problem to the belief in its authenticity. Origen, a 3rd century Church father from Alexandria, wrote a commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. He makes no mention of the textual variant at Matthew 6:13 but makes a point which should caution us from taking readings found in a few Alexandrian manuscripts at face value. Origen says in his *Commentary on Matthew* at 15.14: "...the differences among the manuscripts [of the Gospels] have become great, either through the negligence of some copyists or through the perverse audacity of others; they either neglect to check over what they have transcribed, or, in the process of checking, they lengthen or shorten, as they please." (Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd ed. (1991), pp. 151-152). Since such a prominent Alexandrian father admitted the widespread corruption of manuscripts in Alexandria, sometimes by way of "shorten[ing]", it would be unwise for us to dismiss the authenticity of the doxology on the basis of just two codices that are earlier than Codex Washingtonensis by not even a full century. One of those earlier manuscripts is Codex Sinaiticus. This manuscript is known for having careless omissions. The following omissions are accepted as mistakes by practically all textual critics. They are referenced here as examples of why "older" does not mean "more reliable".

1 Corinthians 13:1-2

A total of 32 Greek words are omitted at 1 Corinthians 13:1-2.



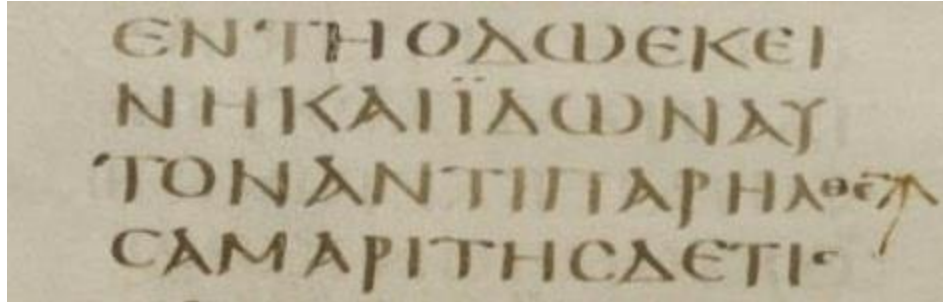
1 Corinthians 13:1-2 in Codex Sinaiticus

(Source: The Codex Sinaiticus Project Website: <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>)

The text should read, "εαν ταις γλωσσαις των ανθρωπων λαλω και των αγγελων αγαπην δε μη εχω γεγωνα χαλκος ηχων η κυμβαλον αλαλαζον και εαν εχω προφητειαν και ειδω τα μυστηρια παντα και πασαν την γνωσιν και εαν εχω πασαν την πιστιν ωστε ορη μεθιστανειν αγαπην δε μη εχω ουδεν ειμι " but the scribe of Sinaiticus omitted the underlined words. When the scribe finished copying the first "αγαπην δε μη εχω", his eyes jumped to the second "αγαπην δε μη εχω" and resumed copying from there. A later scribe inserted the omitted words in the top margin.

Luke 10:32

Luke 10:32 is omitted.



Luke 10:32 in Codex Sinaiticus

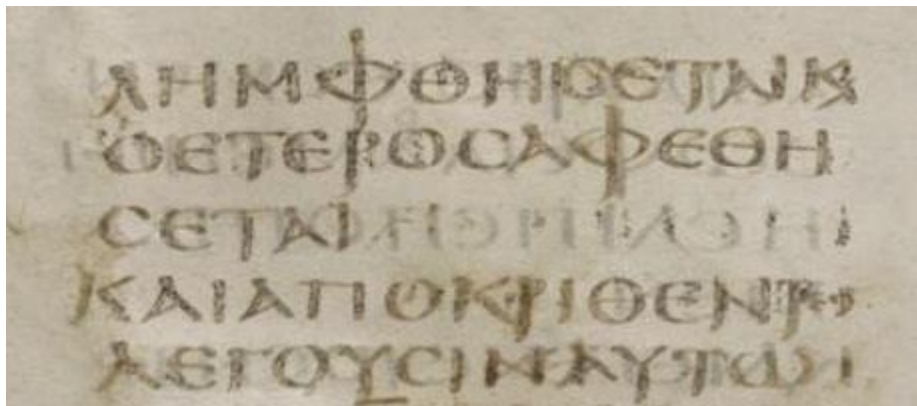
(Source: The Codex Sinaiticus Project Website: <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>)

Here, the scribe omitted all of verse 32 by skipping the words in between the "αντιπαρηλθεν" at the end of verse 31 and the "αντιπαρηλθεν" at the end of verse 32:

"κατα συγκυριαν δε ιερευς τις κατεβαινεν εν τη οδω εκεινη και ιδων αυτον αντιπαρηλθεν ομοιως δε και λευιτης γενομενος κατα τον τοπον ελθων και ιδων αντιπαρηλθεν σαμαρειτης δε τις οδευων ηλθεν κατ αυτον και ιδων αυτον εσπλαγχνισθη" (Luke 10:31-33)

Luke 17:35

Luke 17:35 is omitted.



Luke 17:35 in Codex Sinaiticus

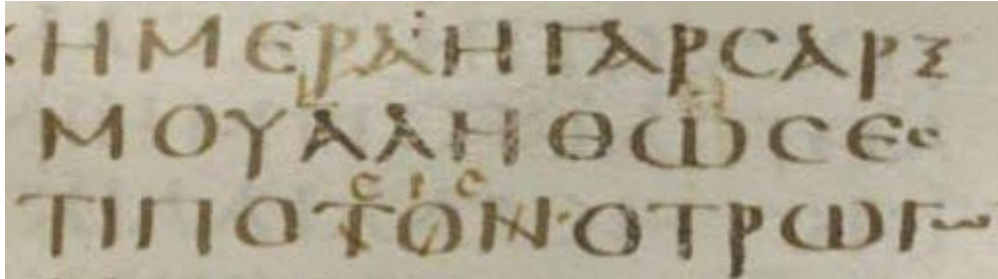
(Source: The Codex Sinaiticus Project Website: <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>)

Here the following underlined words were omitted because "αφεθησεται" appears twice:

"λεγω υμιν ταυτη τη νυκτι εσονται δυο επι κλινης μιας ο εις παραληφθησεται και ο ετερος αφεθησεται εσονται δυο αληθουσαι επι το αυτο η μια παραληφθησεται η δε ετερα αφεθησεται" (Luke 17:34-35)

John 6:55

Important words are omitted at John 6:55.



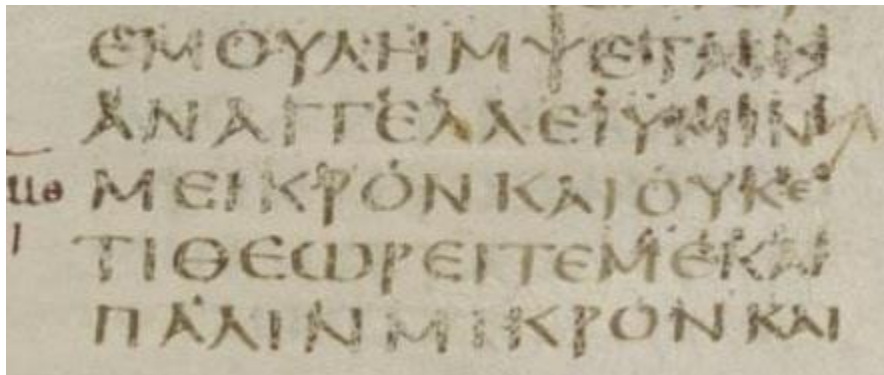
John 6:55 in Codex Sinaiticus

(Source: The Codex Sinaiticus Project Website: <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>)

This passage ought to say, "η γαρ σαρξ μου αληθως εστιν βρωσις και το αιμα μου αληθως εστιν ποσις (For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed)." However, Sinaiticus reads, "η γαρ σαρξ μου αληθως εκ τι ποσις" (For my flesh is drink indeed)." This nonsensical reading arose when the scribe skipped everything in between the first "αληθως" and the second "αληθως".

John 16:15

John 16:15 is omitted.



John 16:15 in Codex Sinaiticus

(Source: The Codex Sinaiticus Project Website: <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>)

The scribe skipped the following underlined words of John 16:15 due to the repetition of the same words:

"εκεινος εμε δοξασει **οτι εκ του εμου ληψεται και αναγγελει υμιν παντα οσα εχει ο πατηρ εμα εστιν δια τουτο ειπον οτι εκ του εμου ληψεται και αναγγελει υμιν** μικρον και ου θεωρειτε με και παλιν μικρον και οψεσθε με οτι εγω υπαγω προς τον πατερα" (John 16:14-16)

The scribes of early manuscripts worked under poor working conditions. Sometimes they made honest mistakes and omitted a great number of words. If the omission of the doxology at Matthew 6:13 was a similar mistake, though confined only to some early manuscripts, it would be most unfortunate to accept the mistake as an original reading. We should know better than to make a verdict on the authenticity of a passage on the basis of just two early manuscripts that have proven errors of omission.

Reasons for the omission

Hypothesis 1: mistake

Perhaps the omission of the doxology was a mistake. Perhaps a scribe who was familiar with Luke's version of the Lord's prayer thought that he was finished the Matthew portion of the prayer after having written, "...deliver us from evil." After glancing back at the parent copy and seeing, "Amen", he may have concluded the prayer at that point and wrote "Amen". Some variants actually have "amen" without the doxology (17, vg^{cl}). The "amen" could have dropped out at a later date to conform the prayer with Luke's version. This is not an unreasonable scenario considering some of the strange scribal errors seen in Codex Sinaiticus.

Hypothesis 2: harmonization

Perhaps the omission of the doxology was deliberate. The omission could be sufficiently explained as an early attempt to harmonize the prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 with the other version of the Lord's prayer in Luke 11:2-4. There is evidence of attempts at harmonizing the two prayers:

- Luke's version says "forgive us our sins" whereas Matthew's version says "forgive us our debts". But scribes have tried to change "sins" in Luke's version to "debts" in order to harmonize the two prayers (see D, 2542, b c ff² vg^{mss}).
- Luke's version asks for daily bread "day by day (καθ ημεραν)" whereas Matthew's version asks for bread "this day (σημερον)". But scribes have tried to change "καθ ημεραν" to "σημερον" in Luke's version in order to harmonize the two prayers (see D, 2542 pc it vg^{cl} bo^{mss}).

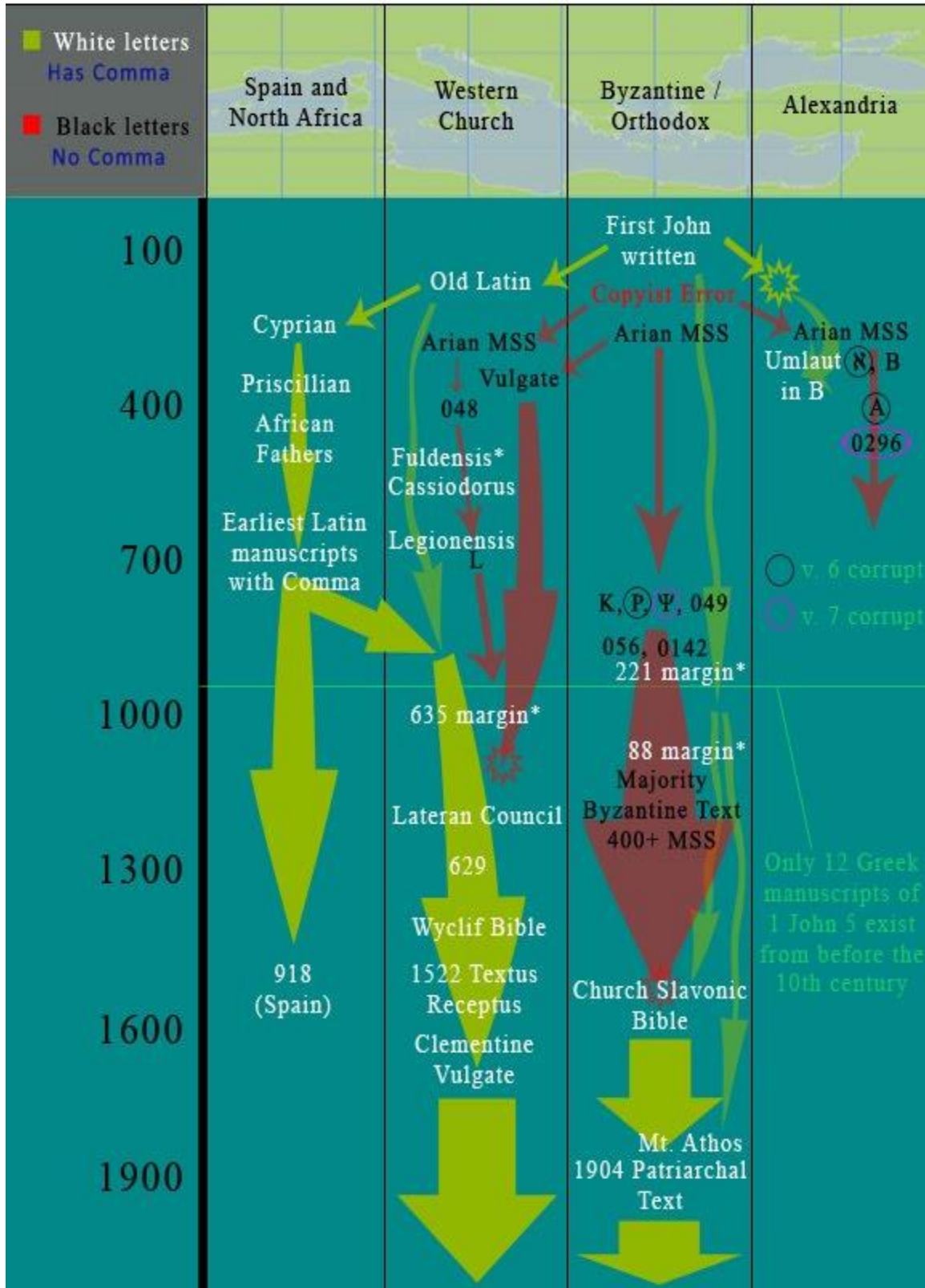
Unless one were to grasp the contextual differences between Matthew 6 and Luke 11, as explained above, one would find it difficult to explain why Matthew's version should have a doxology when Luke's version does not. Hence an early skeptic might have removed it believing the doxology to be a pious addition or a gloss from a liturgical text. Yet if the doxology were added later it would be most probable that a similar doxology would also be added to Luke's version of the prayer, at least in some manuscripts. But there is no such thing to be found in the body of manuscript evidence.

Hypothesis 3: the oral tradition overrode the written word

For the first several decades since the formation of the Church, many Christian communities did not have the written New Testament. These Christians received doctrines and traditions orally and passed them on orally to the next generation. No matter how early the Gospels of Matthew and Luke were written, the oral traditions were inevitably older. When a written tradition appeared to differ from a well-established oral tradition, the oral tradition might have taken priority in some communities. Consider the following hypothesis:

Suppose that in the early years of the Church, some Christian communities orally received the Lord's prayer as later recorded by Luke (the version with no doxology). These communities had not yet learned of the version with the doxology. Suppose that these communities later came into contact with the Gospel of Matthew without ever seeing the Gospel of Luke. In this scenario, these communities were faced with a written version of the Lord's prayer that is different from the oral version that had been remembered since the beginning. As these communities had no knowledge of the Gospel of Luke, the idea that there might have been two occurrences in which our Lord taught how to pray may not have crossed their minds. Members of these communities may have regarded the doxology in the Gospel of Matthew as a spurious addition to what had been believed to be the only version of the Lord's prayer. As a result, these communities may have omitted the doxology thinking that they were doing the service of guarding the one and only true version of the Lord's prayer.

Preservation of the Johannine Comma



Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7)

Contents

1 [Ancient Greek manuscripts of 1 John 5 are unreliable](#)

1. [1.1 Extant Greek manuscripts](#)
2. [1.2 Historical manuscripts](#)
3. [1.3 Umlaut in Codex Vaticanus](#)
4. [1.4 1 John 5:6 was corrupted early](#)
5. [1.5 1 John 5:6 was prone to corruption](#)
6. [1.6 1 John 5:8 was prone to corruption](#)
7. [1.7 1 John 2:23b was corrupted early](#)
8. [1.8 1 John 4:3 was corrupted early](#)
9. [1.9 1 John 5:13 was corrupted early](#)
10. [1.10 Socrates of Constantinople confirms that 1 John was corrupted early](#)

2 [Latin manuscripts have the Comma](#)

1. [2.1 Latin Vulgate and Old Latin](#)
2. [2.2 The Vulgate reading has no preposition](#)

3 [Greek fathers knew of the Comma](#)

1. [3.1 Athanasius](#)
2. [3.2 Origen](#)
3. [3.3 Gregory of Nazianzus](#)
4. [3.4 John Chrysostom](#)
5. [3.5 Zacharias Rhetor](#)
6. [3.6 Andrew of Crete](#)
7. [3.7 John of Damascus](#)
8. [3.8 Ignatius of Antioch](#)

4 [Latin fathers knew of the Comma](#)

1. [4.1 Tertullian](#)
2. [4.2 Cyprian](#)
3. [4.3 Phoebadius](#)
4. [4.4 Priscillian](#)
5. [4.5 Augustine](#)
6. [4.6 Vigilius Tapsensis](#)

7. [4.7 Victor Vitensis](#)
8. [4.8 Fulgentius Ruspensis](#)
9. [4.9 Cassiodorus](#)
5. [5 Syriac evidence](#)
 1. [5.1 Ephrem the Syrian](#)
 2. [5.2 Like the Vulgate, the Syriac Peshitta has a trace of the Comma](#)
6. [6 Internal evidence](#)
 1. [6.1 Comma-absent readings lack an explicit explanation of the "witness of God"](#)
 2. [6.2 Comma-absent readings have no antecedent](#)
 3. [6.3 Comma-absent readings give rise to a grammatical anomaly](#)
 4. [6.4 John and the Trinity](#)
 5. [6.5 Our Lord's baptism in the Gospel of John relates to 1 John 5:6-9](#)
 6. [6.6 Johannine parallelism](#)
7. [7 Why Trinitarians did not cite the Comma](#)
 1. [7.1 A caveat with respect to argument from silence](#)
 2. [7.2 1\) The Comma was counterproductive in the context](#)
 3. [7.3 2\) The Comma was not helpful in the context](#)
 4. [7.4 3\) The Comma was not relevant in the context](#)
 5. [7.5 4\) Silence of the Comma only proves the existence of doubt, not absence](#)
8. [8 Demonstrable mechanisms for omission](#)
 1. [8.1 Evidence of errors by parablepses](#)
 2. [8.2 Arian influence](#)
 3. [8.3 Evidence of Gnostic versions of three witnesses](#)
 4. [8.4 Evidence of the early subversion of John's doctrines](#)
9. [9 Continuous preservation](#)

Ancient Greek manuscripts of 1 John 5 are unreliable

Extant Greek manuscripts

"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." (1 John 5:7, KJV)

"οτι τρεις εισιν οι μαρτυρουντες εν τω ουρανω ο πατηρ ο λογος και το αγιον πνευμα και ουτοι οι τρεις εν εισιν" (1 John 5:7, 1894 Scrivener Textus Receptus)

1 John 5:7 in the KJV contains these words called the Johannine Comma (also known as the Comma Johanneum or the Heavenly Witnesses). This Comma is omitted from most modern translations of the Bible because most Greek manuscripts do not have them. Only 11 "late" Greek manuscripts contain the Comma, with 6 of them having it in the margin by an even later hand:

- 629 (14th century)
- 61 (16th century)
- 918 (16th century)
- 2473 (17th century)
- 2318 (18th century)
- 221 margin (10th century, Comma added later)
- 635 margin (11th century, Comma added later)
- 88 margin (12th century, Comma added in 16th century)
- 429 margin (14th century, Comma added later)
- 636 margin (15th century, Comma added later)
- 177 margin (11th century, Comma added later)

This might appear to be a small body of evidence, but they must be considered in light of the following facts particular to the text of 1 John 5:

- No [extant papyrus](#) contains 1 John 5. Since the earliest Greek manuscript of 1 John 5 is Vaticanus from c. 300 - 325 AD, there is at least a 200 year gap between the composition of 1 John 5 and its earliest surviving witness. [This is sufficient time for the text to be corrupted.](#)
- Although there are 5000+ Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, manuscripts which contain 1 John 5 are limited to about [480 manuscripts](#). Although the majority of these manuscripts lacks the Comma, [the majority also lacks the latter half of 1 John 2:23.](#)
- Most Greek manuscripts containing 1 John 5:6-8 would be considered "late" by modern standards. Of the about 480 manuscripts of 1 John 5, only 12 of these manuscripts are from before the 10th century (Nestle-Aland: *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th revised edition (2006)):
 - 01 (4th century)
 - A (5th century)

- B (4th century)
- K (9th century)
- L (8th century)
- P (9th century)
- Ψ (9th century)
- 048 (5th century)
- 049 (9th century)
- 056 (10th century)
- 0142 (10th century)
- 0296 (6th century)

The rest of the 480 manuscripts are minuscules from after the 10th century, the average being from around the 12th century.

Historical manuscripts

Evidence disappears over time. What we have existing now in the 21st century is not representative of what actually existed throughout history. Reformation era scholars seemed to have more Greek manuscripts containing the Comma. John Gill (1697 – 1771 AD), commenting on 1 John 5:7 says the Comma is found "in the Complutensian edition, the compilers of which made use of various copies; and out of sixteen ancient copies of Robert Stephens', nine of them had it" (*Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*). John Calvin, commenting on 1 John 5:7, said, "The whole of this verse has been by some omitted. Jerome thinks that this has happened through design rather than through mistake, and that indeed only on the part of the Latins. But as even the Greek copies do not agree, I dare not assert any thing on the subject." (*Calvin's Commentaries*). Apparently in Calvin's time there were more Greek manuscripts with the Comma so as to give rise to a disagreement among the Greek copies. Francis Cheynell, the president of St. John's College, Oxford from 1648 to 1650, commented that the Comma is "to be found in copies of great antiquity and best credit." The following are excerpts from his book, *The divine trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, published in 1650:

"But it is objected by some that the words, *These three are one*. I Joh.5.7 are not to be found in some ancient Copies, and therefore it will not be safe to build a point of such weight and consequence upon such a weake foundation. To which we answer, It is true that these words are not to be found in the Syriack Edition, but they who speake most modestly, do acknowledge that the Syriack Edition is not Authentick." (p. 251)

"But then it is farther objected, that these words *These three are one* are wanting in some other Greek copies; for answer I proceed with my observations." (p. 253)

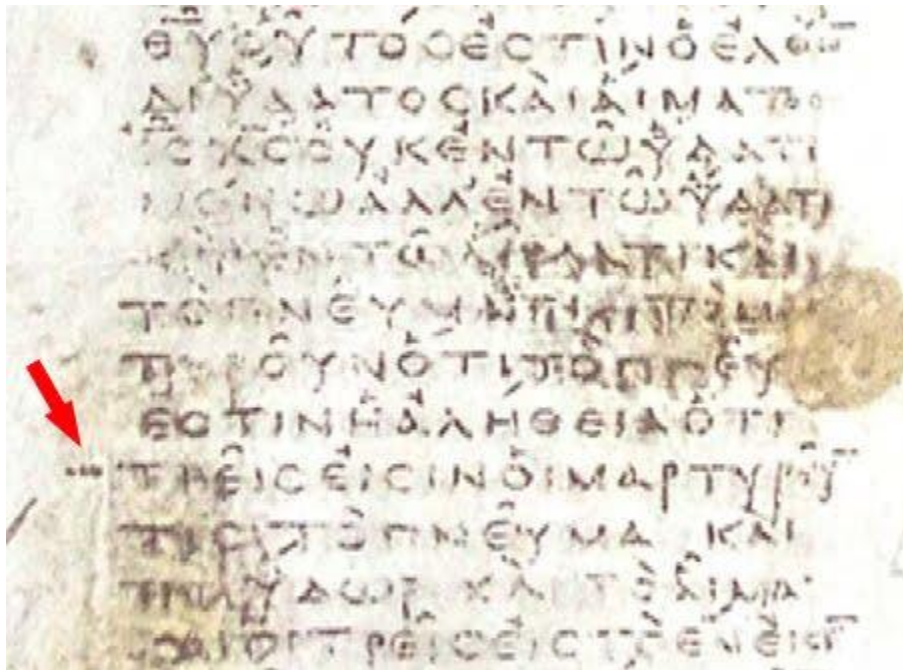
"8. These words, I Ioh.5.7. are to be found in copies of great antiquity and best credit." (p. 255)

[ONLINE LINK TO Google Book: *The divine trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*](#)

These testimonies by trusted Reformation era scholars should be given weight because in the centuries following their deaths Europe erupted into political and religious turmoil, resulting in the loss of manuscripts. It is presumptuous for us in the 21st century to think we have more evidence now than what scholars had in the 16th century. For more on this, please read: [Question: Aren't some Textus Receptus readings based on weak manuscript evidence?](#)

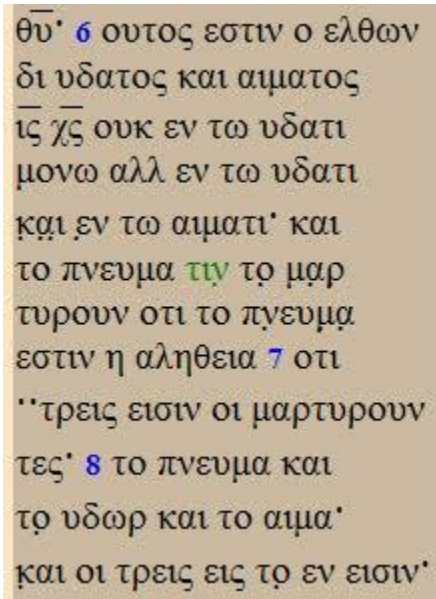
Umlaut in Codex Vaticanus

The oldest manuscript containing 1 John 5:7 demonstrates that a significant textual variant was known for 1 John 5:7 in the 4th century. In 1995 Philip B. Payne discovered "umlauts" (double dots) in the margins of various places in Codex Vaticanus. He and many scholars agree that these umlauts indicate lines where a textual variant was known to the scribe. You can read his work, *The Originality of Text-Critical Symbols in Codex Vaticanus* [here](#). Interestingly, an umlaut appears next to the phrase "τρεις εισιν οι μαρτυρουντες" in Vaticanus. Payne briefly discusses and seemingly dismisses the significance of the umlaut in 1 John 5:7 (p. 112, footnote 34), but without a doubt the umlaut is there. The following is a scanned image of 1 John 5:6-8 in Vaticanus:



The following is a screen capture of the transcription of the above from the [official digitized Nestle-Aland on the University of Munster Institute website](#). The image

below can be viewed by selecting 1 John 5:7 in "B - 03 (Vaticanus)" and selecting "view by page":



θ̄ῡ 6 ουτος εστιν ο ελθων
δι υδατος και αιματος
ις̄ χ̄ς̄ ουκ εν τω υδατι
μονω αλλ εν τω υδατι
και εν τω αιματι' και
το πνευμᾱ τιν̄ το μαρ
τυρουν̄ οτι το πνευμᾱ
εστιν η αληθεια 7 οτι
"τρεις̄ εισιν̄ οι μαρτυρουν̄
τες̄ 8 το πνευμᾱ και
το υδωρ και το αιμα'
και οι τρεις̄ εις̄ το εν̄ εισιν̄"

There is clearly an umlaut in the margin of verse 7 indicating a textual variant. The only significant textual variant here is the Comma.

1 John 5:6 was corrupted early

Did you know?

Early Greek manuscripts of 1 John 5:6, the verse preceding the Comma, are corrupt.

1 John 5:6 is the verse immediately preceding the Comma. Among those who parrot the statement that "none of the earliest manuscripts contain the Comma," perhaps only a few of them are aware that the verse immediately preceding the Comma is corrupt in these early manuscripts. The earliest witnesses of the passage are Codices Sinaiticus (4th century), Vaticanus (4th century), Alexandrinus (5th century) and 0296 (6th century). Uncial 048 (5th century) is lacunae. There are semantically significant discrepancies among these early witnesses at 1 John 5:6:

ESV (agreeing with Nestle-Aland 27):

"⁶ This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁷ For there are three that testify: ⁸ the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree."

Nestle-Aland 27:

"⁶ ουτος εστιν ο ελθων δι υδατος και αιματος ιησους χριστος ουκ εν τω υδατι μονον αλλ εν τω υδατι και εν τω αιματι και το πνευμα εστιν το μαρτυρουν οτι το πνευμα εστιν η αληθεια ⁷ οτι τρεις εισιν οι μαρτυρουντες ⁸ το πνευμα και το υδωρ και το αιμα και οι τρεις εις το εν εισιν"

Vaticanus (4th c.):

"⁶ ουτος εστιν ο ελθων δι υδατος και αιματος ις χς ουκ εν τω υδατι μονω αλλ εν τω υδατι και εν τω αιματι· και το πνευμα τιν το μαρτυρουν οτι το πνευμα εστιν η αληθεια ⁷ οτι ··τρεις εισιν οι μαρτυρουντες· ⁸ το πνευμα και το υδωρ και το αιμα· και οι τρεις εις το εν εισιν·"

Sinaiticus (4th c.):

"⁶ ουτος εστιν ο ελθων δια υδατος και αιματος και πνς ις χς ουκ εν τω υδατι μονον αλλ εν τω υδατι και τω αιματι και το πνα εστιν το μαρτυρουν οτι το πνα εστιν η αληθεια ⁷ οτι οι τρεις εισιν οι μαρτυρουντες ⁸ το πνα και το υδωρ και το αιμα και οι τρεις εις το εν εισιν"

Alexandrinus (5th c.):

"⁶ ουτος εστιν ο ελθων δι υδατος και αιματος και πνς ις χς· ουκ εν τω υδατι μονον· αλλα εν τω υδατι και εν τω πνι· και το πνα εστιν το μαρτυρουν· οτι το πνα εστιν η αληθεια ⁷ οτι τρεις εισιν οι μαρτυρουντες· ⁸ το πνα και το υδωρ και το αιμα και οι τρεις εις το εν εισιν"

0296 (6th c.):

6 ουτος ε[στι]ν ο ελθων [δι] υδατος και [π]νς· και αιμα[το]ς ις χς· ουκ [εν] τω υδατι – [αιμα]τ[ι] [κ]αι το [πνα] εστιν το [μαρ]τυρουν· οτι το πνα εστι[ν] η αληθεια· ⁷ οτ[ι] τρεις οι μαρτυρουντε[ς] ⁸ το πνα και το υδωρ και το αιμα· και οι τρεις [ει]ς τ[ο] εν [εισιν]

Here we see that only Vaticanus among the early uncials agrees with Nestle-Aland 27. Vaticanus says that Jesus Christ came by "water and blood". Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus say that Jesus Christ came by "water and blood **and Spirit**". 0296 even has "Spirit" before "blood". While this different word order in 0296 might initially seem trivial, it actually has deep theological implications considering that some interpret the water to mean Christ's baptism and the blood to mean Christ's crucifixion. As "water and blood" are placed in that order based on the chronological order that such elements played in Christ's life, the rearranging of "Spirit" before "blood" suggests a deliberate attempt by the corrupter to place the reference to the Spirit in the appropriate order based on the chronology of Christ's earthly ministry (Christ's baptism preceded the Spirit descending upon him). Alexandrinus further adds to the confusion by replacing "not by the water only but by the water and the blood" with "not by the water only but by the water and by the Spirit". The textual variants in verse 6 begin to increase when we include [other manuscripts and witnesses](#):

- ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος (B, K, Ψ, 049, 056, 0142, 181, 330, 451, 629, 1739*, 1881, 2127, Byz, Lect, it, vg, syr^p)

- ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος (43, 241, 463, 945, 1241, 1831, 1877*, 1891)
- ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος καὶ αἵματος (P, 81, 88, 442, 630, 915, 2492, arm, eth)
- ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος καὶ πνεύματος (κ, A, 104, 424c, 614, 1739c, 2412, 2495,  598m, syr^h, cypsa, copbo, Origen)
- ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου (39, 61, 326, 1837)

The spurious inclusion of "Spirit" in these early uncials is not trivial. What it demonstrates is that scribes were prone to alter this portion of 1 John based on theological or stylistic motivations. By 350 AD this portion of 1 John 5 was already corrupt in the Greek tradition. Since verse 6 is corrupt in Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus, and verse 7 in 0296 does not have "εἰσιν," there are only two manuscripts (Vaticanus and 048) from before the 7th century which read exactly as the Byzantine/Majority Text or the Nestle-Aland from verse 6 to 7:

- "οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ ἐλθὼν δι' ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος ἰησοῦς χριστὸς οὐκ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι μόνον ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ ὕδατι καὶ ἐν τῷ αἵματι καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ἐστὶν τὸ μαρτυροῦν ὅτι τὸ πνεῦμα ἐστὶν ἡ ἀληθεῖα ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσὶν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες" (Nestle-Aland 27)
- "οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ ἐλθὼν δι' ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος ἰησοῦς χριστὸς οὐκ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι μόνον ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ ὕδατι καὶ τῷ αἵματι καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ἐστὶν τὸ μαρτυροῦν ὅτι τὸ πνεῦμα ἐστὶν ἡ ἀληθεῖα ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσὶν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες" (Byzantine/Majority Text 2000)

Critics of the Comma are almost always silent regarding these corruptions of 1 John 5:6 in the early uncials - corruptions that surely diminish the reliability of these early uncials in this portion of the text. Despite there being this textual variant involving the third person of the Trinity, none of the footnotes to 1 John 5:6 in the ESV, NIV, NASB, NRSV, NLT & HCSB mention it. Such silence only serves to protect the undeserving reputation of the so-called "earliest and best manuscripts" and does not help the casual reader who wants the truth.

1 John 5:6 was prone to corruption

Some later manuscripts show further corruption in 1 John 5:6. Where it should read, "καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ἐστὶν τὸ μαρτυροῦν ὅτι τὸ πνεῦμα ἐστὶν ἡ ἀληθεῖα (And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth)", manuscript 621 (11th century) reads, "καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ἐστὶν τὸ μαρτυροῦν ὅτι τὸ πνεῦμα ἐστὶν τὸ μαρτυροῦν καὶ ἡ ἀληθεῖα (And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is bearing witness and truth)". 326 (10th century) and 436 (11th/12th century) say, "καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ἐστὶν τὸ μαρτυροῦν ὅτι τὸ πνεῦμα ἐστὶν τὸ

μαρτυρουν οτι το πνευμα εστιν η αληθεια (And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is bearing witness because the Spirit is truth)" (*Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior: IV Catholic Letters, Text*, 2nd Ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2013), p. 349). While these errors most likely arose from misreading the line and repeating certain phrases, the fact that such errors arose shows that the repetitive nature of this general passage lends itself to erroneous copying (see below: [Evidence of errors by parablepses](#)).

1 John 5:8 was prone to corruption

1 John 5:8 is also corrupted in a number of late manuscripts. Where it should read, "οι τρεις εις το εν ειςιν (the three agree in one)", the following witnesses read, "οι τρεις εν ειςιν (these three are one)": Pseudo-Caesarius (post-6th century), 2541 (12th century), 254 original (14th century), 1067 (14th century), 1409 (14th century) (*Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior: IV Catholic Letters, Text*, 2nd Ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2013), p. 350). While it could be surmised that either "εις" or "το" could drop during transmission, the drop of both letters resulting in the same phrase as in the Comma ("οι τρεις εν ειςιν (these three are one)") suggests Comma influence.

1 John 2:23b was corrupted early

Did you know?

1 John 2:23b is proof that the Vulgate can sometimes be more reliable than the majority of Greek manuscripts.

We now depart from the immediate context of the Comma and turn to 1 John 2:23b, as it proves two things. First, it proves that a Trinitarian clause could be expunged from 1 John in the majority of manuscripts. Second, it proves that the Vulgate can sometimes preserve authentic readings more accurately than can the majority of Greek manuscripts. 1 John 2:23 in the King James Bible says:

"Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: *[but] he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.*"

"πας ο αρνουμενος τον υιον ουδε τον πατερα εχει ο ομολογων τον υιον και τον πατερα εχει"
(Textus Receptus, Beza 1598)

The second clause of this Trinitarian verse is supported by the Vulgate, Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Alexandrinus, Ephraemi, Porphyrianus and about 70 other Greek manuscripts (*Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior: IV Catholic*

Letters, Text, 2nd Ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2013), p. 292). Most modern translations (e.g. NIV, ESV, NASB) follow this reading.

But with there being about 517 extant Greek manuscripts of 1 John and with just over 70 manuscripts having 1 John 2:23b, the clause is a minority reading. Accordingly, the Byzantine Majority Text does not include the clause. The Majority Text says:

"Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father."

"πας ο αρνουμενος τον υιον ουδε τον πατερα εχει" (Byzantine Majority Text)

The Geneva Bible in 1557 followed the majority of manuscripts here and left out the latter clause. If a Trinitarian clause in 1 John 2:23 could be lost in the majority of Greek manuscripts, and the Vulgate can be more reliable here, it is not much of a stretch to believe that the Johannine Comma was also lost in the majority of Greek manuscripts, and preserved by the Vulgate (as will be discussed below, the Vulgate preserves the Comma). The only difference between 1 John 2:23b and the Comma could be that the Comma was deleted earlier than 1 John 2:23b.

1 John 4:3 was corrupted early

1 John 4:3 is another example of an early corruption in 1 John. 1 John 4:3 is a Trinitarian verse just like the Comma. 1 John 4:3 mentions all three Trinitarian components: "spirit", "Jesus Christ" and "God." The verse in the KJV says:

"And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world."

This is the reading supported by Codex Sinaiticus, one of the earliest Greek manuscripts of 1 John, and the Byzantine Majority Text:

Sinaiticus:

"και παν πνα ο μη ομολογει **ιν κν εν σαρκι εληλυθοτα εκ** του θυ ουκ εστιν και τουτο εστιν το του αντιχριστου οτι ακηκοαμεν οτι ερχεται και νυν εν τω κοσμω εστιν ηδη"

Byzantine Majority Text:

"και παν πνευμα ο μη ομολογει **ιησουν χριστον εν σαρκι εληλυθοτα εκ** του θεου ουκ εστιν και τουτο εστιν το του αντιχριστου ο ακηκοατε οτι ερχεται και νυν εν τω κοσμω εστιν ηδη"

However, 1 John 4:3 in Nestle-Aland 27, following Alexandrinus and Vaticanus and a few later manuscripts, reads:

"και παν πνευμα ο μη ομολογει τον ιησουν του θεου ουκ εστιν και τουτο εστιν το του αντιχριστου ο ακηκοατε οτι ερχεται και νυν εν τω κοσμω εστιν ηδη"

["ιησουν χριστον εν σαρκι εληλυθοτα εκ" is omitted.]

From the evidence of one of the earliest manuscripts and the majority of manuscripts, it is reasonable to believe that 1 John 4:3 in the Textus Receptus is the correct reading. Byzantine Majority Text proponents would agree. If Sinaiticus and the Majority Text are correct here, 1 John 4:3 is further evidence that a clause in a Trinitarian verse could be expunged in the early stage of transmission.

1 John 5:13 was corrupted early

1 John 5:13 is proof that a clause in a parallel construction (such as that in the Comma) could drop out of some early manuscripts. The proof of 1 John 5:13 may not be convincing to an Alexandrian text proponent, but it should be convincing to a Byzantine text proponent. The verse in the KJV says:

"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

The clause, though appearing to be redundant at first, makes perfect sense. The present-tense subjunctive phrase "that ye may believe..." expresses a wish that the action continue. John is wishing that those who currently believe on the name of the Son of God would *continue* to do so. However, the underlined words are not found in the three earliest witnesses of the verse. Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and Alexandrinus, essentially say:

"ταυτα εγραψα υμιν ινα ειδητε οτι ζωην εχετε αιωνιον τοις πιστευουσιν εις το ονομα του υιου του θεου"

The Textus Receptus and the Byzantine Majority Text, in agreement with the fourth, fifth, and sixth earliest witnesses of the verse in its entirety, K (9th century), L (9th century), P (9th century), say:

"ταυτα εγραψα υμιν τοις πιστευουσιν εις το ονομα του υιου του θεου ινα ειδητε οτι ζωην αιωνιον εχετε και ινα πιστευητε εις το ονομα του υιου του θεου"

Socrates of Constantinople confirms that 1 John was corrupted early

We also have the testimony of Socrates of Constantinople, a 5th century Church historian, regarding the theologically motivated corruption of 1 John. He says the following in his criticism of Nestorius:

Αὐτίκα γοῦν ἠγνόησεν, ὅτι ἐν τῇ καθολικῇ Ἰωάννου γέγραπτο ἐν τοῖς παλαιοῖς ἀντιγράφοις, ὅτι «πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ λύει τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐκ ἔστι.» Ταύτην γὰρ τὴν διάνοιαν ἐκ τῶν παλαιῶν ἀντιγράφων περιεῖλον οἱ χωρίζειν ἀπὸ τοῦ τῆς οἰκονομίας ἀνθρώπου βουλόμενοι τὴν θεότητα. Διὸ καὶ οἱ παλαιοὶ ἐρμηνεῖς αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐπεσημῆναντο, ὡς τινες εἶεν ῥαδιουργήσαντες τὴν ἐπιστολὴν, λύειν ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸν ἄνθρωπον θέλοντες· συνανεῖληπται δὲ ἡ ἀνθρωπότης τῇ θεότητι· καὶ οὐκέτι εἰσὶ δύο, ἀλλὰ ἓν. Τοῦτο θαρροῦντες οἱ παλαιοὶ «Θεοτόκον» τὴν Μαρίαν λέγειν οὐκ ᾤκνησαν· (Historia ecclesiastica, VII:32)

Now in any event, he did not perceive that in the Catholic epistle of John it was written in the ancient copies, 'Every spirit that severs Jesus is not from God.' For the removal of this [passage] out the ancient copies are understandably by those who wished to sever the divinity from the human economy. And thus by the very language of the ancient interpreters, some have corrupted this epistle, aiming at severing the humanity from the divinity. But the humanity is united to the divinity, and are not two, but one. Knowing this, the ancients did not hesitate to call Mary 'Theotokos'. (Translation by KJV Today)

A curious point is that Socrates refers to a variant reading of 1 John 4:3 that does not exist anywhere in the extant body of Greek manuscripts. Yet this reading appeared somewhat widespread in Socrates' day. This lends credence to the theory that the readings in the majority of manuscripts of 1 John may not be representative of the readings which existed in the early church. Furthermore, Socrates refers to the words of some "ancient interpreters" who observed the corruption of this epistle for theological motives. Not only that, these corruptions relate to the Trinity and the hypostatic union of Jesus.

The variants at 1 John 5:6, 1 John 2:23b, 1 John 4:3 and 1 John 5:13, and Socrates' testimony demonstrate that 1 John underwent early corruption. These examples are related to the Comma in one way or another. Some of these examples concern the Trinity. Others concern the omission of a clause in a parallel construction. Thus the extant body of early Greek manuscripts is a shaky foundation on which to determine the correct reading of the text of 1 John 5 in the 21st century. God promised to preserve his words for all generations, but God never promised to preserve the most ancient copies of his words. Given that we do have the Comma preserved for us in Greek today in relatively few and late manuscripts, other considerations should be given weight to determine its authenticity.

Latin manuscripts have the Comma

Latin Vulgate and Old Latin

"Quoniam tres sunt, qui testimonium dant in cælo:
Pater, Verbum, et Spiritus Sanctus:
et hi tres unum sunt."

(Clementine Vulgate)

The Comma appears in most Latin manuscripts, which are broadly classified into two groups: The Latin Vulgate & The Old Latin. The Latin Vulgate, translated by Jerome, is the more common Latin translation as it was commissioned by the Catholic church in the late 4th century. The Old Latin is a term used to describe the various Latin translations that existed before the Latin Vulgate. Old Latin translations were made since about the latter half of the 2nd century (F. H. A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the New Testament Textual Criticism*, 4th Ed., Vol. 2, (New York: George Bell & Sons, 1894), p. 43).

The oldest Latin manuscript having 1 John 5 is Codex Fuldensis or manuscript F from the mid-6th century. This is a Vulgate version and does not contain the Comma. However, Codex Frisingensis, or manuscript r or 64 (6th-7th century), contains the full text of the Comma. Codex Legionensis, or manuscript l or 67 (7th century) contains the Comma with slight variation in wording (Nestle-Aland: *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th revised edition (2006)). These two are of the Old Latin versions. Thus Latin manuscripts with and without the Comma exist from around the same time. Furthermore, Codex Fuldensis, dated 546 AD, contains the *Prologue to the Canonical Epistles*, purported to be by Jerome himself, which mentions the Trinitarian Comma in John's first epistle:

"Quae si ut ab eis digestae sunt ita quoque ab interpretibus fideliter in latinum eloquium verterentur nec ambiguitatem legentibus facerent nec sermonum se varietas impugnaret illo praecipue loco ubi de unitate trinitatis in prima iohannis epistula (the place where it concerns the Trinity in the first epistle of John) positum legimus in qua est ab infidelibus translatoribus multum erratum esse fidei veritate conperimus trium tantummodo vocabula hoc est aquae sanguinis et spiritus in ipsa sua editione potentes et patri verbi que ac spiritus (Father, the Word, and Spirit) testimonium omittentes."

While the text of 1 John 5:7 in Fuldensis does not have the Comma and critics dismiss Jerome's authorship, the Comma was certainly known to an Italian scribe who wrote the *Prologue* as early as in 546 AD.

19th century textual critic F.H.A. Scrivener estimated that "49 out of 50 [Vulgate] manuscripts testify to this disputed Comma" (F. H. A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the New Testament Textual Criticism*, 4th Ed., Vol. 2, (New York: George Bell & Sons, 1894), p. 403). The line between Vulgate and Old Latin manuscripts is blurry because scribes often incorporated Old Latin readings into the Vulgate. The Clementine Edition of the Vulgate, published in 1592, sought to standardize the Vulgate text, and it includes the Comma. There were other revisions of the Vulgate in the 16th century, such as those of the Complutensian Polyglot and Erasmus, which even consulted Greek manuscripts. The medieval Latin church was apparently cognizant of the controversy surrounding the authenticity of the Comma, as is demonstrated by the following excerpt from Canon 2 of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215:

"For the faithful of Christ, he says, are not one in the sense that they are some one thing that is common to all, but in the sense that they constitute one Church by reason of the unity of the Catholic faith and one kingdom by reason of the union of indissoluble charity, as we read in the canonical Epistle of St. John: "There are three who give testimony in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one" (I John 5: 7). And immediately it is added: "And there are three who give testimony on earth, the spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three are one" (I John 5: 8), as it is found in some codices." ([*The Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215*](#))

Latin manuscripts can reliably preserve authentic readings. For example, the Vulgate preserved the reading, "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father" at 1 John 2:23 even while the Byzantine Majority Text failed to preserve it. Moreover, there is no basis to deride the Textus Receptus for including the Comma based on Latin support. Modern translators follow the similar practice of departing from the majority Hebrew readings and following the Latin when it comes to ascertaining correct Old Testament readings. The NIV and the ESV include a sentence in Psalm 145:13 that does not appear in the majority of Hebrew manuscripts. The extra sentence is included simply because it is deemed to fit well structurally and it has the support of one Masoretic manuscript, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Septuagint, Syriac, and *Vulgate*. Furthermore, the NIV in Genesis 4:8 has Cain saying to Abel, "Let's go out to the field" based on the Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, *Vulgate*, and Syriac. No Hebrew manuscript (not even the Dead Sea Scrolls) has this reading in Genesis 4:8. The NIV, ESV and NASB in 1 Chronicles 4:13 add "and Meonothai" from the Vulgate despite its absence in the Hebrew. The NIV, ESV and NASB in 2 Chronicles 15:8 add "Azariah the son of"

from the Vulgate despite its absence in the Hebrew. Thus there is a consensus that Latin readings can be reliable at times.

The Vulgate reading has no preposition

All Vulgate readings of 1 John 5:7, with or without the Comma, testify for the early existence of the Comma. Comma-free editions of the Vulgate read:

"Quia tres sunt qui testimonium dant: Spiritus et aqua et sanguis et tres unum sunt."

This is the reading of Codex Fuldensis, one of the oldest Vulgate manuscripts from the 6th century. It is odd for the Vulgate to have "tres unum sunt" because this is actually a translation of "τρεις εν εισιν" in the Comma rather than of "τρεις εις το εν εισιν" in verse 8. The Greek in verse 8 has the preposition "εις". The inclusion of "εις" ("in" in Latin) completely changes the sense of the passage. Later editions of the Vulgate have resupplied the preposition. The 20th century Nova Vulgata has "tres in unum sunt" and John Calvin's Latin translation has "tres in unum conveniunt". There is no reason why a translation of "τρεις εις το εν εισιν" in verse 8 should omit the preposition unless the wording of verse 8 was influenced by the wording of the Comma. Thus the Comma has left its mark in all Vulgate editions.

Greek fathers knew of the Comma

A good number of Greek fathers were aware of the Comma:

Athanasius

By "Athanasius", it is meant Athanasius (c. 296 – 373 AD) or Pseudo-Athanasius (c. 350 - c. 600 AD). Athanasius quoted the Comma in *Disputatio Contra Arium*:

"Τί δὲ καὶ τὸ τῆς ἀφέσεως τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν παρεκτικὸν, καὶ ζωοποιὸν, καὶ ἁγιαστικὸν λουτρὸν, οὐ χωρὶς οὐδεὶς ὄψεται τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν, οὐκ ἐν τῇ τρισμακαρίᾳ ὀνομασίᾳ δίδοται τοῖς πιστοῖς; Πρὸς δὲ τούτοις πᾶσιν Ἰωάννης φάσκει: «Καὶ οἱ τρεῖς τὸ ἐν εἰσιν.»"

"But also, is not that sin-remitting, life-giving and sanctifying washing [baptism], without which, no one shall see the kingdom of heaven, given to the faithful in the Thrice-Blessed Name? In addition to all these, John affirms, 'and these three are one.'" (Translation by KJV Today)

[ONLINE LINK to Disputatio Contra Arium](#)

The quote, "Καὶ οἱ τρεῖς τὸ ἓν εἰσιν", is likely from the Comma rather than verse 8 because it lacks "εις (in)". This somewhat hesitant tagging of the Comma at the end of the statement is consistent with the Comma being a minority reading in the early Greek church. The Comma, though worth quoting, was not the crux of Athanasius' argument.

Athanasius quoted another portion of the Comma in *Quaestiones Aliae*:

"Ὡσπερ ἡ ψυχὴ μου μία ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τρισυπόστατος, ψυχὴ, λόγος, καὶ πνοή· οὕτω καὶ ὁ Θεὸς εἷς ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ἔστι καὶ τρισυπόστατος, Πατὴρ, Λόγος, καὶ Πνεῦμα ἅγιον.... Ὡς γὰρ ψυχὴ, λόγος καὶ πνοὴ τρία πρόσωπα, καὶ μία φύσις ψυχῆς, καὶ οὐ τρεῖς ψυχαί· οὕτω Πατὴρ, Λόγος καὶ Πνεῦμα ἅγιον, τρία πρόσωπα, καὶ εἷς τῆ φύσει Θεὸς, καὶ οὐ τρεῖς θεοί."

"Even as my soul is one, but a triune soul, reason, and breath; so also God is one, but is also triune, Father, Word, and Holy Ghost.... For as soul, reason and breath are three features, and in substance one soul, and not three souls; so Father, Word and Holy Ghost, [are] three persons, and one God in substance, and not three gods." (Translation by KJV Today)

[ONLINE LINK to *Quaestiones Aliae*](#)

Those who claim that Athanasius did not quote the Comma elsewhere need to consider that Athanasius also did not quote Matthew 28:19 in some of his most pro-Trinitarian writings such as *The Deposition of Arius*, *Apologia Contra Arianos* and the *Four Discourses Against the Arians*. Matthew 28:19 provides the second most clearest declaration of the Trinity after the Comma, yet Athanasius used other scriptures to support his views on the Trinity. Athanasius was not necessarily interested in establishing the Trinity per se, but rather the consubstantial unity of the Father and the Son. Other texts were more appropriate for this goal. The later Latin Fathers are the ones who were influenced by Neo-Platonic thought and sought to formulate the relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost in a neatly arranged Trinity.

Origen

Origen (c. 184 - c. 253 AD) or Pseudo-Origen quoted the Comma in *Selecta in Psalmos* (PG XII, 1304):

"Ἴδου ὡς ὀφθαλμοὶ δούλων εἰς χεῖρας τῶν κυρίων αὐτῶν, ὡς ὀφθαλμοὶ παιδίσκης εἰς χεῖρας τῆς κυρίας αὐτῆς, οὕτως οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ ἡμῶν πρὸς Κύριον Θεὸν ἡμῶν, ἕως οὗ οἰκτειρήσαι

ἡμᾶς, κ. τ. ἐ. Δοῦλοι κυρίων Πατρὸς καὶ Υἱοῦ πνεῦμα καὶ σῶμα· παιδίσκη δὲ κυρίας τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος ἢ ψυχῆ. Τὰ δὲ τρία Κύριος ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν ἐστίν· οἱ γὰρ τρεῖς τὸ ἓν εἰσιν."

"Behold, the eyes of bondservants in the hands of their lord, as the eyes of a bondwoman in the hands of their lady, so are our eyes towards the Lord our God, until he may pity us; spirit and body are the bondservants of the Lord Father and Son; but the soul is the bondwoman of the lady Holy Spirit. And the Lord our God is three, for the three are one." (Translation by KJV Today)

[ONLINE LINK to *Selecta in Psalmos*](#)

The quote "οἱ γὰρ τρεῖς τὸ ἓν εἰσιν" is cited as an authority ("γὰρ") for the Trinity. Thus it bears the mark of a scriptural allusion.

Gregory of Nazianzus

Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329 - 390 AD) cites the Comma in the vocative case in the following doxology at the end of *Oration 45: The Second Oration on Easter*:

"Εἰ δὲ καταλύσαιμεν ἀξίως τοῦ πόθου, καὶ δεχθείημεν ταῖς οὐρανίαις σκηναῖς, τάχα σοι καὶ αὐτόθι θύσομεν δεκτὰ ἐπὶ τὸ ἅγιόν σου θυσιαστήριον, ὦ Πάτερ, καὶ Λόγε, καὶ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον· ὅτι σοὶ πρέπει πᾶσα δόξα, τιμὴ, καὶ κράτος, εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. Ἀμήν."

"But if we are to be released, in accordance with our desire, and be received into the Heavenly Tabernacle, there too it may be we shall offer You acceptable Sacrifices upon Your Altar, to Father and Word and Holy Ghost; for to You belongs all glory and honour and might, world without end. Amen." (English translation at [New Advent](#))

ONLINE LINK to [Oration 45: The Second Oration on Easter](#)

The points supporting this as a citation or at least an allusion to the Comma are as follows:

- The context is with respect to the "Heavenly Tabernacle", namely, God as revealed in heaven. This mirrors the context of the Comma in which the Father, Word, and Holy Ghost are said to be heavenly witnesses.
- In this same document at chapter IV, Gregory refers to the Trinity in its usual formula as follows: "And when I say God, I mean Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; for Godhead is neither diffused beyond These, so as to introduce a mob of gods, nor yet bounded by a smaller compass than These, so as to condemn us for a poverty stricken conception of Deity, either

Judaizing to save the Monarchia, or falling into heathenism by the multitude of our gods." After stating emphatically that by God he means "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost", it is curious that he would end the same document with a different atypical formula if it were not an import from an established source.

- The context is ripe with scriptural allusions, namely to the "Heavenly Tabernacle" (Revelation 8:3), "Sacrifices upon Your Altar" (Revelation 15:5: "της σκηνης του μαρτυριου εν τω ουρανω"), and "glory and honour and might, world without end" (Revelation 5:13: "η τιμη και η δοξα και το κρατος εις τους αιωνας των αιωνων"). In this scripturally pregnant context, one must be in a state of denial to suppose that "Father and Word and Holy Ghost" alone is not a scriptural allusion.
- Furthermore, these scriptural allusions at this last portion of Gregory's oration are all from the Johannine corpus, which makes it more likely that "Father and Word and Holy Ghost" is also from that same corpus.
- In *Oration 31*, Gregory of Nazianzus had commented on the unconventional grammar of 1 John 5:6-8 in manuscripts without the Comma (as explained [above \[LINK\]](#)). As is typical among theologians, Gregory's comment may have elicited a debate concerning the unconventional grammar and possible reasons/solutions. Given the Comma existed in the Latin West at this time, it is likely that after composing *Oration 31* and prior to composing *Oration 45*, Gregory had been made aware of the Comma as a possible solution to the grammatical anomaly. This is where Gregory may have committed the unique Trinitarian wording of the Comma to memory so as to make an allusion to it in *Oration 45*.

John Chrysostom

John Chrysostom (c. 349 – 407 AD) wrote *Adversus Judaeos* (Homily 1:3) in which he used the following curious phrase:

"Κάτω τρεῖς μάρτυρες, ἄνω τρεῖς μάρτυρες, τὸ ἀπρόσιτον τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ δόξης δηλοῦντες."

"Three witnesses below, three witnesses above, showing the inaccessibility of God's glory."
(Translation by KJV Today)

[ONLINE LINK to *Adversus Judaeos*](#)

Chrysostom is not speaking about the Trinity in the context. He is merely saying that a good number of witnesses testify concerning the ineffable nature of God. Still, it is interesting that Chrysostom would give weight to his argument by using the formula of having three witnesses below and three witnesses above ("above" is to be understood as "heaven", as he previously stated, "ἀλλ' ἀνέβην εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν" ("But I went up to heaven [figuratively]"). Since the Comma was already cited in the Latin Church during Chrysostom's time, it is far more candid to suppose that a learned teacher such as Chrysostom knew of the Comma and was alluding to its formula than to suppose that he formulated it by his own imagination.

Pseudo-Chrysostom quotes the Comma in the vocative case in *De Cognitione Dei et in Sancta Theophania* as follows:

"Ἄλλ', ὦ Πάτερ, καὶ Λόγε, καὶ Πνεῦμα, ἡ τρισυπόστατος οὐσία, καὶ δύναμις, καὶ θέλησις, καὶ ἐνέργεια, ἡμᾶς τοὺς ὁμολογοῦντάς σου τὰς ἀσυγχύτους καὶ ἀδιαίρετους ὑποστάσεις, ἀξιώσον καὶ τῆς ἐκ δεξιῶν σου στάσεως, ἡνίκα ἔρχῃ ἐξ οὐρανῶν κρῖναι τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ· ὅτι πρέπει σοι δόξα, τιμὴ καὶ προσκύνησις, τῷ Πατρὶ καὶ τῷ Υἱῷ καὶ τῷ ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι, νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ, καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων."

"But, O Father, and Word, and Spirit, the triune being and might and will and power, deem us, who confess you as the unconfused and indivisible substance, also worthy to be the ones standing at your right hand when you come from heaven to judge the world in righteousness, for rightly yours is the glory, honor, and worship, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and for always, and for eternity." (Translation by KJV Today)

[ONLINE LINK to *De Cognitione Dei et in Sancta Theophania*](#)

Pseudo-Chrysostom first refers to the Trinity as Father, Word, and Spirit and then switches to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the same sentence. This switch has no contextual reason. Given the abundance of scriptural allusions in this passage, it is most likely that the two forms of the Trinity are both scriptural allusions (Matthew 28:19 & 1 John 5:7).

Zacharias Rhetor

Zacharias Rhetor (born c. 465 AD) was a bishop of Mytilene. He cited the Comma in the vocative case as follows in *Disputatio De Mundi Opificio* (PG LXXXV, 1141):

"Ὁ Δεσποτα καὶ Δημιουργε τουδε του παντος, ὦ Πατερ, καὶ Λογε, καὶ Πνευμα αγιου, ὦ Θεια Τριας, καὶ τριση καὶ αγια μονας."

"The Lord and Creator of all things, O Father, and Word, and Holy Ghost, the Divine Trinity, both threefold and holy unity." (Translation by KJV Today)

[ONLINE LINK to PG LXXXV](#) (see page 1141)

Not only are the persons of the Trinity named according to the wording of the Comma, the following clause, "both threefold and holy unity" mirrors the Comma's "there are three... and the three are one".

Andrew of Crete

Andreas Cretensis (born c. 635) was an archbishop of Crete. He cites the Comma in the vocative case in *Magnus Canon* (PG XCVII, 1345):

"Υπεραρχιε, συμμορφε, πανσθενεστατη Τριας αγια Πατερ, Λογε, Πνευμα αγιον´ θεε, Φως, και Ζωη, φυλαττε την ποιμνην σου."

"O High Ruler, O conformed, all powerful holy Trinity: O Father, Word, Holy Ghost, O God, Light, and Life, guard your flock."

[ONLINE LINK to *Magnus Canon*](#)

John of Damascus

John of Damascus (c. 675 - 749 AD), though born Syrian, wrote treatises as well as hymns in Greek. He wrote the following line in *Carmina et Cantica: In Dominicam Pascha* (PG XCVI, 844):

"Πατερ παντοκρατορ, και Λογε, και Πνευμα, τρισιν ενιζομενη εν υποστασεσι φϋσις, υπερουσιε και υπερθεε, εις σε βεβαπτισμεθα, και σε ευλογουμεν αι εις τους αιωνας."

"O Omnipotent Father, and Word, and Spirit, three persons [yet] in nature one substance, highest essence and highest divinity, in you [we are] baptized, and you we bless always and forever." (Translation by KJV Today)

[ONLINE LINK to *Carmina et Cantica: In Dominicam Pascha*](#) (see page 844)

The influence of the Comma is strong here given the context. John of Damascus names the Trinity in the vocative case as "Father, and Word, and Spirit" and says in these persons "[we are] baptized". This expression is rather unusual if it were not for the influence of the Comma; for Matthew 28:19 is the seminal passage linking the Trinity to baptism; and there we are commanded to baptize in "the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost". Only the Comma, which names the Father, Word, and Holy Ghost as witnesses, provides a scriptural basis for baptizing in these three names. In accordance with the Comma, John of Damascus declares the "Father, and Word, and Spirit" and immediately follows with the three in one principle.

Ignatius of Antioch

The longer version of *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians* might have an allusion to the Comma. While the longer version is considered to be an interpolation from after Ignatius' death, scholars date it to the 4th century - which is still early enough for the allusion to be noteworthy. For the sake of this discussion, the author will be called "Ignatius". The text reads:

"ἐπεὶπερ καὶ εἷς ἀγέννητος, ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατήρ, καὶ εἷς μονογενὴς υἱός, θεὸς λόγος καὶ ἄνθρωπος, καὶ εἷς ὁ παράκλητος, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας,"

(the above Greek excerpt corresponds to the underlined portion below)

"I have confidence of you in the Lord, that ye will be of no other mind. Wherefore I write boldly to your love, which is worthy of God, and exhort you to have but one faith, and one [kind of] preaching, and one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ; and His blood which was shed for us is one; one loaf also is broken to all [the communicants], and one cup is distributed among them all: there is but one altar for the whole Church, and one bishop, with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow-servants. Since, also, there is but one unbegotten Being, God, even the Father; and one only-begotten Son, God, the Word and man; and one Comforter, the Spirit of truth; and also one preaching, and one faith, and one baptism; and one Church which the holy apostles established from one end of the earth to the other by the blood of Christ, and by their own sweat and toil; it behoves you also, therefore, as "a peculiar people, and a holy nation," to perform all things with harmony in Christ." ([Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1, "The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus", Edited by Alexander Roberts, D.D. & James Donaldson, LL.D.](#))

[ONLINE LINK to *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians*](#)

The entire passage is an expanded exposition of Ephesians 4:1-7. The following chart shows how each portion of Ephesians 4:1-7 gave rise to each portion of Ignatius' exposition:

Ephesians 4:1-7	Ignatius to Philadelphians
<p>¹ I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, ² With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; ³ Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.</p>	<p>I have confidence of you in the Lord, that ye will be of no other mind. Wherefore I write boldly to your love, which is worthy of God, and exhort you to have but one faith, and one [kind of] preaching, and one Eucharist.</p> <p><i>(This portion mirrors Ephesians 4:1-3 in</i></p>

	<p><i>exhorting believers to maintain unity; and what follows explains the basis of this unity.)</i></p>
<p>⁴ There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;</p>	<p>For there is one flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ; and His blood which was shed for us is one; one loaf also is broken to all [the communicants], and one cup is distributed among them all: there is but one altar for the whole Church, and one bishop, with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow-servants.</p> <p><i>(This portion expands the meaning of "body" as understood in its various interpretations and applications)</i></p>
<p>⁵ One Lord,</p>	<p><u>Since, also, there is but one unbegotten Being, God, even the Father; and one only-begotten Son, God, the Word and man; and one Comforter, the Spirit of truth;</u></p> <p><i>(This portion expounds the "One Lord" of Ephesians 4:5 as referring to the threefold "Father... Word... Spirit".)</i></p>
<p>⁵ one faith, one baptism,</p>	<p>and also one preaching, and one faith, and one baptism;</p> <p><i>(This portion seems to reference Romans 10:17 "faith cometh by hearing" and adds "one preaching" as a precursor to "one faith"; which results in "one baptism".)</i></p>
<p>⁶ One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. ⁷ But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.</p>	<p>and one Church which the holy apostles established from one end of the earth to the other by the blood of Christ, and by their own sweat and toil; it behoves you also, therefore, as "a peculiar people, and a holy nation," to perform all things with harmony in Christ.</p> <p><i>(This concluding portion refers to God's grace</i></p>

	<i>enabling believers to edify the Church by their various giftings.)</i>
<i>(Ephesians 5-6 provide instructions for wives, husbands, children, and servants.)</i>	<i>(The passage continues with Ignatius exhorting wives, children, servants, and husband to follow these instructions in Ephesians 5-6.)</i>

The reference to the "Father... Word... Spirit" in Ignatius' epistle is most likely an allusion to the Comma for the following reasons:

- "Father... Word... Spirit" is a Trinitarian formula unique to the Johannine Comma.
- By cross-referencing the "One Lord" statement of Ephesians 4:5 to the Trinity of "the Father... Word... Spirit", Ignatius carries over the meaning of the Comma, namely, that there are "the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost" and "these three are one."
- The order of the descriptions of the three persons of the Trinity suggests a deliberateness in alluding to the Comma. First, the "one unbegotten Being, God" is listed, and it is further clarified that this is "even **the Father**". Then the "one only-begotten Son, God" is listed and further clarified that this is "**the Word** and man (an allusion to the parallelism between 1 John 5:7 and 1 John 5:8)". Lastly the "one Comforter" is listed and further clarified that this is "**the Spirit** of truth" (an allusion to 1 John 5:6). Each person of the Trinity is first identified and the immediately following clarifying title always mirrors the wording of the Comma. It would have been typical for "the Father" to be associated with "the Son" (with both terms indicating the relationship between each other) as clarifying titles to the first and second persons of the Trinity. However, what we have in Ignatius is an atypical grouping of "the Father" with "the Word":

	First title	Second title
1st person of the Trinity	"unbegotten being"	" the Father "
2nd person of the Trinity	"only-begotten Son"	" the Word and man"
3rd person of the Trinity	"Comforter"	" the Spirit of truth"

- All the attributes which Ignatius gives to "the Father... Word... Spirit" are found in the context of the Comma.
 - Ignatius refers to the unbegotten nature of the Father and the begotten nature of the Son. This echoes 1 John 5:1 which says, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus

is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him."

- The distinction between the heavenly "Word" and the earthly humanity of the Son ("man") is laid out in 1 John 5:6-8. In fact, 1 John 5:7-8 first refers to the Son as the "Word" and then refers to his humanity characterized by "the water, and the blood".
- While the reference to the Parakletos (comforter, advocate) is found farther back in 1 John 2:1, the reference to the "Spirit of truth" is found in 1 John 5:6 and 1 John 4:6. There is no question that John 15:26 is the closer reference of the Comforter being the Spirit of truth, but the Epistle of First John is not far off.
- There are countless other attributes and titles that Ignatius could have ascribed to "the Father... Word... Spirit" from scripture, but his restriction to those found in the context of the Comma suggests an allusion to it.
- Ignatius is careful to expand the meaning of Ephesians 4:1-7 from close scriptural allusions. This suggest the expansion of the "One Lord" in verse 5 is also a close scriptural allusion.

Latin fathers knew of the Comma

Latin fathers quoted/alluded to the Comma more often than the Greek fathers. The earliest citations of the Comma provide only the portion which reads, "these three are one". However, this is the only relevant portion to cite in a Trinitarian argument for the consubstantial unity of the Godhead since the Comma quoted in its entirety would only prove that the Godhead is united in testimony, not essence (more on this later).

Tertullian

Tertullian (c. 155 - c. 245 AD) makes a truncated reference to the Comma:

"Ita connexus Patris in Filio et Filii in Paracleto, tres efficit coharentes, alterum ex altere, qui tres unum sunt, non unus, quomodo dictum est, Ego et Pater unum sumus." (*Against Praxeas* XXV).

"Thus the connection of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Paraclete, produces three coherent persons, one from the other, which three are one, not one [person], as it is said, "I and my Father are One."" (Translation by KJV Today)

Some translations in English obscure Tertullian's reference to the Comma. Tertullian makes the truncated reference, "tres unum sunt" and argues for the consubstantial unity of the Father and the Son with the reference to John 10:30. He did not quote the Comma fully because a full quotation has "the Word" instead of "the Son".

Furthermore, Tertullian alludes to the Comma in *De Baptismo*:

"Not that in the waters we obtain the Holy Spirit; but in the water, under (the witness of) the angel, we are cleansed, and prepared for the Holy Spirit. In this case also a type has preceded; for thus was John beforehand the Lord's forerunner, preparing His ways. Thus, too, does the angel, the witness of baptism, make the paths straight for the Holy Spirit, who is about to come upon us, by the washing away of sins, which faith, sealed in (the name of) the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, obtains. For if in the mouth of three witnesses every word shall stand: — while, through the benediction, we have the same (three) as witnesses of our faith whom we have as sureties of our salvation too— how much more does the number of the divine names suffice for the assurance of our hope likewise! Moreover, after the pledging both of the attestation of faith and the promise of salvation under three witnesses, there is added, of necessity, mention of the Church; inasmuch as, wherever there are three, (that is, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,) there is the Church, which is a body of three." (English translation by [New Advent](#))

Here Tertullian is alluding to two Trinitarian passages: Matthew 28:19 ("Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:") and 1 John 5:7 ("For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one."). It is significant that he does not explicitly quote Matthew 28:19, because that means we have no reason to expect him to quote 1 John 5:7 explicitly. It is obviously that Matthew 28:19 is alluded because the issue concerns baptism in the name of the Trinity. However, Matthew 28:19 alone falls short of describing the Trinity as "three witnesses" concerning "the attestation of faith and the promise of salvation". This is a matter described in 1 John 5 verse 7 to 12.

[Cyprian](#)

Cyprian (c. 210 - 258 AD) quotes the Comma:

“Dicit Dominus, Ego et Pater unum sumus; et iterum de Patre et Filio et Spiritu sancto scriptum est: 'Et tres unum sunt.'” (*Treatise I:6*).

"The Lord says, "I and the Father are one; " and again it is written of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, "And these three are one."

While some might argue that Cyprian was giving a theological spin to 1 John 5:8, Cyprian clearly says "scriptum est" (it is written). As with Tertullian, Cyprian would not have given the full quotation because the Comma has "the Word" instead of "the Son". In *De Rebaptismate* (15 and 19) Pseudo-Cyprian appears to quote 1 John 5:8 without the Comma. However, this writer is not the actual Cyprian.

Phoebadius

Phoebadius in 359 AD quotes the Comma:

"Sic alius a Filio Spiritus; sicut alius a patre Filius. Sic tertia in Spiritu ut in Filio secunda persona, unus tamen omnia quia tres unum sunt" (*Contra Arianos XXVII: 4*)

"The other Spirit comes from the Son just as the other Son comes from the Father. So the Spirit is the third as the Son is the second person. But the sum is one, for the three are one."

Priscillian

Priscillian of Avila in c. 380 AD quotes the Comma:

"Sicut Ioannes ait: Tria sunt quae testimonium dicunt in terra: aqua caro et sanguis; et haec tria in unum sunt et tria sunt quae testimonium dicunt in caelo: pater, verbum et spiritus; et haec tria unum sunt in Christo Iesu." (*Liber Apologeticus, I.4*)

"As John says, "There are three that give testimony in earth: the water, the flesh and the blood; and these three are one and there are three that give testimony in heaven: the Father, the Word and the Spirit; and these three are one in Christ Jesus." (Translation by KJV Today)

The order of verse 7 and 8 is reversed, but the Comma nonetheless existed by 350 AD, which is the date of the earliest Greek manuscripts against the Comma (e.g. Sinaiticus and Vaticanus). Some critics dismiss the significance of Priscillian's citation due to the fact that he was considered a heretic. These critics may even go as far as to say that Priscillian forged the Comma. But Priscillian was considered a heretic because of his extreme asceticism and

Manichaeism. Forging the Comma would not have helped in furthering any of these heretical beliefs.

Augustine

Augustine (354 - 430 AD) quotes the Comma in *City of God*, Book 5, Chapter 11. He writes:

"Deus itaque summus et verus cum Verbo suo et Spiritu sancto, quae tria unum sunt, Deus unus omnipotens, creator et factor omniae atque omniae corporis,"

"Therefore God supreme and true, with His Word and Holy Spirit (which three are one), one God omnipotent, creator and maker of every soul and of every body;" (English translation by [New Advent](#))

The significance of this passage is the use of "His Word" to refer to the second person of the Trinity followed by "and Holy Spirit" and the phrase "which three are one". Such a formula appears only in the Comma.

Some people believe that Augustine did not know of the Comma because he made a mystical Trinitarian interpretation of 1 John 5:8 in *Contra Maximinum* (II:22:3), written sometime around 427 AD, without overtly referring to the Comma. In this very construed interpretation, Augustine saw the Spirit as signifying the Father, the blood as signifying the Son, and the water as signifying the Holy Ghost. Even if Augustine appeared to be hesitant to regard the Comma as Scripture in *Contra Maximinum* in 427 AD, he appeared to be aware of the Comma in 410 AD. So his change in view could be attributed to him "switching his translation" later in life. In fact, Augustine's quote of 1 John 5:8 in *Contra Maximinum* is not from the Vulgate. The quote reads:

"Sane falli te nolo in Epistola Ioannis apostoli, ubi ait: Tres sunt testes; spiritus, et aqua, et sanguis; et tres unum sunt."

The Vulgate should read, "Tres sunt qui testimonium dant". It appears that Augustine is making his own translation from the Greek, which did not have the Comma in the majority of manuscripts at this point in time. Augustine's policy was to turn to the Greek whenever there were variants in the Latin. He said: "As to the books of the New Testament, again, if any perplexity arises from the diversities of the Latin texts, we must of course yield to the Greek, especially those that are found in the churches of greater learning and research" (*On Christian Doctrine*, II:15). Augustine's neglect of the Comma in *Contra Maximinum* may prove that the Comma was already expunged in the Greek, but it does not prove the lack of the Comma in the Latin. Besides, it sure is curious that Augustine would make such a construed interpretation of the Spirit, water, and blood if it were not for him being influenced by the parallelism of the Comma earlier in life.

Vigilius Tapsensis

North African Bishop Vigilius Tapsensis quotes the Comma in *Contra Varimadum* in c. 450 AD and three times in Books 1 and 10 of *De Trinitate Libri Duodecim* in c. 480 AD:

Contra Varimadum:

“Item ipse ad Parthos: Tres sunt, inquit, qui testimonium perhibent in terra, aqua, sanguis et caro, et tres in nobis sunt. Et tres sunt qui testimonium perhibent in caelo, Pater, Verbum, et Spiritus, et ii tres unum sunt.” (Contra Varimadum, Book I, Chapter 5 (MPL062, col. 359))

“Also to the Parthians, ‘There are three’, He says, ‘that bear record in earth, the water, the blood and the flesh, and the three are in us. And there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, and these three are one.’” (Translation by KJV Today)

De Trinitate Libri Duodecim:

“Ergo quamvis in superioribus exemplis Scripturarum tacita sint nomina personarum, tamen unitum nomen divinitatis per omnia tibi est in his demonstratum; sicut et in hoc exemplo veritatis, in quo nomina personarum evidenter sunt ostensa, et unitum nomen divinitatis clause est declaratum, dicente Joanne evangelista in Epistola sua: Tres sunt qui testimonium dicunt in caelo, Pater, et Verbum, et Spiritus, et in Christo Jesu unum sunt;” (*De Trinitate Libri Duodecim* , Book I (MPL062, col. 243))

“Therefore, although in the above examples the Scriptures are silent regarding the names of the persons, yet this union of the divine name by all in this is to be demonstrated to you; also as in this example of the truth, in which the names of the persons are clearly evident, and the united divine names declared closed, the Evangelist John says in his Epistle: ‘There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, and the Word, and the Spirit, and they are one in the Lord Jesus Christ;’” (Translation by KJV Today)

Victor Vitensis

Victor bishop of Vita in c. 485 AD cited the Comma as representing the testimony of John the evangelist in a dispute with Huneric the Vandal:

“Et ut adhuc luce clarius unius divinitatis esse cum Patre et Filio Spiritum sanctum doceamus, Joannis evangelistae testimonio comprobatur. Ait namque: Tres sunt qui testimonium perhibent in caelo, Pater, Verbum, et Spiritus sanctus, et his tres unum sunt.” (*Historia persecutionis Africanae Provinciae*, Book III, Chapter XI (MPL058, col. 227))

“And in order to show with clearer light that the unity of divinity is with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, John the evangelist bears record. For which it is said: ‘There are

three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one.” (Translation by KJV Today)

Fulgentius Ruspensis

Fulgentius bishop of Ruspe in North Africa (died 527 AD) cited the Comma, even referring to Cyprian’s citation of the same:

Responsio Contra Arianos Libri Duo:

“In Patre ergo et Filio et Spiritu sancto unitatem substantiae accipimus, personas confundere non ademus. Beatu enim Joannes apostolus testatur, dicen: Tres sunt qui testimonium perhibent in caelo, Pater, Verbum, et Spiritus; et tres unum sunt. Quod etiam beatissimus martyr Cyprianus, in epistola de Unitate Ecclesiae confitetur, dicens: Qui pacem Christi et concordiam rumpit, adversus Christum facit; qui alibi praeter Ecclesiam colligit, Christi Ecclesiam spargit. Atque ut unam Ecclesiam unius Dei esse monstraret, haec confestim testimonia de Scripturis inseruit. Dicit Dominus: Ego et Pater unum sumus. Et iterum: De Patre et Filio et Spiritu sancto scriptum et: Et tres unum sunt.” (*Responsio Contra Arianos Libri Duo*, Response 10 (MPL065, col. 224))

In the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, whose unity of substance we accept, are confident not to confound the persons. For the blessed John the Apostle testifies, saying: ‘There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit; and the three are one. This is also confessed by the most blessed martyr Cyprian in the letter On the Unity of the Church, saying: ‘He who breaks the peace and concord of Christ, he does against Christ’, who in another place says in addition to a collection of the Church, says, ‘scatters the Church of Christ’. And in order to show that there is one Church of the one God, he immediately inserted this into the testimonies of the Scriptures: ‘The Lord says: I and the Father are one. And again: of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit it is written: ;And the three are one.’” (Translation by KJV Today)

Ad Felicem Notarium De Trinitate Liber Unus:

“En habes in brevi aliu esse Patrem, alium Filium, alium Spiritum sanctum: alium et alium in persona, non aliud et aliud in natura; et idcirco Ego, inquit, et Pater unum sumus. Unum, ad naturam referre nos docei, Sumus, ad personas. Similiter et illud: Tres sunt, inquit, qui testimonium dicun in caelo, Pater, Verbum, et Spiritus, et his tres unum sunt.” (*Ad Felicem Notarium De Trinitate Liber Unus*, Chapter IV (MPL065, col. 500))

“Here you have briefly that another is the Father, another is the Son, another is the Holy Spirit: different in person, not different in nature: and for this reason ‘I’, he says, ‘and the Father are one.’ We teach that ‘One’ refers to nature, and ‘We are’ refers to the persons. Likewise regarding it: ‘There are three’, he says, who are said to testify in heaven, ‘the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, and these three are one.’” (Translation by KJV Today)

Cassiodorus

Cassiodorus of Italy (c. 485 - c. 585 AD) cited the Comma in *Complexiones In Epistollis Apostolorum*:

“Cui rei testificantur in terra tria mysteria: aqua, sanguis et spiritus, quae in passione Domini leguntur impleta: in caelo autem Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus sanctus; et hi tres unus est Deus.” (*Complexiones In Epistollis Apostolorum*, Epistolam S. Joannis ad Parthos, Chapter X (MPL070, col. 1373))

“This matter the three mysteries testify in earth: ‘the water, the blood, and the spirit’, which are fulfilled as we read in the Passion of the Lord: but in heaven ‘the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit: and these three are one God’. (Translation by KJV Today)

Syriac evidence

Ephrem the Syrian

Ephrem the Syrian was a 4th century theologian writing in Syriac in Assyria. He wrote:

"The daring men try to escape men's notice [when pretending] that they baptize in the Three Names. Now at the mouth of Three the judges decide. See here be Three Witnesses Who put an end to all strife! And who would doubt about the holy Witnesses of His Baptism?" (*Eighty Rhythms upon the Faith, against the Disputers*, 28:7, translated into English by Rev. J. B. Morris, *Select Works of S. Ephrem the Syrian* (Oxford:, 1847), p. 196).

[ONLINE LINK to *Eighty Rhythms upon the Faith, against the Disputers*](#)

While scriptures other than the Comma could account for the theological truths expounded by Ephrem, his naming of the "Three Names" as "Three Witnesses" seems based on the wording of the Comma. Only the Comma refers to the Three Names, Father, Word, and Holy Ghost, as Three Witnesses.

Like the Vulgate, the Syriac Peshitta has a trace of the Comma

[In a similar vein to those Vulgate manuscripts without the Comma](#), early manuscripts of the Syriac Peshitta do not have the Comma but nonetheless retain a trace of the Comma in verse 8 (or verse 7 depending on the versification), which begins with "ܐܡܘܢܐ" (Thomas Burgess, *In Further Proof of the Authenticity of 1 John*, v. 7 (London: Brodie and Dowding, 1829), p. 56):

ܘܢܘܪ ܕܡܘܬܘܪܐ ܘܢܘܪܐ ܕܡܘܬܘܪܐ ܘܢܘܪܐ ܕܡܘܬܘܪܐ ܘܢܘܪܐ ܕܡܘܬܘܪܐ

"And there are three that testify, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three are in one." (J. W. Etheridge)

"And there are three to bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three are one." (George M. Lamsa)

"And there are three witnesses, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three are in union." (James Murdock)

The phrase "And there are..." at 1 John 5 appears only in Bibles with the Comma. This is because the clause immediately following verse 6 is introduced with "For there are..." (whether with or without the Comma). The phrase "And there are..." follows the Comma only if the Comma exists. In Bibles without the Comma the only phrase should be "For there are....":

"ὅτι τρεις εισιν οι μαρτυρουντες, το πνευμα και το υδωρ και το αιμα, και οι τρεις εις το εν εισιν." (Nestle-Aland 27)

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

There is no reason why the Syriac should translate the Greek causal conjunction "ὅτι" as the copulative Waw (ܘ) conjunction. The Syriac translates "ὅτι" as "because" in just the previous verse and also at 1 John 5:4. The phrase "ὅτι τρεις εισιν οι μαρτυρουντες" obviously introduces a "cause" or "reason" for the antecedent phrase. The Syriac appears to be translated from a Greek manuscript which contained "και τρεις εισιν", which is a vestige of the Comma. Although this manuscript apparently did not contain the Comma and the mention of "in earth", it nonetheless contained a trace of the Comma. The oldest Syriac manuscript which contains 1 John is from the 5th century (British Library, Add. 14470).

Internal evidence

"⁶ This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. ⁷ For there are three that bear record [*in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.*] ⁸ And there are three that bear witness in

earth], the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. ⁹ If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son." (1 John 5:6-9, the Comma identified in bracketed italics)

Given the early corruption of the text of 1 John, the internal evidence for the Comma should be given greater weight. The internal evidence for the Comma is strong.

Comma-absent readings lack an explicit explanation of the "witness of God"

1 John 5:6 says "it is the Spirit that beareth witness" and yet 1 John 5:9 refers to the "witness of God". A Trinitarian might automatically equate "the Spirit" with "God" but such a logical leap is not warranted in the context of 1 John 5. In the context of John chapter 5, "God" refers to the Father. 1 John 5:1 says, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him." Since Jesus Christ is born of the Father, this "God", namely "him that begat", must refer to the Father. When verse 9 says that if we receive the witness of men, the witness "of God" is greater, this "God" must mean the "Father". But without the Comma, there is no reference to the Father ever giving witness. When the Comma is included, we see the Father providing witness in union with the Spirit.

Johannine appeal to the witness of the Father

Following up with the previous point, in John's Gospel we find recurring instances of the Father bearing witness of Jesus Christ:

- John 5:37: "And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape."
- John 8:18: "I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me."

As our Lord Jesus often appealed to the witness of the Father as the highest authority, without such reference to the Father as one of the witnesses of Jesus Christ, the passage in 1 John 5 is theologically hollow and deficient. Including the Comma is more agreeable to the Joannine appeal to the witness of the Father.

Comma-absent readings give rise to an unbiblical doctrine

Verse 6 declares that the Spirit is truth. This is shown by the fact that the Spirit is in agreement with the Father and the Word ("...το πνευμα εστιν η αληθεια **οτι** τρεις εισιν οι μαρτυρουντες εν τω ουρανω ο πατηρ ο λογος και το αγιον πνευμα και ουτοι οι τρεις εν εισιν."). In other words, the Spirit is truth because it is one with the source of truth, the divine Father and the Son whose testimonies are in agreement (John 8:18). If the Comma were not present, the Spirit is purported to be truth just because it agrees with two other earthly witnesses ("...το πνευμα εστιν η αληθεια **οτι** τρεις εισιν οι μαρτυρουντες το πνευμα και το υδωρ και το αιμα και οι τρεις εις το εν εισιν"). However, this would hardly explain why the Spirit alone is singled out as being truth. If the unity in testimony determines whether a contributing witness is truth, then either the water or the blood could also be truth on the same level as the Spirit. The biblical principle on two or three witnesses is that *the matter* which is being testified by two or three witnesses is truth (Matthew 18:16). The contributing *witnesses* themselves are not deemed to be truth just on the basis of participating and being in agreement. The Spirit is truth in a unique sense because it is one with the Godhead, not just because it agrees with two other witnesses.

Comma-absent readings have no antecedent

Verse 8 says, "And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one." In Greek, the phrase "these three agree in one" is "οι τρεις εις **το** εν εισιν" (the three are in **the** one). There is a definite article that indicates that the "one" is a particular "one" that has been referred to previously in the flow of the argument. If the Comma remains, this demonstrative article has a clear antecedent. The Father, Word, and Holy Ghost are "one," and the three earthly witnesses agree in "the one." Without the Comma there is no clear antecedent ("Discussions of Robert Lewis Dabney," The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967, by the Trinitarian Bible Society).

Comma-absent readings have a weaker reason for having exactly "three" witnesses

Critics of the Comma might say that 1 John 5:8 refers to three witnesses because of the biblical principle that two or three witnesses establish a matter (Matthew 18:16). While the principle of Matthew 18:16 might appear sufficient as to why there should be *at least* three witnesses in 1 John 5:8, there is otherwise no reason

why the number of witnesses should be exactly three, and not more. Would it not have been more persuasive for John to list a larger number of witnesses on earth? How about other candidates such as "the scriptures", "miracles" or "the Church"? John appears to be fixated on the number three, which is best explained if the Trinitarian truth of the Comma is included. 18th century Greek New Testament scholar Johann Albrecht Bengel said:

"The heavenly Trinity, archetypal, fundamental, unchangeable, is the foundation of the triad of witnesses on earth, which conforms to it. The apostle might either have made the number of those who bear witness on earth greater; comp. ver. 9; or referred them all to one spirit; comp. ver. 6; but he reduces them to a triad, solely with reference to the three who bear witness in heaven. Because the Father, and the Word, and the Spirit, are properly three, and are bearing witness, and are one, similar things are also, by a figure, predicated of the spirit, and the water, and the blood; which things are evidently less applicable of themselves to those subjects:" (Charlton T. Lewis, *Bengel's Gnomon of the New Testament: A New Translation*, Vol 2 (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1860) p. 810).

Comma-absent readings give rise to a grammatical anomaly

Around 379 AD, Gregory of Nazianzus commented on the grammatical anomaly in 1 John 5:7-8 without the Comma. He says, "...after using Three in the masculine gender [Apostle John] adds three words which are neuter, contrary to the definitions and laws which you and your grammarians have laid down" ([*The Fifth Theological Oration. On the Holy Spirit, XIX*](#)). Gregory is referring to the grammatical mismatch that results from the masculine construction "τρεις εισιν οι μαρτυρουντες (there are three that bear witness)" introducing three neuter nouns, "το πνευμα (the Spirit)," "το υδωρ (the water)" and "το αιμα (the blood)". Although Gregory seemed to be defending the abbreviated text despite the anomaly, for such a defense to be necessary there likely were both variants in the body of Greek manuscripts.

If the Comma were included there is no grammatical problem according to the 19th century Presbyterian theologian Robert L. Dabney. First, the masculine nouns in the Comma, "the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost", would control the gender over the neuter noun "Holy Ghost". Then the repetition of the masculine construction "τρεις εισιν οι μαρτυρουντες" could "be accounted for by the power of attraction, so well known in Greek syntax..." (R. L. Dabney, *The Works of Robert L. Dabney*, (London: Banner Truth, 1967). Anti-Comma scholars have developed several of their own theories to explain away this anomaly without appealing to the Comma, but these theories fall short.

One theory is that John regarded the "Spirit" as a person, and therefore personified it by giving it the masculine gender. The problem with this theory is that "Spirit" appears in verse 6 and is not personified as it is associated with a neuter article and participle, "το πνευμα εστιν το μαρτυρουν."

Another theory by the critics is that John gave the masculine gender to the Spirit, water and blood because John wanted to indicate that they are all valid witnesses, which in Old Testament law had to be males. The problem with this theory is that, again, the Spirit is already described as a valid witness in verse 6 but is given the neuter gender there.

John and the Trinity

Trinitarian defenders of the early Church quoted John's writings the most of all the biblical writers because John's writings state the Trinitarian doctrine most clearly. John is undoubtedly the top spokesman for the doctrine of the Trinity in the Bible. We find the following Trinitarian statements in his writings:

- "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1)
- "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)
- "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." (John 1:18)
- "I and my Father are one." (John 10:30)
- "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58)
- "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:26)
- "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:" (John 15:26)
- "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;" (John 14:16)

- "And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God." (John 20:28)
- "(For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)" (1 John 1:2)
- "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also." (1 John 2:23)
- "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. (1 John 4:13-15)
- "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." (2 John 1:9)
- "John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (Revelation 1:4-6)

As the Trinity was so important a doctrine for John that he sometimes even disrupted the natural flow of the narrative to insert a comment on the Trinity, it is very likely for John to have inserted a reference to the Trinity in the climactic passage of his first epistle (1 John 5:1-12 is considered the climax of the epistle and the closure beings to happen starting at 5:13 with the words, "These things have I written unto you..."). Furthermore, John could have stated the most complete and systematic Trinitarian doctrine in his epistle as it was not confined within the scope of a historical narrative as was the case in John's Gospel. John referred to the Trinity in his Gospel but the concepts therein were confined by the dialogues in the narrative. For example, perhaps the strongest co-equality principle in John's Gospel is the statement, "I and my Father are one." (John 10:30). A stronger and fuller Trinitarian statement would have been, "The Father, the Holy Ghost, and I are one" but such words did not come out of our Lord's mouth because his circumstances did not concern the Holy Ghost. This means John had no basis to state the co-equality of the entire Trinity in his Gospel. However, given that the first epistle is more a theological treatise rather than narrative, John was able to declare a complete and systematic propositional statement concerning the Trinity. The Comma is just what we would expect from John in a doctrinal treatise which makes many points concerning the Trinity. On the other hand, when all the pieces to the Trinitarian doctrine are lining up in the discourse of 1 John 5 (mentioning the Father (verses 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11), the Son (verses 1, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12), the Spirit (verses 6, 8), the concept of three things agreeing in one (verse 8)), John's first epistle absent the

Comma would arguably be uncharacteristic of his writings which never wasted an opportunity to declare the Trinitarian doctrine.

Johannine distinction between the heavenly and earthly

The Comma should be included because it bears the marks of Johannine theology as it relates to the superiority of heavenly witnesses over earthly witnesses. John in his Gospel at John 3:12 refers to the words of our Lord who said, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" The implication is that a witness who can testify concerning heavenly matters is certainly qualified to testify concerning earthly matters. The point is that a heavenly witness is superior. Later, John writes at John 3:31-36:

"He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the **words of God**: for God giveth not the **Spirit** by measure unto him. The **Father** loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. **He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life**: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John 3:31-36)

To begin with, this Johannine passage makes a distinction between a heavenly witness and an earthly witness. A heavenly witness is shown to be far superior to any earthly witness. Second, the passage refers to the Father, the words of God* and the Spirit (*though $\rho\eta\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$ του θεου is written here instead of $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$, the two are undeniably related). Third, the matter of verse 36, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life", is precisely the same matter to which the witnesses in 1 John 5:7-8 attest. Compare the similar theological truths stated in John 3:31-36 and 1 John 5:7-12 with the Comma:

Similarities:

- Heaven
- Earth
- Father
- Word
- Holy Spirit

text: Witness (μαρτυρία)

text: "Life is in the Son"

1 John 5:6-12	John 3:31-36
<p>1Jn 5:7 For there are three that bear record (<u>μαρτυροουντες</u>) in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.</p>	<p>Joh 3:31 He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all.</p> <p>Joh 3:32 And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth (<u>μαρτυρει</u>); and no man receiveth his testimony (<u>μαρτυριαν</u>).</p> <p>Joh 3:33 He that hath received his testimony (<u>μαρτυριαν</u>) hath set to his seal that God is true.</p> <p>Joh 3:34 For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.</p> <p>Joh 3:35 The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.</p>
<p>1Jn 5:8 And there are three that bear witness (<u>μαρτυροουντες</u>) in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.</p> <p>1Jn 5:9 If we receive the witness (<u>μαρτυριαν</u>) of men, the witness (<u>μαρτυρια</u>) of God is greater: for this is the witness (<u>μαρτυρια</u>) of God which he hath testified of his Son.</p>	<p>(John 3:31 has already made a comparison between heavenly and earthly witnesses. However, the three specific earthly witnesses could not have been mentioned at John 3 because the witness of "the blood" and the Holy Spirit (John 15:26) had not been introduced yet.)</p>
<p>1Jn 5:10 <i>He that believeth on the Son</i> of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.</p> <p>1Jn 5:11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.</p> <p>1Jn 5:12 <i>He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.</i></p>	<p>Joh 3:36 <i>He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life;</i> but the wrath of God abideth on him.</p>

Both John 3:31-36 and 1 John 5:7-12 refer to the same matter, which is that the life is in the Son. Hence consistency demands that the same arguments being made in

John 3:31-36 should be made also in 1 John 5:7-11. Since John 3:31-36 explicitly declares the superiority of heavenly witnesses over earthly witnesses and even mentions the three heavenly witnesses,

1 John 5:7-11 would lack theological depth and consistency if the Comma were not included. If the Comma were included, 1 John 5:7-11 would be a most accurate and concise summary of the theology of John 3:31-36.

Our Lord's baptism in the Gospel of John relates to 1 John 5:6-9

The phrase "witness of men" in 1 John 5:9 has been interpreted in many ways. However, this "witness of men" might be a specific reference to John the Baptist's testimony recorded in the Apostle John's account of our Lord's baptism.

John writes at 1:32-34:

"And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God." (John 1:32-34)

While Matthew, Mark and Luke also tell their versions of our Lord's baptism, only John refers to John the Baptist's "record" (or witness) that "this is the Son of God". John the Baptist bears witness and, more importantly, Father God in heaven, with the Spirit descending from above, also bears witness that Jesus is the Son of God. This may be what is meant by "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son" (1 John 5:9). This interpretation makes perfect sense in light of John 1:32-34. However, given that the heavenly witnesses are presented at John 1:32-34, the context of 1 John 5:9 makes more sense with the reference to the heavenly witnesses in the Comma.

Johannine parallelism

The repetitive contrastive parallelism of 1 John 5:7-8 is a mark of Johannine authorship. Compare the Comma with the other examples of contrastive parallelisms in the same Epistle:

- 1 John 5:7-8: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that

bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."

- 1 John 1:8-10: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."
- 1 John 12:13-14: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one."
- 1 John 4:2b-3a: "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God:"
- 1 John 5:12: "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

Why Trinitarians did not cite the Comma

A caveat with respect to argument from silence

While some Greek and Latin fathers cited the Comma, there are others who did not. Critics appeal to this argument from silence to argue against the early existence of the Comma. However, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. For example, Eusebius did not cite the Trinitarian baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 ("...in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost") in many of his writings:

- "What king or prince in any age of the world, what philosopher, legislator, or prophet, in civilized or barbarous lands, has attained so great a height of excellence, I say not after death, but while living still, and full of mighty power, as to fill the ears and tongues of all mankind with the praises of his name? Surely none save our only Saviour has done this, when, after his victory over death, he spoke the word to his followers, and fulfilled it by the

event, saying to them, **Go, and make disciples of all nations in my name.**"
(*Oration in Praise of Emperor Constantine*, 16:8)

- "But the rest of the apostles, who had been incessantly plotted against with a view to their destruction, and had been driven out of the land of Judea, went unto all nations to preach the Gospel, relying upon the power of Christ, who had said to them, **Go and make disciples of all the nations in my name.**"
(*Church History*, Book III, 5:2)

Given that all three earliest manuscripts of Matthew (Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Alexandrinus) contain the Trinitarian formula, Eusebius' silence on the Trinitarian formula does not prove its absence in the 4th century. There may be several reasons for Eusebius' silence, such as that his focus in these writings did not require the full quotation, that he preferred to paraphrase, or that his manuscripts did not have the Trinitarian formula. Likewise, the various Church fathers' silence on the Comma could have the following reasons:

1. The Comma was counterproductive in the context.
2. The Comma was not helpful in the context.
3. The Comma was not relevant in the context.
4. Silence of the Comma only proves the existence of doubt, not absence.

1) The Comma was counterproductive in the context

The earliest anti-Trinitarian heretics denied not the unity of the Trinity, but the distinctness of the persons of the Trinity. Sabellianism in the East and Patripassianism in the West denied the distinction between the Father and the Son. 3rd century fathers would not have quoted the Comma given that it could have bolstered the Sabellian argument for the oneness of the Father, Word, and Holy Ghost.

Even during the Arian controversies of the 4th century, Trinitarians may have supposed the Comma would give ammunition to those who claimed the Godhead is "one" only in terms of agreement, not essence. Given that 1 John 5:8 demonstrates the oneness of the Spirit, water and the blood only in terms of agreement, not essence, drawing attention to the Comma and its context could have undermined the Trinitarian view of the Godhead.

2) The Comma was not helpful in the context

In some cases, the Comma might not have been counterproductive but nonetheless unhelpful. For one thing, the context of the Comma has been unclear to many expositors. The identity of the water and blood in 1 John 5:6-8 has been interpreted as follows by different commentators:

- 1) Jesus' baptism and death. (Tertullian)
- 2) Jesus' incarnation. (Johann J. Wettstein)
- 3) Water and blood which poured out from Jesus' side at his crucifixion. (Augustine)
- 4) The ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper. (Matthew Henry)
- 5) Faith and the public acknowledgment of it. (Clement of Alexandria)

As with the case even today, the early Church did not have a common interpretation of the context surrounding the Comma. Without having a common understanding of the context, the Comma is hardly a useful proof text.

The greatest threat to Trinitarian orthodoxy was the heresy of Arianism. Yet the Comma is not an effective proof text against this heresy. The Comma, naming the Word as the second person of the Trinity, does not prove the consubstantial unity of the Father and the incarnate Son, which was the controversy brought by Arianism. The Comma speaks only of the unity of the Father and the Word, which was never ambiguous given the "and the Word was God" declaration in John 1:1.

Moreover, Athanasius does not quote even the Trinitarian formula at Matthew 28:19 in any of his writings other than in *De Synodis*. Matthew 28:19 has the second clearest statement on the triadic structure of the Trinity ("...in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"). Yet Athanasius argued against Arianism in *The Deposition of Arius*, *Apologia Contra Arianos* and the *Four Discourses Against the Arians* all without referring to Matthew 28:19. Athanasius could have cared less about the triadic structure of the Trinity because he argued for the consubstantial unity of the Father and the Son. The Comma became more useful in the later centuries to develop the structure of the Trinity as being a triad, but the Comma, as with Matthew 28:19, was not essential as far as Athanasius was concerned in the 4th century.

3) The Comma was not relevant in the context

The Comma was irrelevant to the topics of many of the fathers. Novatian, Hilary of Poitiers and Ambrose are counted as witnesses against the Comma but they had not need to cite the Comma.

Novatian (255 AD) in *On the Trinity* does not quote the Comma for two reasons. First, Novatian's argument on the Trinity focuses on Christ's divinity in his incarnate state (chapters 13-16, 21-25) as well as his theophanic state (chapters 17-19). The Johannine Comma says nothing about the incarnation or the manifestation of the Deity. Second, he argues against the

Sabellians (chapters 26-28). The Comma, interpreted a certain way, could actually bolster the Sabellian view of the oneness of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. It is significant that Novatian does not even quote Matthew 28:19, the second clearest statement on the triadic structure of the Trinity ("...in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"). If Novatian did not need to cite Matthew 28:19, he probably did not need to cite the Comma either.

Hilary of Poitiers (360 AD) in *On the Trinity* quotes John 10:30 heavily but not the Comma because his task to the Arians is to expound that the Son is God, not to argue for the Holy Spirit. He says, "Concerning the Holy Spirit I ought not to be silent, and yet I have no need to speak" (Book II). John 10:30 would have been the only proof text that Hilary needed if he were trying to prove that Jesus is God, and did not want to confuse the argument by introducing the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the Comma only proves the unity of testimony between the Father and the Word, not the unity in substance of the Father and the Son.

Ambrose (380 AD) had no reason to refer to the Comma in his reference to 1 John 5:8 because he was explaining baptism, not the Trinity. Ambrose did not even give direct quotations of 5:8 in any of his writings. He writes in *On the Holy Spirit* (Book I, 6:77): "Et ideo hi tres testes unum sunt, sicut Ioannes dixit: Aqua, sanguis, et Spiritus. Unum in mysterio, non in natura." He writes in *On the Mysteries* (4:20): "Ideoque legisti quod tres testes in baptisate unum sunt, aqua, sanguis, et Spiritus; quia si in unum horum detrahas, non stat baptismatis sacramentum." So Ambrose's references to 1 John 5:8 do not reveal what Ambrose's Bible text actually said.

4) Silence of the Comma only proves the existence of doubt, not absence

A Church father's silence on the Comma does not prove that the Comma did not exist at the time. Even today, many prominent Trinitarian apologists would not quote the Comma even though it is present in perhaps half of the printed English Bible translations in existence (with the KJV, NKJV and the Amplified Bible having the Comma). Practically all English translations have the Comma if we include the margins (e.g. NIV, NASB, though not the ESV). Thus silence on the Comma by a preacher today is not due to its absence but rather motivated by a majority consensus of its spuriousness. Many Christians today consider the Comma as an embarrassing case of fabricating a proof-text for the Trinity. Prominent atheists and Muslims have tried to cast doubt on the Bible by referencing the Comma. For many Christians today, the Comma is something best forgotten and only the uneducated are considered to rely on it for doctrine. Early Church fathers may have shared this same sentiment. The manuscript evidence demonstrates that the text of 1 John 5 had been tampered with at an early stage. Thus it is likely that early Church fathers lacked confidence in the integrity of the text of 1 John 5. Even if a good number of manuscripts with the Comma came down through the ages, it may have appeared even back then to be a pious addition

to prove the Trinity. The general lack of confidence in its authenticity would have dissuaded most fathers from using it for establishing doctrine.

Demonstrable mechanisms for omission

Now that it has been established that the Comma does have early witnesses, albeit in a minority situation, we turn to the issue of *why* and *how* the Comma came to be omitted among the majority of manuscripts at such an early stage. Bruce M. Metzger said that if the Johannine Comma were original, there is no good reason to account for its omission, either accidentally or intentionally, by copyists of hundreds of Greek manuscripts and by translators of ancient versions (Bruce M. Metzger. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. Second Edition. 1994, p. 647-649.). In response to Metzger's claim, there are indeed a number of good reasons for the omission of the Comma.

Evidence of errors by parablepses

The Comma could have been omitted by way of parablepsis due to the homoeoteleuton in the passage. "Homoeoteleuton" refer to consecutive lines with similar endings. Homoeoteleuton can cause an error called haplography, where only one line is written instead of both. This error is caused by parablepsis, a situation in which a careless scribe jumps from the ending of the first line to the similar ending of the second line. It is not mere speculation to theorize that the Comma was removed by parablepsis. The possibility of this theory is substantiated by the fact that even the so-called "most reliable manuscripts" omit significant portions of text by parablepses.

1 John 2:23b

As discussed previously, 1 John 2:23b was omitted in the early stage of transmission. It can be shown that 1 John 2:23b was omitted because of a homoeoteleuton - the repetition of the same endings.

Textus Receptus (Beza 1598), Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, etc. read:

"πας ο αρνουμενος τον υιον ουδε τον πατερα εχει ο ομολογων τον υιον και τον πατερα εχει"

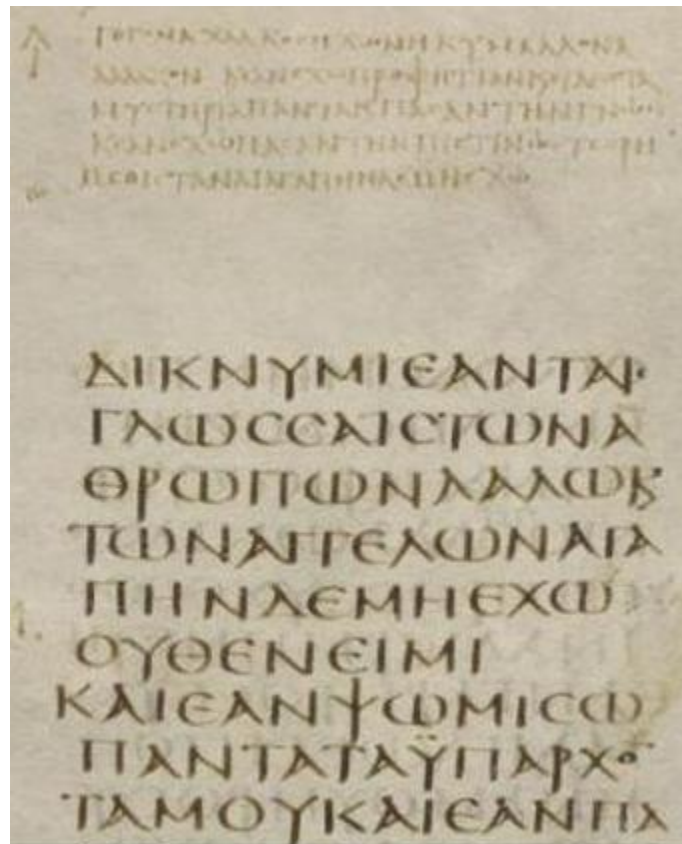
The Byzantine Majority Text reads:

"πας ο αρνουμενος τον υιον ουδε τον πατερα εχει" (Byzantine Majority Text)

The omission arose when a scribe who finished copying the first "τον πατερα εχει" jumped to the end of the second "τον πατερα εχει" and resumed copying from there, thereby omitting everything in between.

1 Corinthians 13:1-2

Codex Sinaiticus, the earliest witness against the Comma, omits a total of 32 Greek words at 1 Corinthians 13:1-2 due to a homoeoteleuton.



1 Corinthians 13:1-2 in Codex Sinaiticus

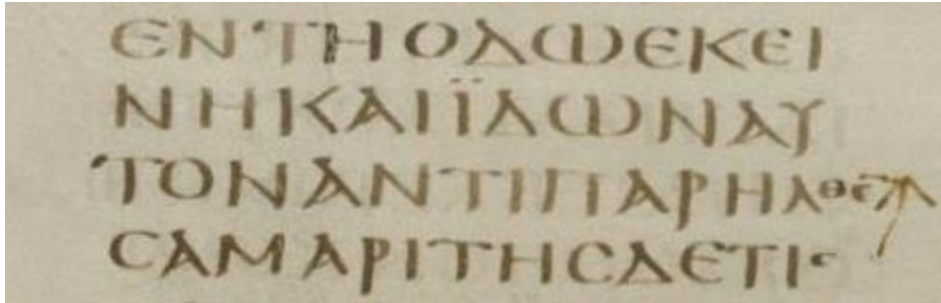
(Source: The Codex Sinaiticus Project Website: <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>)

The text should read, "εαν ταις γλωσσαις των ανθρωπων λαλω και των αγγελων αγαπην δε μη εχω γεγονα χαλκος ηχων η κυμβαλον αλαλιζον και εαν εχω προφητειαν και ειδω τα μυστηρια παντα και πασαν την γνωσιν και εαν εχω πασαν την πιστιν ωστε ορη μεθιστανειν αγαπην δε μη εχω ουδεν ειμι " but the scribe of Sinaiticus omitted the underlined words. When the scribe finished copying the first "αγαπην δε μη εχω", his eyes jumped to the second "αγαπην δε μη εχω" and resumed copying from there. A later scribe

inserted the omitted words in the top margin.

Luke 10:32

Codex Sinaiticus exhibits this same type of error again at Luke 10:32.



Luke 10:32 in Codex Sinaiticus

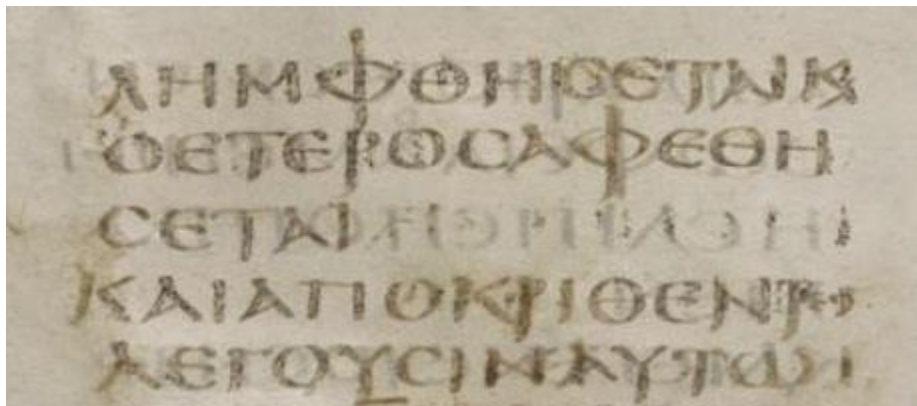
(Source: The Codex Sinaiticus Project Website: <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>)

Here, the scribe omitted all of verse 32 by skipping the words in between the "αντιπαρηλθεν" at the end of verse 31 and the "αντιπαρηλθεν" at the end of verse 32:

"κατα συγκυριαν δε ιερευς τις κατεβαινεν εν τη οδω εκεινη και ιδων αυτον αντιπαρηλθεν ομοιως δε και λευιτης γενομενος κατα τον τοπον ελθων και ιδων αντιπαρηλθεν σαμαρειτης δε τις οδευων ηλθεν κατ αυτον και ιδων αυτον εσπλαγχνισθη" (Luke 10:31-33)

Luke 17:35

The scribe of Codex Sinaiticus made the same mistake at Luke 17:35 and omitted the entire verse:



Luke 17:35 in Codex Sinaiticus

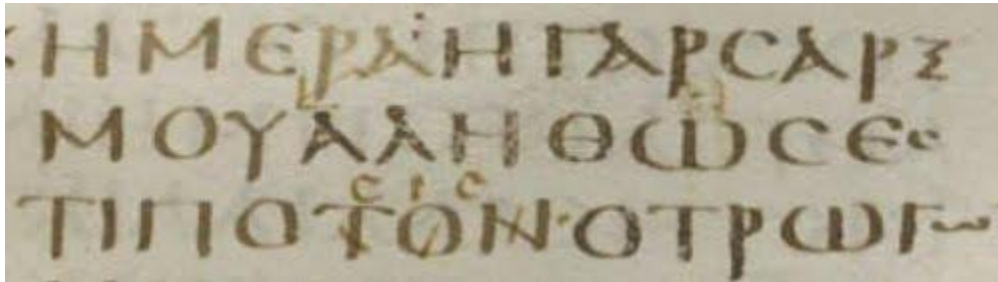
(Source: The Codex Sinaiticus Project Website: <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>)

Here the following underlined words were omitted because "αφεθησεται" appears twice:

"λεγω υμιν ταυτη τη νυκτι εσονται δυο επι κλινης μιας ο εις παραληφθησεται και ο ετερος αφεθησεται εσονται δυο αληθουσαι επι το αυτο η μια παραληφθησεται η δε ετερα αφεθησεται" (Luke 17:34-35)

John 6:55

The scribe of Codex Sinaiticus does it again at John 6:55:



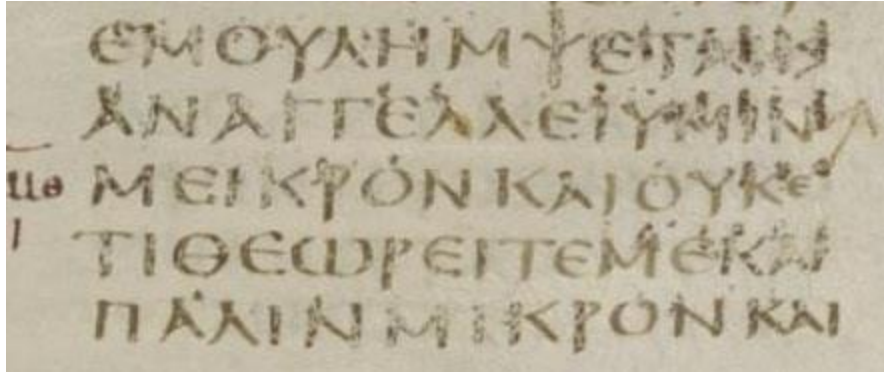
John 6:55 in Codex Sinaiticus

(Source: The Codex Sinaiticus Project Website: <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>)

This passage ought to say, "η γαρ σαρξ μου αληθως εστιν βρωσις και το αιμα μου αληθως εστιν ποσις (For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed)." However, Sinaiticus reads, "η γαρ σαρξ μου αληθως εκ τι ποσις" (For my flesh is drink indeed)." This nonsensical reading arose when the scribe skipped everything in between the first "αληθως" and the second "αληθως".

John 16:15

The scribe of Codex Sinaiticus does it yet again at John 16:15:



John 16:15 in Codex Sinaiticus

(Source: The Codex Sinaiticus Project Website: <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>)

The scribe skipped the following underlined words of John 16:15 due to the homoeoteleuton:

"εκεινος εμε δοξασει οτι εκ του εμου ληψεται και αναγγελει υμιν παντα οσα εχει ο πατηρ εμα εστιν δια τουτο ειπον οτι εκ του εμου ληψεται και αναγγελει υμιν μικρον και ου θεωρειτε με και παλιν μικρον και οψεσθε με οτι εγω υπαγω προς τον πατερα" (John 16:14-16)

We have seen that Codex Sinaiticus omits at least 4 entire verses due to a homoeoteleuton. This should be enough to cause us to rethink the idea that the earliest manuscripts = the most reliable manuscripts.

Luke 14:27

Luke 14:27 in some manuscripts is another example of an omission due to a homoeoteleuton. Verses 26 and 27 share the same endings:

- Luke 14:26 "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."
- Luke 14:27 "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."

Several manuscripts, M (9th century), R (6th century), Γ (10th century) and others (al mu) omit the entire verse 27. A scribe accidentally omitted verse 27 because when he finished copying "ου δυναται μου μαθητης ειναι" in verse 26 his eyes

jumped to the same phrase in verse 27. See the critical apparatus of Tischendorf's 8th Edition for the manuscripts with this omission:

27. Versum om m*εΓ al ma | οστις sine copula cum κ*L cop (accedit B* : quod enim habet οστις ουν, vitiose pro οστις ου scriptum est, etsi B^s ου ad ουν addidit. Item accedit aeth, qui quod praecedit, ου ουν. ε. μ. μαθ., cum οστις conjg; antea „odio habeat“ etc.) Contra nil probat Ir ex Valentt¹⁶: εν τω ειπειν· οσ ου βασταζει etc, nec Or^{int}¹², ⁴⁷⁷ „dicit: Qui non tollit“ etc ... ζ Ln Ti και οστις (D Ir¹⁶ οσ) cum κ*Α(D)ΧΔΛΗ unc⁹ al fere omn a b c f ff²· l q vg (e et sz) syr^{cu} et utr ... 157. arm οστ. γαρ | βασταζει: F al^{2scr} -ασει | ειαιτου c. ABL²M²Δ al¹⁰ ... ζ αυτου c. κΔΛΗ unc⁸ al pler Bas^{bapt}⁶²⁸ : : ut Mt | ερχεται: κη al⁷ Bas^{bapt} ακολουθει (item Ir¹⁷ sed ακολ. μοι pro ερχ. οπ. μ.) :: ex Mt | εν. μου μαθ. cum κΒΕΓΦΗΛΣΥΧΔΛ al²⁰ fere b e f q am² for go Bas^{bapt} ... D (a Ir^{int}¹⁷) tol μου μαθ. (a Ir^{int} disc. meus) ειναι ... ζ Ln μου εν. μαθ. cum ΑΚΜ³ΥΗ al plu c ff²· vg (et. am^{*}). Libere Ir¹⁷ ex Valentt μαθητ. εμοσ ου δυνατ. γενεσθ. Cf et. (quae magis a Mt pendent) Or^{3,625} οσ αν μη αρη τον σταυρον αυτου και ακολουθηση οπισω μου, ουκ εστι μου αξιος ειναι μαθητησ.

1 John 5:13

1 John 5:13 was discussed earlier above. In the Byzantine text, two clauses have the phrase, "εις το ονομα του υιου του θεου". Although it is more difficult to explain how the error arose here than in the other examples with homoeoteleutons, the error most likely did arise due to the homoeoteleuton. An Alexandrian text proponent may not be convinced of an error here, but a Byzantine text proponent must believe that an omission occurred in the Alexandrian copies. So this example in 1 John 5:13 is relevant in persuading at least a Byzantine text proponent that a line in 1 John chapter 5 that has a repetition of similar words was omitted, whether intentionally or accidentally.

Homoeoteleuton at 1 John 5:6-8

As in the other passages where words were carelessly omitted, the text of 1 John 6 to 8 also contains many repetitions of the same words. The corruptions of 1 John 5:6 seen in Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus involve the word "πνευμα." It is not surprising that scribes would accidentally add this word because it appears 4 times in just 3 verses from 5:6 to 5:8 (3 times in just 2 verses even if we omit the Comma). Scribes would essentially be "juggling" many

appearances of the word in a span of just a few lines. The frequency of the appearance of "πνευμα" from 5:6 to 5:7 could confuse a careless scribe.

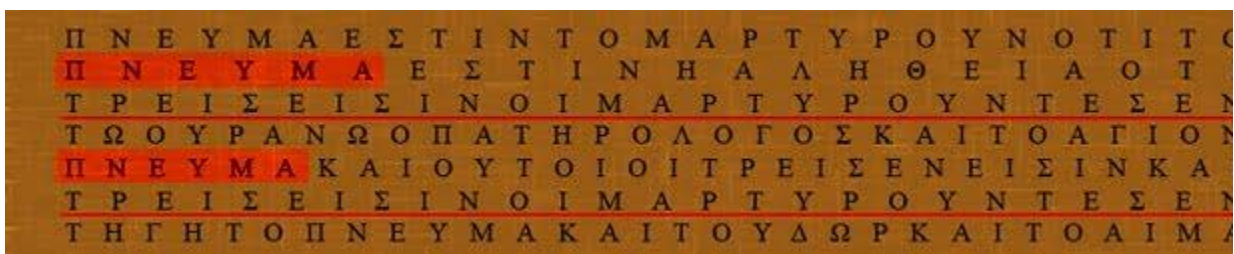
Due to the many repetitions of similar words in 1 John 5:6-8, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that a scribe omitted the Comma by accident. If the Comma appeared originally, the text could have been laid out as follows:



The portion above is from the end of 1 John 5:6 to the middle of 1 John 5:8. It corresponds to the portion in the KJV which reads:

"...Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood:"

The text is arranged in a manner that is typically seen in papyri. Even if the words on an actual papyrus were not arranged exactly in the same positions on the papyrus as in this hypothetical arrangement, the relative positions of the words would still be similar. Consider how the phrase "τρεῖς ἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν" appears twice identically, separated by two lines, and how the word "πνευμα" is located above that phrase in both instances at the left-hand side of the papyrus (the phrase is underlined):



Due to the identical appearance of the phrase in 5:7 and 5:8, the eyes of a scribe who is in the midst of copying a word in 5:7 could jump to the corresponding word in 5:8. Moreover, the word directly above the left-most portion of the phrase in 5:8

is "πνευμα," which is also the word directly above the left-most portion of the phrase back in 5:7. This could cause great confusion for a careless scribe. The text of a scribe who skipped the two lines in between would read:



This text with the omission says, "Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood:" The phrase "in earth" would remain in the new copy, but it could easily drop during further transmission. Moreover, support for "in earth" is stronger than the Comma itself. The Anchor Bible, which by no means is a friend of the Comma, says concerning the support for "in earth":

"However, in the course of Latin textual transmission, independently of the Comma, variants appeared that show that the passage was the subject of reflection and "improvement" by scribes.... For instance, Facundus of Hermiane (ca. 550) reads I John as saying, "There are three who give testimony on *earth*" (Pro Defensione Trium Capitulorum ad Isutinianum 1.3.9; CC 90A, 12; also inferior MSS. of Bede). If that addition was an older tradition, it may have facilitated the creation of the Comma with its corresponding witnesses in heaven" (*The Anchor Bible: The Epistles of John* at 778).

The author of the *Anchor Bible* interprets the support for "on earth" as a corruption which caused the creation of the Comma. However, it could also be interpreted as the vestige of a copyist error who omitted the mention of the heavenly witnesses but managed to keep the words "on earth." In fact, this interpretation is consistent with the hypothesis of the corruption of 1 John 5:7 discussed above. The suspicion that the Comma was accidentally omitted due to a homoeoteleuton is not far-fetched seeing that there are examples of such errors elsewhere in the manuscripts. The passage in 1 John 5:6-7 clearly bears features that would attract this type of copyist error.

Arian influence

If the Comma was not accidentally removed, it could have been removed intentionally by heretics. Yale professor of ecclesiastical history, Jaroslav Pelikan,

notes that theologians of the past suspected that Arians expunged the Comma:

"Although the weight of the textual evidence against it was seemingly overwhelming, the proof it supplied for the Trinity made an attack on its authenticity seem to be an attack on the dogma. Therefore the Reformed theologian Johann Heinrich Heidegger, citing Jerome, and the Lutheran theologians Johann Gerhard and Johann Andreas Quenstedt argued that the real corruption of the Greek text had been its "erasure by the fraud of the Arians," not its addition by orthodox fathers. In a lengthy disputation on the question, Gerhard marshaled the evidence of manuscripts and versions in an effort to show this, and in his systematic theology he reaffirmed its authenticity." (Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: Reformation of Church Dogma (1300-1700)* at 346)

The Orthodox remnant viewed the notorious Arians with much suspicion. Athanasius had complained of the Arians' "calumnies, imprisonments, murders, wounds, conspiracies by means of false letters" (*Apologia Contra Arianos* at 49). The hypothesis that Arians expunged the Comma is valid because it is falsifiable: the hypothesis could be proven false if the Comma does not exist even in places where Arianism did not exert early influence. However, the evidence supports the hypothesis. The Comma exists in places where Arianism was not established early, such as Spain and North Africa. Whereas Constantinople and Alexandria were infected with Arianism by the 4th century, Spain and North Africa were relatively less infected until the 5th century. Geographically, Spain and North Africa were the farthest places from the major centers of Arianism. Moreover, whereas primarily Greek and Latin speakers spread Arianism in the rest of Christendom, Spain was introduced to Arianism through Visigoths and North Africa was introduced to Arianism through Vandals. These were both Germanic tribes who used the Gothic Bible of Ulfilas. Thus Arians in Spain and North Africa had less influence on the Latin scriptures. This allowed the Comma to remain in Latin manuscripts of Spain and North Africa.

The earliest uses of the Comma are from the far West (Cyprian, Priscillian, Phoebadius, Vigilius, Victor, Fulgentius). The earliest manuscripts with the Comma are from Spain. This localization of manuscripts containing the Comma has led scholars to believe that the Comma was just an anomalous reading in an obscure part of Christendom. However, this "obscure part of Christendom" is where Arianism was not prevalent in the earlier centuries. A single generation of prolific Arian copyist activity in the early 4th century would have created a majority of copies of 1 John 5 without the Comma. Just as one Catholic man,

Erasmus, popularized the inclusion of the Comma in the Greek texts of Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestants from the 16th century onward, a few scholarly Arians could have popularized the omission of the Comma in the Greek texts of both Arians and Trinitarians from the 4th century onward. The argument against the Comma, that it was included by the Latin Church because of tradition, goes both ways. If Protestants could accept the reading of a Catholic for 400 years, it is certainly within the realm of possibility for the Orthodox Greeks to accept the reading of Arians for many centuries (until the reinstatement of the Comma in the *1904 Patriarchal Text*).

Evidence of Gnostic versions of three witnesses

The Gnostic "Godhead"

Even before the spread of Arianism, Gnosticism had infected the early Church. Most scholars believe that John in his Epistles attempted to expose and refute the early Gnostic proclivities in the Church. The First Epistle would have attracted the relentless hostility of Gnostics. Valentinian Gnostics did not believe in the simple Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. They identified the God of the Old Testament as the Demiurge. They gave primacy to a feminine emanation of God who was called Sophia (Divine Wisdom). The Logos (or "Word" - one of the three witnesses in the Comma) was believed to be just one of the many Aeons (emanations of God). Surely the Comma would have been incompatible with this complicated Valentinian concept of the divine hierarchy.

The "Trinity" and "there are three" in the Secret Book of John

In fact, there is a Gnostic text called the *Secret Book of John*, written before 180 AD, which subverts the orthodox Trinity. It is a fraudulent work that was not actually written by the Apostle John. In this work, the Gnostic John describes the Trinity as a trinity of Father, Mother and Son:

"There was not a plurality before me, but there was a likeness with multiple forms in the light, and the likenesses appeared through each other, and the likeness had three forms. He said to me, "John, John, why do you doubt, or why are you afraid? You are not unfamiliar with this image, are you? - that is, do not be timid! - I am the one who is with you (pl.) always. I am the Father, I am the Mother, I am the Son. I am the undefiled and incorruptible one." (Translated by Frederik Wisse for the Nag Hammadi Library)

Further into the work, the Gnostic John uses the Comma phrase, "And there are three" a total of four times to describe the number of Gnostic aeons:

"For from the light, which is the Christ, and the indestructibility, through the gift of the Spirit the four lights (appeared) from the divine Autogenes. He expected that they might attend him. And the three (are) will, thought, and life. And the four powers (are) understanding, grace, perception, and prudence. And grace belongs to the light-aeon Armozel, which is the first angel. And there are three other aeons with this aeon: grace, truth, and form. And the second light (is) Oriel, who has been placed over the second aeon. And there are three other aeons with him: conception, perception, and memory. And the third light is Daveithai, who has been placed over the third aeon. And there are three other aeons with him: understanding, love, and idea. And the fourth aeon was placed over the fourth light Eleleth. And there are three other aeons with him: perfection, peace, and wisdom. These are the four lights which attend the divine Autogenes, (and) these are the twelve aeons which attend the son of the mighty one, the Autogenes, the Christ, through the will and the gift of the invisible Spirit. And the twelve aeons belong to the son of the Autogenes. And all things were established by the will of the holy Spirit through the Autogenes." (Translated by Frederik Wisse for the Nag Hammadi Library)

There are just too many clues here to ignore the possibility of a Gnostic corruption of the Johannine Comma:

- This Gnostic text uses the Comma phrase, "And there are three" four times.
- This Gnostic text subverts the orthodox Trinity with the Gnostic trinity of the "Father, Mother and Son".
- This Gnostic text is ascribed to "John", though falsely.

There is another ancient Gnostic work titled [*Allogenes*](#) which says "the three are one" with respect to the trinity of the Gnostic saviors, "Vitality, Mentality and That-Which-Is":

"And he was becoming salvation for every one by being a point of departure for those who truly exist, for through him his knowledge endured, since he is the one who knows what he is. But they brought forth nothing beyond themselves, neither power nor rank nor glory nor aeon, for they are all eternal. He is Vitality and Mentality and That-Which-Is. For then That-Which-Is constantly possesses its

Vitality and Mentality, and Life has Vitality possesses non-Being and Mentality. Mentality possesses Life and That-Which-Is. And the three are one, although individually they are three." (Translated by John D. Turner and Orval S. Wintermute)

If Gnostics wrote such works (and surely they did), it is utterly inconceivable that they would have left the Johannine Comma untouched and unchallenged. Moreover, the *Secret Book of John* is a Gnostic propaganda text to redefine John's actual teachings. Gnostics often mimicked the style of the real Apostles in order to supplant their teachings. And by producing a work which redefines the members of the Trinity, uses the phrase "And there are three", and names the author of the work as "John", this *Secret Book of John* ironically proves the existence of the Johannine Comma, which alone is a Trinitarian verse in which John wrote "And there are three".

The corruption of manuscripts in Alexandria

The earliest witness of 1 John 5 is the Alexandrian Codex Sinaiticus from 350 AD. The second and third earliest witnesses are also Alexandrian and written later than 350 AD. Long before these manuscripts were written, the heresy of Gnosticism became widespread from Alexandria to Rome through the ministry of Valentinus. By 150 AD, Valentinianism was extremely popular in Alexandria. The fact that these heretics published many spurious Gospels is well documented. They most likely also corrupted the true Scriptures. With respect to the state of corruption of the manuscripts in Alexandria, Origen of Alexandria in the 3rd century said:

"...the differences among the manuscripts [of the Gospels] have become great, either through the negligence of some copyists or through the perverse audacity of others; they either neglect to check over what they have transcribed, or, in the process of checking, they lengthen or shorten, as they please."

(Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd ed. (1991), pp. 151-152).

It is not far-fetched to conclude that the majority of these omissions were made by the heretical Gnostics. Although we can only speculate as to which verses the Gnostics omitted, it is reasonable to believe that the Comma was one of them. There was also an early heretical sect which denied the "Logos" (the Word). Epiphanius termed this sect the "[Alogi](#)" (Anti-Logos). The "Word" mentioned in the Comma is certainly at odds with any theology that is against the Logos.

These heretics had the motive to omit the Comma. If a large and influential sect such as the Valentinians were responsible for omitting the Comma, and if other smaller sects such as the Alogi were complicit, the Comma would have had a very rough history by 350 AD. Origen in the 3rd century would have used the standard Gnostic-influenced text-type of Alexandria. Non-Gnostic Christians in the rest of the Greek speaking world would have kept the Comma in their copies, but many of these non-Gnostics eventually became Arians in the following centuries. Assault one after another would have left the Comma with a confusing textual history by the time of Athanasius and the Orthodox Fathers. As shown earlier on this page, 1 John 6-8 indeed bears evidence of textual corruption by 350 AD. It is absolutely reasonable to suppose that 1 John 5:6-8 suffered textual corruption prior to 350 AD under the hands of heretics than to suppose that the Comma was fabricated by Orthodox Trinitarians.

Evidence of the early subversion of John's doctrines

Even before Gnosticism and Arianism, there was an arch enemy of John named Diotrephes who attempted to subvert John's doctrines. He is mentioned by name in John's Third Epistle at verses 9 to 10:

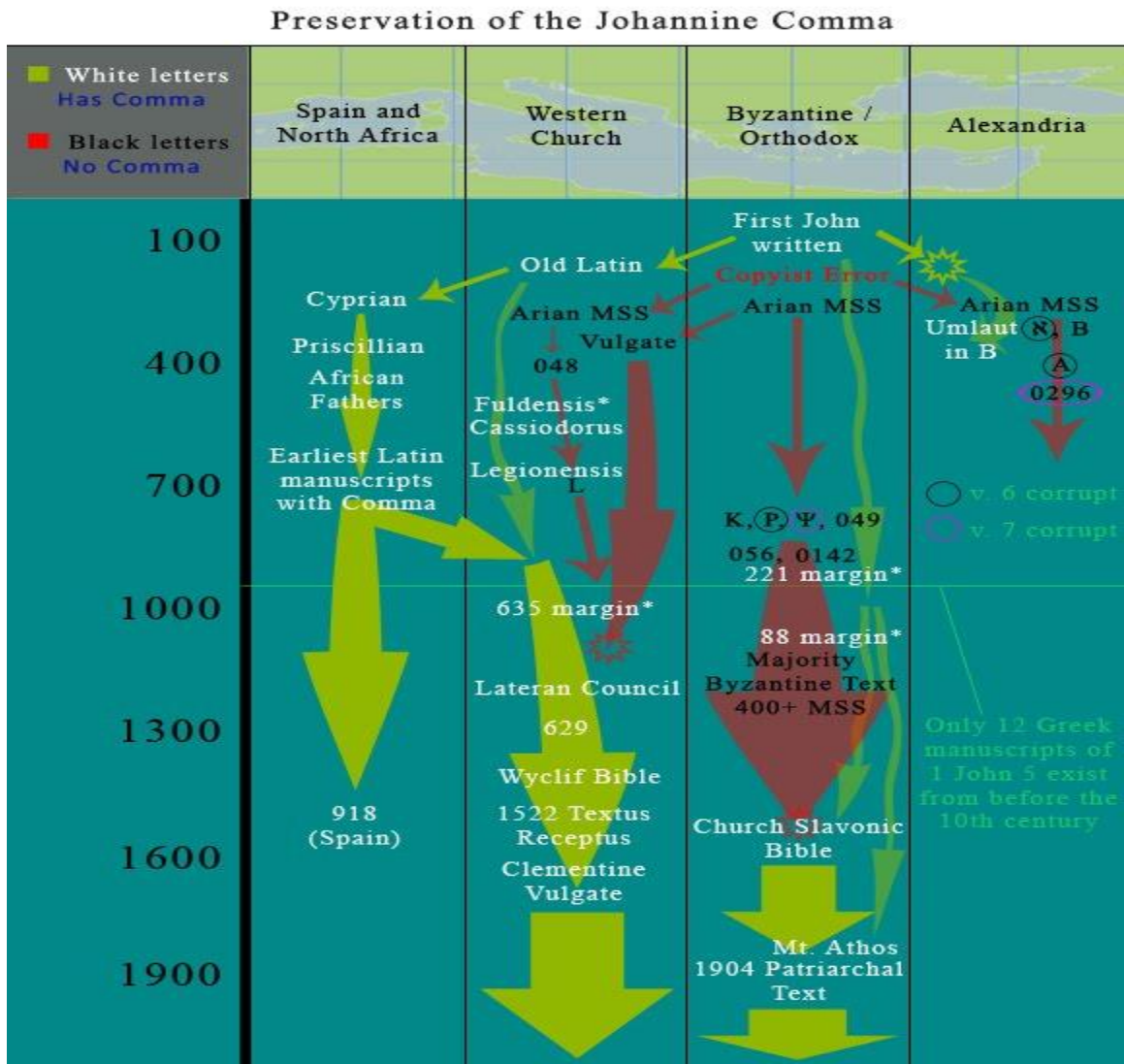
"I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church."

Nowhere else in the Bible do we read of a heretic preventing a community of believers from receiving the actual epistles of an Apostle. Diotrephes could have modified the contents of John's epistles to suit his own theology (whatever they were) and his congregation would not have known. He apparently had enough power and influence to do so since even John could not get to the believers under Diotrephes' control. Diotrephes appears to be a prime candidate for corrupting John's epistles.

If Diotrephes expunged the Comma before 100 AD, there would have been ample time for the corrupted reading to receive wide circulation by the rise of Sabellianism in 220 AD. Trinitarians who were aware of both readings of 1 John 5:7-8 by 220 AD may have been inclined to believe the Comma to be a Sabellian forgery. These Trinitarians may have preferred the copies without the Comma, and thereafter the Comma-free copies may have gained irreversible ascendancy. Of course, Diotrephes' deletion of the Comma is mere speculation. And with the clear evidence of Arian and Gnostic hostility towards John's Trinitarian statements, we need not rely on the hypothesis that Diotrephes expunged the Comma. However, the fact that John had such an influential rival validates the hypothesis that John's epistles may have been corrupted even during John's lifetime.

Continuous preservation

The Johannine Comma is not a novel invention of late medieval Catholicism. There is an unbroken lineage of the preservation of the Comma from early times. The Comma was preserved in the Western Latin stream of transmission. There is nothing to be apologetic about this since the majority of Christians from the 4th century to the 16th century spoke and understood Latin. Hence the Comma was available to the majority of Christians throughout history. Furthermore, the Comma was also preserved by the Greek Church albeit as a minority reading in the margins, and reinstated in the text of the Epistle by the Greek Orthodox Church in modern times. The following chart maps the unbroken preservation of the Comma:



The Comma has been subject to hostility throughout history, especially in the Greek Church in early times. But the Comma has survived and is now represented in the official ecclesiastical texts of the three major Churches. The Protestant Church has the Comma in the Textus Receptus. The Roman Catholic Church has the Comma in the Clementine Vulgate. The Eastern Orthodox Church has the Comma in the *1904 Patriarchal Text*.

Despite its long absence in the Greek stream of transmission, the Comma has made it back into the official Greek New Testament of the Greek Orthodox Church, the *1904 Patriarchal Text*. This ecc

lesiastical text is based on the readings of about sixty Greek lectionaries dating from the ninth to the sixteenth century (John M. Rife, "The Antoniades Greek Testament" *Prolegomena to the Study of the Lectionary Text*. 57-66.). Early nineteenth century textual critic Johann Griesbach supposed that the Comma in these Lectionaries of the sixteenth century came from the new printed editions of the Greek New Testament which contained the Comma (Griesbach, *Diatribes in Locum I Ioann. 5. 7- 8, V2, 1806, p. 12*). The Comma came back into the Greek stream in this manner as the Greek Orthodox Church deferred to the Western tradition of including the Comma. Thus t

he Comma is thoroughly preserved for us today and can be accepted as authentic Scripture.

COMMAS SAVE LIVES.

"Let's eat Granny."

Oops! I'm pretty sure you mean:

"Let's eat, Granny."

When you're addressing someone ("direct address"),
set the name or title off with a comma.

Granny will be very grateful.

Should the comma be placed after “Today” in Luke 23:43?

The KJV says, “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” The comma is placed before “Today” in the KJV, NASB, ESV, NIV, NLT, ESV, NKJV, etc. Those who hold to the doctrine of soul sleep, or those who cannot reconcile this reading with the fact that Jesus went to Hades, allege that the KJV and a host of other translations erroneously place the comma before “Today.” These critics claim that Jesus said, “I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with me in paradise,” joining “today” with the first clause. But it is futile to challenge this placement of the comma in the KJV based on either the doctrine of soul sleep or the fact that Jesus went to Hades.

Whether the doctrine of soul sleep is true or not for the general population is irrelevant here. The Bible is clear that the soul of Jesus did not sleep. 1 Peter 3:18-19 says that Jesus was “put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.” Thus, the question is not whether Jesus’ soul slept or not. Jesus’ soul did not sleep. The question is WHERE his soul went.

The Apostle Peter says that Jesus’ “soul was not left in hell (Hades)” (Acts 2:31). Thus, Jesus went to Hades, the abode of the dead. This is consistent with 1 Peter 3:18-19. Was Hades paradise? Not quite. But from Jesus’ parable of Lazarus and the rich man, we see that there was a place called “Abraham’s bosom,” which was a place of comfort (Luke 16:22-25) across a “great gulf” from the place of torment (Luke 16:26). This is probably the “paradise,” which Jesus referred to in Luke 23:43. Abraham’s bosom was neither in heaven nor in a place of torment. It was a place of comfort that was visible from the place of torment. Thus, what we can deduce from scripture strongly suggests that Abraham’s bosom was in Hades, just not in the fiery pit of it (which kept the unsaved souls). If we were to map Jesus’ course after death, he seemed to have gone to Abraham’s bosom (i.e. paradise) and also went to the “spirits in prison” to preach to them.

KJV Today

Should the Bible include Acts 8:37: "And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."?

Acts 8:26-39 describes the conversion of an Ethiopian eunuch through Philip's evangelism. The KJV includes Acts 8:37, the Ethiopian eunuch's confession of faith:

"And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

The NKJV, following the Textus Receptus, includes this verse. The NASB includes the verse in brackets. Translations such as the NIV and ESV omit the verse.

External Evidence

Early manuscripts such as P45 (3rd century), P74 (7th century), Sinaiticus (4th century), Vaticanus (4th century), Alexandrinus (5th century), C (5th century), L (8th century), and Ψ (9th century) omit the verse. The earliest extant manuscript to include the verse is E from the 6th century. Thus E is predated by 5 manuscripts that omit the verse. Worthy of note is that all 5 of these are Egyptian manuscripts. However, early Latin fathers such as Irenaeus and Cyprian knew of the verse:

- Irenaeus (180 AD): [Philip declared] that this was Jesus, and that the Scripture was fulfilled in Him; as did also the believing eunuch himself: and, immediately requesting to be baptized, he said, "I believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God." ([*Against Heresies, 3.12.8*](#))
- Cyprian (250 AD): In the Acts of the Apostles: "Lo, here is water; what is there which hinders me from being baptized? Then said Philip, If you believe with all your heart, you may." ([*The Treatises of Cyprian, Treatise 12, Book 3.43*](#))

These Church father quotations predate all of the extant manuscripts that omit the verse. In terms of the number of manuscripts, 8:37 is not found in the majority of even the later manuscripts. However, the official Greek text of the Greek Orthodox Church, the 1904 Patricarchal Text, has included the verse:

"εἶπε δὲ ὁ Φίλιππος· εἰ πιστεύεις ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας, ἔξεστιν. ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ εἶπε· πιστεύω τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι τὸν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν." ([*1904 Patriarchal Text, Acts 8*](#))

From the external evidence, it appears the verse was missing very early in the Egyptian churches. The Latin churches had the verse in their Latin Bibles and perhaps even in their Greek copies.

Cause of Addition or Omission

As is typical of longer readings in the Textus Receptus, critics of the inclusion of 8:37 propose that the verse was a pious addition. Inversely, proponents of the inclusion of 8:37 propose that the verse was omitted by scribes who disliked the message of the verse. Origen of Alexandria, Egypt in the 3rd century testified that [manuscripts in Alexandria underwent corruption by way of careless or unfaithful copying](#). He said:

"...the differences among the manuscripts [of the Gospels] have become great, either through the negligence of some copyists or through the perverse audacity of others; they either neglect to check over what they have transcribed, or, in the process of checking, they lengthen or shorten, as they please."

(Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd ed. (1991), pp. 151-152).

So the theory that the verse was omitted early is certainly viable. Let us see which theory is more likely in the context of the early church and its theology regarding baptism.

The message of the verse is that baptism prerequisites the expression of faith in Jesus Christ. This is a message that is central to many Evangelical churches today. However, this message was not believed by the predominant churches of the early centuries (or even today among the mainline denominations). The common belief among the early churches was that even infants, who could not express faith, could be baptized. Here are some [quotes](#) by influential church fathers supporting infant baptism:

- **Origen (244 AD):** "Baptism is given for the remission of sins; and according to the usage of the Church, Baptism is given even to infants. And, indeed, if there were nothing in infants that required the remission of sins and nothing in them pertinent to forgiveness, the grace of Baptism would be superfluous." (Origen, Homily on Leviticus 8:3 -- AD 244)
- **Cyprian (250 AD):** "But in respect to the case of infants, which you say ought not to be Baptized within the second or third day after their birth, and that the law of ancient circumcision should be regarded, so that you think one who is just born should not be Baptized and sanctified within the eighth dayAnd therefore, dearest brother, this was our opinion in council, that by us no one ought to be hindered from Baptism ...we think is to be even more observed in respect of infants and newly-born persons." (Cyprian, Epistle 58, To Fides [54] -- AD 251)

- **Gregory Nazianzus (381 AD):** "Be it so, some will say, in the case of those who ask for Baptism; what have you to say about those who are still children and conscious neither of the loss nor of grace? Are we to Baptize them too? Certainly, if any danger presses. For it is better that they should be unconsciously sanctified than that they should depart unsealed and uninitiated." (Gregory Nazianzus, Oration on Holy Baptism, 40:28 -- AD 381)
- **Chrysostom (388 AD):** "We do Baptize infants, although they are not guilty of any [personal] sins." (John Chrysostom, Ad Neophytos -- AD 388)
- **Ambrose (387 AD):** "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. No one is excepted: not the infant, not the one prevented by some necessity." (Ambrose of Milan, Abraham 2,11,84 -- AD 387)
- **Augustine (415 AD):** "Likewise, whoever says that those children who depart out of this life without partaking of that Sacrament (Baptism) are alive in Christ, certainly contradicts the apostolic declaration and condemns the universal Church, in which it is the practice to lose no time and run in haste to administer Baptism to infant children, because it is believed as an indubitable truth, that otherwise they cannot be made alive in Christ." (Augustine, Epistle 167 -- AD 415)
- **Council of Carthage (418 AD):** "Canon 2: Likewise it has been decided that whoever says that infants fresh from their mother's wombs should not be Baptized ...let him be anathema." (Council of Carthage, AD 418)

In both the Greek East and the Latin West, infant baptism was considered normative and beneficial. In this cultural and theological context of favoring infant baptism, what "pious scribe" would add a verse that goes against the prevalent view of his church? The theory that a "pious scribe" added 8:37 is shared by Evangelicals who see historical theology only through an Evangelical bias. The fact of history demonstrates that the message of 8:37 was subversive to the dominant theologies of the early churches. **In light of this, it is more likely than not that 8:37 was omitted rather than added.** The fact that 8:37 remained in the Latin stream despite the Latin church's deeply held devotion to infant baptism demonstrates the resilience of 8:37, which is best explained by the theory that 8:37 was supported by sufficient external evidence in early times.

KJV Today

“It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him,” in Acts 9:5-6?

⁵ And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. ⁶ And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. (Acts 9:5-6, KJV)

⁵ ειπεν δε τις ει κυριε ο δε κυριος ειπεν εγω ειμι ιησους ον συ διωκεις σκληρον σοι προς κεντρα λακτιζειν ⁶ τρεμων τε και θαμβων ειπεν κυριε τι με θελεις ποιησαι και ο κυριος προς αυτον αναστηθι και εισελθε εις την πολιν και λαληθησεται σοι τι σε δει ποιειν. (Acts 9:5-6, Textus Receptus)

The underlined words above are omitted from the NA/UBS editions of the Greek text. The words in their entirety are found only in one Greek manuscript, 629 (14th century), and Latin authorities: p (8th century), h (5th century), t (5th/6th century), vg^{cl}). Syrus Harklensis (616 AD) has the reading except for "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks". E (6th century), 431 (12th century) and some other authorities have "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" at the end of verse 4 (*Nestle-Aland: Novum Testamentum Graece, 27th ed.*).

The words are not found in the earlier Greek manuscripts, but this passage has given rise to a number of early variants. In verse 5, C (5th century) and 1241 (12th century) adds "συ" in between "ει" and "κυριε". In between "δε" and "εγω", Sinaiticus (4th century), 81 (1044 AD), 945 (11th century), 614 (13th century) add "ειπεν"; E (6th century), Ψ (9th/10th century), 323 (12th century) add "κυριος προς αυτον"; L (9th century), 33 (9th century), 1241 (12th century), 1505 (12th century), 18 (14th century) add "κυριος ειπεν"; 424 (11th century) adds "κυριος". In between "ιησους" and "ον" Alexandrinus (5th century), C (5th century), E (6th century) adds "ο ναζωραιος".

Though all of these variants demonstrate that the verse had been tampered with, the addition of "ο ναζωραιος (of Nazareth)" in some early uncials is especially significant because this shows an early attempt to harmonize Acts 9:5 with Acts 22:8, which says, "And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest." In fact, Acts 9:5-6 as it appears in the majority of Greek manuscripts appears to be a harmonization of it with Acts 9:26:15-16:

Acts 9:5-6 in NA/UBS:

"...τις εἶ, Κύριε; ὁ δὲ Κύριος εἶπεν· ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις· ἀλλὰ ἀνάστηθι...."

Acts 26:15-16:

"...τις ει κυριε ο δε ειπεν εγω ειμι ιησους ον συ διωκεις αλλα αναστηθι...."

It is possible that at an early stage the text of Acts 9:5-6 was made to harmonize with Acts 9:26:15-16 in the majority of manuscripts, and then later some scribes made further harmonizations with Acts 22:8 (as in Alexandrinus, C, E). This theory supposes that the original reading was lost in the majority of manuscripts only to be preserved primarily by the Latin stream; but there are in fact verses that are in the Sinaiticus (oldest Greek codex) that were later lost in the Byzantine Greek, but were preserved in Latin (e.g. "raise the dead" (Matthew 10:8), "the Jews" (John 3:25), "Church of God" (Acts 20:28), Doxology (Romans 16:25-27)), so it is theoretically possible for the Latin stream to preserve an ancient Greek reading that would be lost in later Greek readings.

Moreover, even the NIV, ESV and NASB prefer several Latin Vulgate readings over readings that are preserved in the originally inspired language. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew. However, the NIV in Genesis 4:8 adds the line, "Let us go out to the field" from the Vulgate even though the line does not exist in the Hebrew. The NIV, ESV and NASB in 1 Chronicles 4:13 add "and Meonothai" from the Vulgate despite its nonexistence in the Hebrew. The NIV, ESV and NASB in 2 Chronicles 15:8 add "Azariah the son of" from the Vulgate despite its nonexistence in the Hebrew. Anybody who uses the NIV, ESV or NASB has no right to fault the KJV for including a line from the Vulgate.

Even if one were to doubt the KJV reading of Acts 9:5-6, he has no reason to doubt the historical fact stated therein. This exact conversation between Christ and Paul did occur, according to Acts 22 and 26. So even if a reader supposes that including this passage in Acts 9:6 is an error, the reader has no reason to doubt the truth of the passage. This is not a case where the stated historical fact is not supported by any original language text. For example, the NIV has Cain saying to Abel, "Let's go out to the field" in Genesis 4:8 based on non-Hebrew texts (i.e. Vulgate, Septuagint). The Hebrew does not have this reading in Genesis 4:8 and no other place in the Bible mentions this statement by Cain to Abel. KJV's Acts 9:6 is not such a case where a debatable historical fact is included. In conclusion: At most, one could accept the KJV reading as original presuming that non-Greek texts preserved the reading correctly against all Greek texts (except for one) that became corrupt in this place at a very early stage. But at the very least, even if one were to think that the KJV incorrectly inserts this passage in Acts 9:6, he has no reason to doubt the content. We can read Acts 9:6 and believe its content with certainty.

KJV Today

"Servant" or "Deacon" in Romans 16:1?

"I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea:" (Romans 16:1, KJV)

It is alleged that the KJV discriminates against Phebe, a woman, by translating the Greek word describing her, διακονον, as "servant" rather than "deacon". This allegation, of course, assumes that a "deacon" is a more dignified word than "servant". The ESV, NASB and NIV 1984 also describe Phebe as a servant rather than deacon. For there to be discrimination, however, it must be demonstrated that the KJV (and these other translations with "servant" at Romans 16:1) routinely translates διάκονος as "deacon" for males while translating the same word as "servant" only for Phebe, a woman. But such cannot be demonstrated.

In the KJV, the word "deacon(s)" only appears five times, that is, at Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:8, 10, 12 and 13. In each occurrence, the word "deacon" is used because it is obvious that the office of a deacon is in view, not any particular individual. In Philippians 1:1 the word διακονοις is obviously a title because it appears alongside the word "bishops". In the four occurrences in 1 Timothy, "deacon(s)" appears because the passage is clearly speaking of the office of deacons. The verb form διακονέω, translated as "use(d) the office of a deacon" at 1 Timothy 3:10 and 13, is translated as "serve" in Acts 6:2 where males (ανδρας) are selected.

As for the KJV translating διάκονος as "minister" in reference to males (e.g. Christ at Romans 15:8, Epaphras at Colossians 1:7, Paul at Colossians 1:23, Tychicus at Colossians 4:7, Timothy at 1 Thessalonians 3:2), this in no way demonstrates any sexism on the part of the KJV translators. The KJV uses "minister" interchangeably with "servant" to translate διάκονος in related or parallel passages, even in the same book, as follows:

- **Matthew 20:26:** "But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;"
- **Matthew 23:11:** "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant."
- **Mark 9:35:** "And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all."
- **Mark 10:43:** "But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:"

This shows that in the mind of the KJV translators, "minister" was no more a dignified word than "servant". This is the biblical view of the position of a minister. It is obvious that in Matthew 20:26 and Mark 10:43 "minister" refers to a position of servitude and humility. Moreover, sexist motives are not behind the use of "minister" in one place in Matthew and Mark and "servant" in another place in Matthew and Mark. The interchangeability is perhaps only stylistic in purpose. Thus the KJV's descriptions of men such as Epaphras and Tychicus as being "ministers" in no way exalts them above a woman such as Phebe who is described as a "servant".

It is the modern translations that have erroneously elevated the position of a minister by replacing "minister" with "servant" in Matthew 20:26 and Mark 10:43, and using "minister" only for those seemingly dignified roles held by prominent individuals such as Paul and Timothy. The KJV cannot be faulted for calling Phebe a "servant" because the internal dictionary of the KJV equates her with a "minister".

KJV Today

“The root of all evil” or “A root of all kinds of evil” in 1 Timothy 6:10?

"For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." (1 Timothy 6:10, KJV)

Some critics take issue with the KJV's statement that the love of money is "the root of all evil". They take issue with two things. First, the definite article "*the* root" would suggest that the love of money caused the original evil, whether it be Lucifer's rebellion or man's original sin. This is supposedly a problem because money did not exist during Lucifer's rebellion or man's original sin. Second, "all evil" would suggest that the love of money causes all evil in existence. This is supposedly a problem because some evils are unrelated to money. Here is the response:

What is money?

We must first ask the philosophical question, "What is money?" Money is not coins and bills because there are cashless transactions going on everyday. Money is not a physical object. Money is an idea. It is the idea that the more you have of *X* (money) the more you are entitled to have *Y* (goods) which belongs to another person.

What is the "love" of money?

Readers must be careful not to think that 1 Timothy 6:10 is condemning money itself. The condemnation is against the "love" of money. Hence misguided are the criticisms that money did not exist during Lucifer or Adam's time or that money does not cause certain evils. It is the "love of money" that has existed from time immemorial. This love of money is the love of having more of *X* in order to have more of *Y* which belongs to another person. Hence the love of money is the act of coveting. "Covet" means "to feel inordinate desire for what belongs to another" (*Merriam-Webster*). The context of 1 Timothy 6:10 makes a connection between this love of money and the act of coveting, for the two are the same:

"For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

Even without being philosophical, common sense dictates that people love money because they love having more of what belongs to other people. One could have this kind of love whether or not money exists as a physical object. This "love of money", or the act of coveting, certainly existed at the time of Lucifer's rebellion and man's original sin. Lucifer coveted God's throne (Isaiah 14:13) and man coveted the forbidden fruit. Hence it can be said that the love of money is the root of all evil.

Coveting is the root of all evil

Lust is closely related to coveting for they both relate to desire. The Epistle of James says concerning lust:

"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." (James 1:14-15)

Every sin begins with lust (desire). Murder, sexual sins, disobedience to parents - they all come to fruition when we desire to have that which we do not have - our own selfish satisfaction in any given situation. Hence, we can correctly say that the act of coveting is the root of all (yes, *all*) evil.

KJV Today

Errors of Textual Interpretation:

Word–Study Fallacies

Words are among the preacher’s primary tools—both the words he studies and the words with which he explains his studies. Mercifully, there now exist several excellent volumes to introduce the student to the general field of lexical semantics and to warn against particular abuses; and this is all to the good, for Nathan Söderblom was right when he said, “Philology is the eye of the needle through which every theological camel must enter the heaven of theology.”²

My own pretensions are modest. I propose merely to list and describe a collection of common fallacies that repeatedly crop up when preachers and others attempt word studies of biblical terms, and to provide some examples. The entries may serve as useful warning flags.

Common Fallacies in Semantics

1. *The root fallacy*

One of the most enduring of errors, the root fallacy presupposes that every word actually *has* a meaning bound up with its shape or its components. In this view, meaning is determined by etymology; that is, by the root or roots of a word. How many times have we been told that because the verbal cognate of ἀποστολος (*apostolos*, apostle) is ἀποστέλλω (*apostellō*, I send), the root meaning of “apostle” is “one who is sent”? In the preface of the *New King James Bible*, we are told that the “literal” meaning of μονογενής (*monogenēs*) is “only begotten.” Is that true? How often do preachers refer to the verb ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*, to love), contrast it with φιλέω (*phileō*, to love), and deduce that the text is saying something about a special kind of loving, for no other reason than that ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*) is used?

All of this is linguistic nonsense. We might have guessed as much if we were more acquainted with the etymology of English words. Anthony C. Thiselton offers by way of example our word *nice*, which comes from the Latin *nescius*, meaning “ignorant.” Our “good-bye” is a contraction for Anglo-Saxon “God be with you.” Now it may be possible to trace out diachronically just how *nescius* generated “nice”; it is certainly easy to imagine how “God be with you” came to be contracted to “good-bye.” But I know of no one today who in saying such and such a person is “nice” believes that he or she has in some measure labeled that person ignorant because the “root meaning” or “hidden meaning” or “literal meaning” of “nice” is “ignorant.”

J. P. Louw provides a fascinating example. In 1 Corinthians 4:1 Paul writes of himself, Cephas, Apollos, and other leaders in these terms: “So then, men ought to regard us as servants (ὑπηρέτας, *hypēretas*) of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God” (NIV). More than a century ago, R. C. Trench popularized the view that ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*) derives from the verb ἐρέσσω (*eressō*) “to row.” The basic meaning of ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*), then, is “rower.” Trench quite explicitly says a ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*) “was originally the rower (from ἐρέσσω [*eressō*]).” A. T. Robertson and J. B. Hofmann went further and said ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*) derives morphologically from ὑπό (*hypo*) and ἐρέτης (*eretēs*). Now ἐρέσσω (*eressō*) means “rower” in Homer (eighth century B.C.!); and Hofmann draws the explicit connection with the morphology, concluding a ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*) was basically an “under rower” or “assistant rower” or “subordinate rower.” Trench had not gone so far: he did not detect in ὑπό (*hypo*) any notion of subordination. Nevertheless Leon Morris concluded that a ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*) was “a servant of a lowly kind”; and William Barclay plunged further and designated ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*) as “a rower on the lower bank of a trireme.” Yet the fact remains that with only one possible exception—and it is merely possible, not certain¹⁰—ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*) is never used for “rower” in classical literature, and it is certainly not used that way in the New Testament. The ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*) in the New Testament is a servant, and often there is little if anything to distinguish him from a διάκονος (*diakonos*). As Louw remarks, to derive the meaning of ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*) from ὑπό (*hypo*) and ἐρέτης (*eretēs*) is no more intrinsically realistic than deriving the meaning of “butterfly” from “butter” and “fly,” or the meaning of “pineapple” from “pine” and “apple.” Even those of us who have never been to Hawaii recognize that pineapples are not a special kind of apple that grows on pines.

The search for hidden meanings bound up with etymologies becomes even more ludicrous when two words with entirely different meanings share the same etymology. James Barr draws attention to the pair סֶהַם (*lehem*) and מִלְחָמָה (*milḥammâ*), which mean “bread” and “war” respectively:

It must be regarded as doubtful whether the influence of their common root is of importance semantically in classical Hebrew in the normal usage of the words. And it would be utterly fanciful to connect the two as mutually suggestive or evocative, as if battles were normally for the sake of bread or bread a necessary provision for battles. Words containing similar sound sequences may of course be deliberately juxtaposed for assonance, but this is a special case and separately recognizable.

Perhaps I should return for a moment to my first three examples. It’s arguable that although ἀπόστολος (*apostolos*, apostle) is cognate with ἀποστέλλω (*apostellō*, I send), New Testament use of the noun does not center on the meaning *the one sent* but on the “messenger.” Now a messenger is usually sent; but the word *messenger* also calls to mind the message the person carries, and suggests he represents the one who sent him. In other words, actual usage in the New Testament suggests that ἀπόστολος (*apostolos*) commonly bears the meaning a *special representative* or a *special messenger* rather than “someone sent out.”

The word μονογενής (*monogenēs*) is often thought to spring from μόνος (*monos*, only) plus γεννάω (*gennaō*, to beget); and hence its meaning is “only begotten.” Even at the etymological level, the γεν (*gen*)–root is tricky: μονογενής (*monogenēs*) could as easily spring from μόνος (*monos*, only) plus γένος (*genos*, kind or race) to mean “only one of its kind,” “unique,” or the like. If we press on to consider usage, we discover that the Septuagint renders יָמְחִיד (*yamhîd*) as “alone” or “only” (e.g., Ps. 22:20 [21:21, LXX, “my precious life” (NIV) or “my only soul”]; Ps.

25:16 [24:16, LXX, “for I am lonely and poor”]), without even a hint of “begetting.” True, in the New Testament the word often refers to the relationship of child to parent; but even here, care must be taken. In Hebrews 11:17 Isaac is said to be Abraham’s μονογενής (*monogenēs*)—which clearly cannot mean “only–begotten son,” since Abraham also sired Ishmael and a fresh packet of progeny by Keturah (Gen. 25:1–2). Issac is, however, Abraham’s *unique* son, his special and well–beloved son. The long and short of the matter is that renderings such as “for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16, NIV) are prompted by neither an inordinate love of paraphrase, nor a perverse desire to deny some cardinal truth, but by linguistics.

In a similar vein, although it is doubtless true that the entire range of ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*, to love) and the entire range of φιλέω (*phileō*, to love) are not exactly the same, nevertheless they enjoy substantial overlap; and where they overlap, appeal to a “root meaning” in order to discern a difference is fallacious. In 2 Samuel 13 (LXX), both ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*, to love) and the cognate ἀγάπη (*agapē*, love) can refer to Amnon’s incestuous rape of his half sister Tamar (2 Sam. 13:15, LXX). When we read that Demas forsook Paul because he loved this present, evil world, there is no linguistic reason to be surprised that the verb is ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*, 2 Tim. 4:10). John 3:35 records that the Father loves the Son and uses the verb ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*); John 5:20 repeats the thought, but uses φιλέω (*phileō*)—without discernible shift in meaning. The false assumptions surrounding this pair of words are ubiquitous; and so I shall return to them again. My only point here is that there is nothing intrinsic to the verb ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*) or the noun ἀγάπη (*agapē*) to prove its real meaning or hidden meaning refers to some special kind of love.

I hasten to add three caveats to this discussion. First, I am not saying that any word can mean anything. Normally we observe that any individual word has a certain limited semantic range & the context may therefore modify or shape the meaning of a word only within certain boundaries. The total semantic range is not permanently fixed, of course; with time and novel usage, it may shift considerably. Even so, I am not suggesting that words are infinitely plastic. I am simply saying that the meaning of a word cannot be reliably determined by etymology, or that a root, once discovered, always projects a certain semantic load onto any word that incorporates that root. Linguistically, meaning isn’t intrinsic possession of a word; rather, “it’s a set of relations for which a verbal symbol is a sign.” In one sense, of course, it is legitimate to say “this word means such and such,” where we are either providing the lexical range inductively observed or specifying the meaning of a word in a particular context; but we must not freight such talk with too much etymological baggage.

The second caveat is that the meaning of a word *may* reflect the meanings of its component parts. For example, the verb ἐκβάλλω (*ekballō*), from ἐκ (*ek*) and βάλλω (*ballō*), does in fact mean “I cast out,” “I throw out,” or “I put out.” The meaning of a word *may* reflect etymology; and it must be admitted that this is more common in synthetic languages like Greek or German, with their relatively high percentages of transparent words (words that have some kind of natural relation to their meaning) than in a language like English, where words are opaque (i.e., without any natural relation to their meaning). Even so, my point is that we cannot responsibly *assume* that etymology is related to meaning. We can only test the point by discovering the meaning of a word inductively.

Finally, I am far from suggesting that etymological study is useless. It is important, in the diachronic study of words (the study of words as they occur across long periods of time), in the attempt to specify the earliest attested meaning, in the study of cognate languages, and especially in attempts to understand the meanings of *hapax legomena* (words that appear only once). In the

last case, although etymology is a clumsy tool for discerning meaning, the lack of comparative material means we sometimes have no other choice. That is why, as Moisés Silva points out in his excellent discussion of these matters, etymology plays a much more important role in the determination of meaning in the Hebrew Old Testament than in the Greek New Testament: the Hebrew contains proportionately far more *hapax legomena*. “The relative value of this use of etymology varies inversely with the quantity of material available for the language.” And in any case, specification of the meaning of a word on the sole basis of etymology can never be more than an educated guess.

2. *Semantic anachronism*

This fallacy occurs when late use of a word is read back into earlier literature. At the simplest level, it occurs within the same language, as when the Greek early church fathers use a word in a manner not demonstrably envisaged by the New Testament writers. It’s not obvious, for instance, that their use of ἐπίσκοπος (*episkopos*, bishop) to designate a church leader who has oversight over several local churches has any New Testament warrant.

But the problem has a second face when we also add a change of language. Our word *dynamite* is etymologically derived from δύναμις (*dynamis*, power, or even miracle). I do not know how many times I have heard preachers offer some such rendering of Romans 1:16 as this: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the *dynamite* of God unto salvation for everyone who believes”—often with a knowing tilt of the head, as if something profound or even esoteric has been uttered. This is not just the old root fallacy revisited. It is worse: it is an appeal to a kind of reverse etymology, the root fallacy compounded by anachronism. Did Paul think of dynamite when he penned this word? And in any case, even to mention dynamite as a kind of analogy is singularly inappropriate. Dynamite blows things up, tears things down, rips out rock, gouges holes, destroys things. The power of God concerning which Paul speaks he often identifies with the power that raised Jesus from the dead (e.g., Eph. 1:18–20); and as it operates in us, its goal is εἰς σωτηρίαν (*eis som tērian*, “unto salvation,” Rom. 1:16, KJV), aiming for the wholeness and perfection implicit in consummation of our salvation. Quite apart from semantic anachronism, therefore, dynamite appears inadequate as a means of raising Jesus from the dead or as a means of conforming us to the likeness of Christ. Of course, what preachers are trying to do when they talk about dynamite is give some indication of the greatness of the power involved. Even so, Paul’s measure is not dynamite, but the empty tomb. In exactly the same way, it’s sheer semantic anachronism to note that in the text “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7) the Greek word behind “cheerful” is ἡλαρόν (*hilaron*) and conclude that what God really loves is a hilarious giver. Perhaps we should play a laugh-track record while the offering plate is being circulated.

A third level of the same problem was painfully exemplified in three articles about blood in *Christianity Today*. The authors did an admirable job of explaining the wonderful things science has discovered that blood can do — in particular its cleansing role as it flushes out cellular impurities and transports nourishment to every part of the body. What a wonderful picture (we were told) of how the blood of Jesus Christ purifies us from every sin (1 John 1:7). In fact, it is nothing of the kind. Worse, it is irresponsibly mystical and theologically misleading. The phrase the *blood of Jesus* refers to Jesus’ violent, sacrificial death. In general, the blessings that the Scriptures show to be accomplished or achieved by the blood of Jesus are equally said to be accomplished or achieved by the death of Jesus (e.g., justification, Romans 3:21–26; 5:6–9; redemption, Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 5:9).

If John tells us the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ purifies us from every sin, he is informing us that our hope for continued cleansing & forgiveness rests not on protestations of our goodness while our life is a sham (1 John 1:6, probably directed against proto-Gnostics) but on continual walking in the light and on continued reliance on Christ's finished work on the cross.

3. *Semantic obsolescence*

In some ways, this fallacy is the mirror image of semantic anachronism. Here the interpreter assigns to a word in his text a meaning that the word in question used to have in earlier times, but that is no longer found within the live, semantic range of the word. That meaning is semantically obsolete.

One of the more interesting lexical works on my shelves is a *Dictionary of Obsolete English*. Some words, of course, simply lose their usefulness and drop out of the language (“to chaffer,” meaning to “to bargain, haggle, dispute”); far trickier are those that remain in the language but change their meaning.²¹ So also in the biblical languages: Homeric words no longer found in the Septuagint or the New Testament are of relatively little interest to the biblical specialist, but a Hebrew word that means one thing at an early stage of the written language & another at a later stage, or a Greek word that means one thing in classical Greek & another in the New Testament, can easily lead the unwary into the pitfall of this third fallacy.

Some changes are fairly easy to plot. The Greek μάρτυς (*martys*) stands behind our English word *martyr*. The plot of the development of the Greek noun and its cognate verb has often been traced and runs something like this:

- a. one who gives evidence, in or out of court
- b. one who gives solemn witness or affirmation (e.g., of one's faith)
- c. one who witnesses to personal faith, even in the threat of death
- d. one who witnesses to personal faith by the acceptance of death
- e. one who dies for a cause—a “martyr”

This development was certainly not smooth. At a given period, one person might use μάρτυς (*martys*) one way, and another person use it some other way; or the same person might use the word in more than one way, depending on the context. In this case, development was doubtless retarded by the fact that the witness of stage c was often before a court of law, reminiscent of state a. Certainly by the time that the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 1:1; 19:1 (mid-second century) was written, the final stage had been reached. The standard classical Greek lexicon urges that stage e was reached by the time the Book of Revelation was penned: the church at Pergamum did not renounce its faith in Christ, “even in the days of Antipas, my faithful μάρτυς [*martys*, witness? martyr?], who was put to death in your city” (2:13). The conclusion may be premature: in the passage about the two witnesses, they *complete* their witness *before* they are killed (11:7), which suggests a place on the plot no more advanced than stage c. Perhaps, therefore, the word μάρτυς (*martys*) in Revelation 2:13 should simply be rendered “witness”; or perhaps in John's usage the term has a semantic range that includes several different stages.

In short, words change their meaning over time. Most of us are aware by now that the force of diminutive suffixes had largely dissipated by the time the New Testament was written: it is difficult to distinguish ὁ παῖς (*ho pais*) from τὸ παιδίον (*to paidion*) by age or size. We are also aware that many perfective prefixes had lost some or all of their force.

It follows, then, that we should be a trifle suspicious when any piece of exegesis tries to establish the meaning of a word by appealing first of all to its usage in classical Greek rather than to its usage in Hellenistic Greek. In an article in *Christianity Today*, for instance, Berkeley and Alvera Mickelsen argue that “head” in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 means “source” or “origin”; but their appeal is to the standard classical lexicon (LSJ—which does of course move forward to cover Hellenistic sources), not the standard New Testament and Hellenistic Greek lexicon (Bauer). The latter lists no meaning of “source” or “origin” for κεφαλή (*kephalē*, head) for the New Testament period.

4. Appeal to unknown or unlikely meanings

We may usefully continue with the previous example. Not only do the Mickelsens appeal to LSJ, but they also fail to note the constraints that even LSJ imposes on the evidence. The Mickelsens make much of the idea *head of a river* as the river’s “source”; but in all such cases cited by LSJ, the word is plural, κεφαλαί (*kephalai*). When the singular form κεφαλή (*kephalē*) is applied to a river, it refers to a river’s mouth. The only example listed by LSJ where κεφαλή (*kephalē*, sing.) means “source” or “origin” is the document the *Fragmenta Orphilcorum*, from the fifth century B.C. or earlier, which is both textually uncertain and patient of more than one translation. Although some of the New Testament metaphorical uses of κεφαλή (*kephalē*) could be taken to mean “source,” all other factors being equal, in no case is that the required meaning; and in every instance the notion of “headship” implying authority fits equally well or better. The relevant lexica are full of examples, all culled from the ancient texts, in which κεφαλή (*kephalē*) connotes “authority.” The Mickelsens’ argument, and that of many others who have joined the same refrain, probably depends on an article by S. Bedale; but the fact remains that whatever the dependencies, the Mickelsens are attempting to appeal to an unknown or unlikely meaning. Certainly there are sound exegetical reasons why such a meaning will not fit the context of 1st Corinthians 11:2–16.

There are many examples of this fourth fallacy. Some spring from poor research, perhaps dependence on others without checking the primary sources; others spring from the desire to make a certain interpretation work out, and the interpreter forsakes evenhandedness. In some instances an intrinsically unlikely or ill-attested meaning receives detailed defense & may even become entrenched in the church. For instance, although no less a Pauline scholar than C. E. B. Cranfield has argued that νόμος (*nomos*) sometimes means not Mosaic law or the Mosaic law covenant, but legalism (e.g., Romans 3:21), the fact remains that the primary defense of that position is not rigorous linguistic evidence but adoption of a certain structure of relationships between the Old Testament and the New.²⁹

Again, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., has argued that νόμος (*nomos*) in 1st Corinthians 14: 34 – 35 refers not to Mosaic law but to rabbinic interpretation, rabbinic rules that Paul has come to reject. Women are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the νόμος (*nomos*) says. The Old Testament does not say this, Kaiser argues, so Paul must be referring to rabbinic rules. Then in verse 36 Paul fires his own comeback: Did the word of God originate with you, or are you men (μόνος [*monous*], not μόνας [*monas*]) the only ones it reached? Paul, in other words, gives the gist of the opponents’ argument, as he does elsewhere in this epistle (e.g., 6:12; 7:1–2), and then gives his own correction. The result is the passage on the submission of women is a summary of the erroneous views Paul seeks to refute.

This interpretation has its attractions, but it will not stand up to close scrutiny.

Elsewhere in this epistle when Paul rebuts or modifies certain erroneous positions, he never does with a mere rhetorical question: he argues his case & sketches in an alternative framework of understanding. This observation calls in question the suggestion that all of 14: 34 – 35 can be dismissed by the question of 14:36. The recurring pattern does not *prove* that 14:34–35 couldn't be introducing a different structure, but since there is no other clear example of this alternative, the observation cannot be lightly dismissed or ignored.

The masculine *μόνους* (*monous*) in 14:36 does not prove that Paul is addressing only the men of the congregation & asking if they think they are the only ones the word of God has reached—they alone, and not the women. Rather, it refers to both the men and the women who constitute the church: the Greek regularly uses plural masculine forms when people (without distinction as to sex) are being referred to or addressed. This means that Paul by rhetorical question is rebuking the entire church for laxness on the issue at hand; he is rebuking the highhandedness its members display on all kinds of issues, a highhandedness that prompts them to break with the practice of other churches & question Paul's authority. This interpretation of *μόνους* (*monous*) is confirmed by three things. First, it makes sense of 14:33b, “as in all the congregations of the saints” (NIV): that is, Paul is refuting a practice that sets the Corinthian church off from other churches. (It is syntactically unlikely that 14:33b should be read with 14:33a; rather, it begins the pericope under debate.) Second, this interpretation also suits 14:37–38: apparently the Corinthian believers are so arrogant, so puffed up with an awareness of the spiritual gifts distributed among them, that they are in danger of ignoring apostolic authority. Are they the *only* ones who think they have prophetic gifts? Real spiritual giftedness will recognize what Paul writes is the Lord's command. The contrast in verse 36, carried on in verses 37 – 38, is not between Corinthian men believers and Corinthian women believers, but between Corinthian believers, men and women, who set themselves over against other churches (14:33b) & even over against apostolic authority (14:37–38). The Corinthians must learn that they are not the *only people* (*μόνους* [*monous*]) the word of God has reached. And third, this interpretation is confirmed by other like passages in this epistle where the same sort of argument is constructed (see especially 7:40b; 11:16).

If verse 36 is not a dismissal of rabbinic tradition, then νόμος (*nomos*) (“as the *Law* says,” v. 34, NIV, italics added) can't refer to that tradition. Now we come to the heart of the fallacy under consideration. Insofar as νόμος (*nomos*) can be a rough Greek equivalent for “Torah” & “Torah” can in rabbinic usage encompass both written Scripture and the oral tradition, a plausible a priori case can be made for understanding νόμος (*nomos*) in verse 34 in this way. But the fact remains that Paul never uses νόμος (*nomos*) in this way anywhere else, even though the word is common in his writings; and therefore to that extent Kaiser's interpretation of this passage, in addition to its other weaknesses, falls under this fourth fallacy. It is an appeal to a meaning unlikely for Paul, if we are to judge by his own usage. The only time such highly unlikely appeal is justified occurs when other interpretations of the passage are so exegetically unlikely that we are forced to offer some fresh hypothesis. When this takes place, we need to admit how tentative and linguistically uncertain the theory really is.

In this case, however, there is no need for such a procedure of last resort. The passage can be and has been adequately explained in its context. There are ample parallels to this way of looking to the Old Testament for a principle, not a quotation (and the principle in question is doubtless Gen. 2:20b–24, referred to by Paul both in 1 Cor. 11:8–9 and in 1 Tim. 2:13); and the demand for silence on the part of women does not bring on irreconcilable conflict with 1st Corinthians 11:2–16, where under certain conditions women are permitted to pray and prophesy, because the silence of 14:33b–36 is limited by context: women are to keep silent in connection with the

evaluation of prophecies, to which the context refers, for otherwise they would be assuming a role of doctrinal authority in the congregation (contra 1 Tim. 2:11–15). All of this is to show nothing more than that this fourth fallacy may be obscured by considerable exegetical ingenuity; but it remains a fallacy just the same.

5. Careless appeal to background material

In a sense, the example of the Mickelsens falls under this fallacy as well; but the borders of this fifth fallacy, although they overlap with the fourth, are somewhat broader. There may be an inappropriate appeal to background material that doesn't involve intrinsically unlikely meaning. Since in the previous entry I focused on an example from the writings of a respected academic dean, Walt Kaiser, I shall now try to make amends, or demonstrate a certain evenhandedness, by illustrating this fifth fallacy from my own published works.

The first concerns the words ὕδατος καὶ (*hydatos kai*) John 3:5: “I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of *water* and the *Spirit*, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” The interpretations given to those two words are legion, and I do not have space to canvass them here. But after weighing as carefully as I could all the options of which I knew anything, I rejected the various sacramental interpretations on the grounds that they were anachronistic, contextually improbable & out of synchronization with John's themes. I also rejected various metaphorical interpretations (e.g., water is a symbol for the Word of God — which makes little contextual sense out of the dialogue). In due course I turned away from the view that the water is simply the amniotic fluid that flows away during the process of birth, because I could find no ancient text that spoke of birth as “out of water”—just as we do not speak that way today. With some reluctance, therefore, I followed Hugo Odeberg and Morris, who point to various sources in which “water” or “rain” or “dew” dignifies male semen. Understanding γεννάω (*gennaō*) in this passage to mean “to beget” rather than “to give birth to,” John 3:5 then reads, “Unless a man is begotten of water [=semen; i.e., natural begetting] and of the spirit [i.e., supernatural begetting], he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

In fact, the parallels aren't good; but my hesitant endorsement of this position has now been shown to be unconvincing & unnecessary. The person who convinced me was Linda Belleville, one of my graduate students before she went on to the University of Toronto for doctoral study. The relevant part of her thesis has been published as an article.³⁴ She surveys and interacts with all the published interpretations, including and argues that ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος (*ex hydatos kai pneumatos*, of water and spirit), far from referring to two births, refers to one (the fact that both nouns are governed by one preposition certainly favors this view). This makes verses 3, 5, 6b, and 7 all parallel statements. Water and spirit are already linked in Ezekiel 36:25–27—the prophet foresees a time of eschatological cleansing in which God will sprinkle clean water on his people, making them clean (the eschatological counterpart to the levitical purification rites), and will give them a new heart & a new spirit. This Nicodemus should have understood (John 3:10). Birth or begetting “of water and spirit” is thus not a hendiadys, but a reference to the dual work of the Spirit (3:6) who simultaneously purifies and imparts God's nature to man. Belleville's work will stand up to close scrutiny.

The second example is from my popular-level exposition on the Sermon on the Mount. I there explained the well-known discrepancy between Matthew's reference to a mountain (5:1) and Luke's mention of a plain (6:17) with more or less standard conservative apologetic: even a mountain has level places, and so forth. Since publishing that book, however, I have written a full-length technical commentary on Matthew; and I have learned that εἰς τὸ ὄρος (*eis to oros*)

in Matthew 5:1 probably does not mean Jesus went “up a mountain” or “to a mountain” or “onto a mountainside,” but simply “into the hill country”; and interestingly *πεδινός* (*pedinos*) in Luke 6:17, usually rendered “plain,” commonly refers to a plateau in mountainous regions. There is no discrepancy; I had simply not done enough work for the earlier book. If it is any encouragement, increasing years make one increasingly careful. They are also teaching me, slowly, to change my mind and acknowledge when I am shown to be in error. There is no virtue in a Maginot Line of emotional defense around a position that is palpably weak.

6. *Verbal parallelomania*

Samuel Sandmel coined the term *parallelomania* to refer to the penchant of many biblical scholars to adduce “parallels” of questionable worth. One subset of such an abuse is verbal parallelomania—the listing of verbal parallels in some body of literature as if those bare phenomena demonstrate conceptual links or even dependency. In an earlier essay I reported the astonishing study by Robert Kysar,⁴⁰ who surveyed the use of parallels in the examination of the Johannine prologue (John 1:1–18) as undertaken by C. H. Dodd and Rudolf Bultmann. Of the three hundred or so parallels that each of the two scholars adduced, the overlap was only 7 percent! That 7 percent, I repeat, covers overlap in what was adduced, not in what was deemed significant as background. With so little overlap, one can only conclude that neither scholar had come close to a comprehensive survey of potential backgrounds. One sees a background in the Mandaeen literature, the other in the Hermetica. Both of these backgrounds are dubious even on the grounds of the dating of the sources; yet both scholars proceed to ascribe to the words of John’s prologue the meanings of similar or identical words in fundamentally different corpora. Neither scholar exhibits much linguistic sensitivity to the need for contrastive paradigmatic equivalence or, more broadly, for equivalent contracts in the semantic fields of the texts being compared. I shall refer to these problems again (fallacy 16); suffice it to say here that Arthur Gibson, for instance, is rightly very harsh on Bultmann in this respect.

7. *Linkage of language and mentality*

It was not long ago that this fallacy generated many books. If one mentions titles like *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* in a room full of linguistically competent people, there will instantly be many pained expressions and groans. The heart of this fallacy is the assumption that any language so constrains the thinking processes of the people who use it that they are forced into certain patterns of thought and shielded from others. Language and mentality thus become confused. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* was particularly guilty of this linkage; and it was to Barr’s great credit that he exposed its bankruptcy, not only in his work on biblical language, but also in his narrower study comparing concepts of time in Hebrew and Greek thought.⁴⁴ This point has been made so often in recent years, and the problem has been so conveniently summarized by Silva, that perhaps I need not say much more about it here. But one should be suspicious of all statements about the nature of “the Hebrew mind” or “the Greek mind” if those statements are based on observations about the semantic limitations of words of the language in question.

Silva cites a deliciously painful example from a conservative textbook, which says that Hebrew has a certain “biographical suitability” and quotes approvingly the judgment that “the Hebrew thought in pictures, and consequently his nouns are concrete and vivid. There is no such

thing as neuter gender, for the Semite everything is alive.” One wonders if neuter entities in other languages must be dead—τὸ παιδίον (*to paidion*), for instance, or *das Mädchen*.

When student at seminary, I was told, in all seriousness, that Greek was an eminently suitable language for the Lord to use in providing New Testament revelation, since, unlike Hebrew, it has a past, a present, and a future tense, and was therefore better able to deal with the temporal location of New Testament revelation. New Testament writers needed to be able to look back to what God had revealed in the *past*, to grasp what God was going to do in the *present*, and to anticipate what God was going to do in the *future*. But did not the covenant community in Isaiah’s day have similar needs? Were ancient Hebrews unable to distinguish past, present, and future because their language has only two aspects?

8. False assumptions about technical meaning

In this fallacy, an interpreter falsely assumes that a word always or nearly always has a certain technical meaning—a meaning usually derived either from a subset of the evidence or from the interpreter’s personal systematic theology. An easy example is the word *sanctification*. In most conservative theological discussion, sanctification is the progressive purifying of the believer, the process by which he becomes increasingly holy after an instantaneous “positional” or “forensic” justification. But it is a commonplace among Pauline scholars that although the term *sanctification* can have that force, it most commonly refers to the initial setting aside of an individual for God at his conversion. Thus, Paul can address his first epistle to the Corinthians, that singularly “unholy” church, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus (ἡγιασμένοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ [*hēgiasmenois en Christom Iesou*], 1 Cor. 1:2).

That one, of course, is well known; but there are many others. If ἀποκαλύπτω (*apokalyptō*, to reveal) is thought to refer invariably to special revelation hitherto unknown, the interpreter is going to have difficulty with Philippians 3:15b (“And if on some point you think differently, that too God will *make clear* to you”; NIV, italics added). Or how about “baptism in the Spirit”? Charismatics tend to want to make all occurrences of the expression refer to a postconversion effusion of Spirit;⁴⁷ some anticharismatics contemplate 1 Corinthians 12:13 (“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink”) and conclude, with equal fallacy, all New Testament references are to the effusion of Spirit all Christians receive at their conversion.⁴⁸ The problem is complicated by the uncertain syntax of 1 Corinthians 12:13; but the worst problem is the assumption on both sides that we are dealing with a *terminus technicus* that always has the same meaning. There is insufficient evidence to support that view; and the assumption makes it exceedingly difficult to handle the five passages (one in each Gospel and one in Acts) that stand in most urgent need of being treated carefully and evenhandedly as references to a step in the progress of redemption. Interestingly, the Puritans adopted neither extreme. Apparently detecting in the phrase *baptism in Holy Spirit* no consistent, technical meaning, they took it to mean “effusion in Spirit” or “inundation in Spirit” and felt free to pray for revival in the terms, “Oh, baptize us afresh with thy Holy Spirit!” Sometimes the detection of an alleged *terminus technicus* is bound up with distinguishable but complex arguments. For example, several scholars have argued that in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20), the phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (*panta ta ethnē*, all nations) excludes Israel.

After all, τὰ ἔθνη (*ta ethnē*) in its eight occurrences in Matthew (4:15; 6:32; 10:5, 18; 12:18, 21; 20:19, 25) normally denotes Gentiles, usually pagans, and, it is argued, this interpretation not only makes sense of this technical force in τὰ ἔθνη (*ta ethnē*) but also meshes with Matthew's argument that Israel has forfeited her place, so that the preaching of the gospel must now be kept from her.

Despite its superficial plausibility, the argument has several weaknesses, not least the fact that it stumbles on this eighth fallacy. It is doubtful, for instance, that ἔθνος (*ethnos*), used anarthrously, has this exclusive force in 21:43; and when the entire expression (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη [*panta ta ethnē*], "all nations"—not just τὰ ἔθνη [*ta ethnē*]) occurs in Matthew (24:9, 14; 25:32; 28:19) it is very doubtful that Jews are being excluded. After all, could Jesus really be excluding Israel as one source of the opposition and hate his followers will have to endure (24:9)? Many other arguments could be advanced; but the heart of the problem is the unjustified adoption of a too restrictive *terminus technicus*.

One corollary of this fallacy is that some interpreters will go one stage further and reduce an entire doctrine to one word which they have understood to be a technical term. This is true, for instance, of many treatments of the verb *to foreknow*.

9. Problems surrounding synonyms and componential analysis

There are two principal & related fallacies I would like to bring up under this heading. The first arises from the fact that the terms *synonymy* & *equivalence* are so little understood by many of us that adequate distinctions aren't always preserved. In J. T. Sanders's Philippians 2: 6 - 11 treatment, for instance, he establishes the stanza division to his own satisfaction, and then says, "The 2nd line in either case explicates what was said in the first line; this is done synonymously in the second stanza ('likeness' = 'fashion', 'of men' = 'like a man'). 'Humbled himself' is the equivalent to 'emptied himself.'" Gibson analyzes the problem.⁵⁵ Strictly speaking, "explicates" is incompatible with "synonymously" and perhaps with "equivalent"; for to the extent that two items are synonymous neither can explicate the other. The two items would have same semantic value. Incidentally, although Gibson doesn't mention it, this is a major problem in treatments of Hebrew poetry. Many scholars treat lexical units in Semitic poetry as synonymous, others as very rough "synonyms" that shed light on each other, and some confuse the two. It is arguable that the habits of Hebrew poets are diverse enough to admit both strict synonymy & explication in most poems, but not at the same time in the same pair of items! Also, the parallels Sanders draws are not exactly synonymous. Even "of men"/"like a man" "are semantically asymmetrical regarding 'of' and 'like' and *quantificationally distinct in men/man*; so it is, at the most, only at some levels that the equated components share semantic levels, with differences at others, while Sanders distinguishes neither group." Third, the equations Sanders advances could in theory be reconstructed as hyponymic relations (the pairs of items do not have the same semantic values: they do not mean exactly the same things, but they have the same referents [they make reference to the same realities, even though their meaning is different]).⁵⁸ Unfortunately, Sanders does not see his equations that way.

		Entries			
		man	woman	boy	girl
Components of Meaning	human	+	+	+	+
	adult	+	+	-	-
	male	+	-	+	-

FIGURE 1

The point of this rather painful exercise is not to denigrate the work of a biblical scholar, since one could argue, for instance, that Sanders does not mean to take “synonymously” in the same rigorous way that modern linguists demand. He might be a “layman” as far as linguistic theory is concerned, and therefore permitted to use terms like “synonyms” in a nontechnical way. But that is just the problem, for the theological agenda is illegitimately controlling the equations, flattening semantic distinctions, violating levels of meaning - squashing them into one equation - with the result the text cannot speak with all its force, with its full semantic power. The fallacy is the unwarranted belief that “synonyms” are identical in more ways than the evidence allows.

To present the second problem, I must say a little about componential analysis. This kind of study attempts to isolate the components of meaning (i.e., the semantic components) of (usually) words. Figure 1 provides a frequently repeated example. The chart is self-explanatory. But note that the semantic components (human, adult, male) do not exhaust the possible constituents of meaning that could go into “man.” To make matters worse, most linguists permit only semantic components that are referents: that is, componential analysis is applicable only to the referential meaning, not to what the word means in a particular context but to all that it refers. In the case of many words, the list of semantic “components” becomes long & cumbersome indeed. Moreover, there is no agreed procedure for analyzing terms componentially, and therefore different scholars sometimes achieve quite different results—which is not reassuring. But even where two analyses of a term agree, they don’t usually claim to list all of the elements that go into the meaning of the term under scrutiny, since componential analysis normally provides only elements of referential meaning.

Perhaps it will now be a little clearer why synonyms are so difficult to handle. In one sense, of course, two terms are virtually never strictly synonymous if by “synonymous” we are saying that *wherever they are used* the two terms mean exactly the same denotatively & connotatively, in their semantic components and in the cognitive information they convey and in the emotional freight they carry, to all people who speak the language. But a pair of words can be found strictly synonymous in certain contexts; each case must be decided on its own merits. To illustrate with another commonly used diagram, figure 2, the terms A and B may be strictly synonymous in a particular context where they enjoy semantic overlap (i.e., overlapping meanings, indicated by the shaded area). For strict synonymy, of course, the semantic overlap must include not only referential meaning, but also all the aspects that go into meaning; for otherwise the terms A and B are “synonymous” at some levels and not at others.

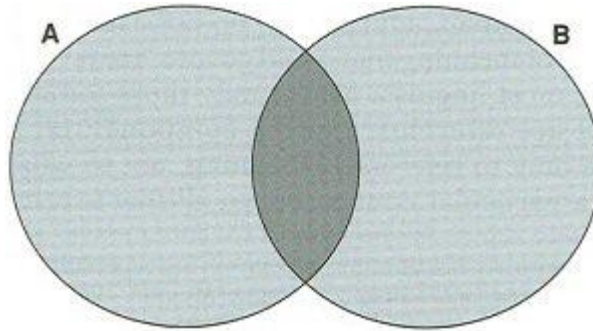


FIGURE 2

We are now equipped to resume our discussion of ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*) and φιλέω (*phileō*), introduced in the discussion about the root fallacy. There we saw that ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*) does not always refer to a “good” love or a sacrificial love or a divine love, and certainly there is nothing in the root to convey such a meaning. But the question arises whether the well-known exchange between Jesus and Peter reported in John 21:15–17, using the two different verbs, is intended to convey a distinction in meaning, or to provide an example of semantic overlap, of synonymy. The pattern is shown in figure 3.

FIGURE 3

Jesus’ question	Peter’s response
ἀγαπάω	φιλέω
ἀγαπάω	φιλέω
φιλέω	φιλέω

For various reasons, I doubt very much that there is an intended distinction. If I were setting out to prove the point, I would have to discuss the significance of “the third time,” exegete the passage in some detail, review the evidence that John regularly introduces expressions that are either precisely synonymous or roughly so, and so forth.

But most of those who insist that there is a distinction to be made in John's use of the two verbs do so on one of two grounds. First, they argue that translators of the Septuagint and New Testament writers have invested ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*, to love) and ἀγάπη (*agapē*, love) with special meaning to provide an adequate expression by which to talk about the love of God; and only this accounts for the word's rapid rise to prominence in our literature. But this argument has been overturned by the diachronic study of Robert Joly, who presents convincing evidence ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*) was coming into prominence throughout Greek literature from the fourth century B.C. on, and was not restricted to biblical literature. This development was fostered by a number of changes in the language (linguists call them structural changes) in which ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*) was becoming one of the standard verbs for "to love" because φιλέω (*phileō*) had over time acquired the meaning *to kiss* as part of *its* semantic range. The reasons for these developments need not detain us; but the evidence is substantial and effectively disqualifies this first ground.

The second ground on which many build their argument that ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*) is to be distinguished from φιλέω (*phileō*) in John 21:15–17—and the one that concerns us most directly at the moment — is well illustrated by William Hendriksen's commentary. Hendriksen shows that although there's considerable semantic overlap between ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*) & φιλέω (*phileō*), once one considers all the biblical passages in which these two words occur there's evidence for a little semantic "overhang" in each case. For instance, φιλέω (*phileō*) can be used when Judas kisses Jesus (Luke 22:47); ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*) is never used in such context. On this sort of basis, then, Hendriksen concludes that ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*) & φιλέω (*phileō*) aren't complete synonyms, and therefore that they preserve slightly differently semantic thrusts in John 21:15–17.

Whatever the outcome of the continued debate on this passage, it should by now be obvious Hendriksen's argument will not stand up, precisely because he mishandles the difficult questions surrounding synonymy. The heart of his argument is that the total semantic range of each word is slightly different from the other, and therefore that there is a semantic difference in this context. But if we decide contextually specific questions of synonymy on the basis of the total semantic range of each word, any synonymy in any context is virtually impossible. Hendriksen's treatment illegitimately forecloses the question.

This particular example of a confused understanding of synonymy is a special instance of "illegitimate totality transfer," discussed again under fallacy 13. Intriguingly, those who insist on two distinguishable meanings for ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*) and φιλέω (*phileō*) in John 21:15–17 rarely observe that there are other subtle differences in the three sets of exchanges between Jesus and Peter. Note especially the three responses Jesus gives to Peter:

- (v.15) βόσκει τὰ ἀρνία μου (*boske ta arnia mou*, "Feed my lambs")
- (v.16) ποιμαίνε τὰ πρόβατά μου (*poimaine ta probata mou*, "Shepherd my sheep")
- (v.17) βόσκει τὰ πρόβατά μου (*boske ta probata mou*, "Feed my sheep")

My somewhat pedantic translation, in parentheses, highlights the changes. But very few preachers judge these changes to be of fundamental importance to the meaning of the passage. One can show that there is some difference between "lambs" and "sheep" when the totality of their respective semantic ranges is taken into account; similarly, there is a difference between "to shepherd" and "to feed." But in this context, it is difficult to see a fundamental theological or linguistic or syntactical reason for the changes. We seem to be in the realm of slight variation for the sake of vague things like "feel" or "style." In any case, my point is that it is rather strange to insist on a semantic distinction between the two words for "to love" *in this context*, and not on small distinctions between other pairs of words in the same context.

10. Selective and prejudicial use of evidence

We have already come across an instance of this fallacy in describing certain treatments of the word κεφαλή (*kephalē*) (fallacy 4); but in that instance my point was background material was improperly handled. Now I am describing a slightly different fallacy, one that may have to do with background material, but is certainly not restricted to such material. I am referring to the kind of appeal to selective evidence that enables the interpreter to say what he or she wants to say, without really listening to what the Word of God says.

Examples of this kind of phenomenon are so numerous that a book could easily be compiled of the various types of distortion generated by this fallacy. I shall restrict myself to one example. Thomas H. Groome, a noted Roman Catholic authority on Christian education, in his discussion of “the Biblical way of knowing,” falls into several exegetical pitfalls. He is deeply guilty of fallacy 7, confusing language and mentality, when he tries to argue the Hebrew way of knowing is not intellectual but experiential. Greek thought, he claims, is quite different; but fortunately (for his thesis), the Hebrew background modified normal pagan Greek, so that even in the New Testament “to know God” has to do with experience, obedience, loving others — not with the acquisition of data. He manages to run afoul of fallacies connected with the improper relation of the Old Testament Semitic background with the New Testament itself (see point 14) & commits himself to the disjunctive fallacy (11, to which I shall turn next). But my concern at the moment is his selective use of biblical evidence. He turns to John’s writings & cites those passages which in relate knowing God or believing in God to keeping God’s commandments and loving others (e.g., 1 John 2:3–5; 3:6). But he fails to cite those many passages, both in John’s writings and elsewhere, that show there’s *also* propositional content to Christian belief. For instance, if I may provide some examples from John, it is imperative to believe not only Christ, but also what he says (e.g., 4:50; 5:47; 11:26); and there are sometimes content clauses after the verb *to believe*—that is, “to believe *that* ...” (e.g., John 13:19; 17:21). Certainly Christian belief and Christian knowledge are not exclusively intellectual; but by being selective with the evidence, Groome has managed to conclude that Christian belief and knowledge are exclusively experiential and nonintellectual. The result is a theory of education that consistently depreciates content. The fallacy lies in Groome’s implicit supposition that presentation of selective evidence constitutes proof.

11. Unwarranted semantic disjunctions and restrictions

Not a few word studies offer the reader either/or alternatives and then force a decision. In other words, they demand semantic disjunction, when complementarity might be a possibility.

We have just witnessed an example from Groome. Here is another, from one of Groome’s colleagues in Christian education. Lawrence O. Richards, arguing that headship in the New Testament has nothing to do with authority (and here his work is a particularly appalling example of the kind of fallacy I discussed in entry 5), comes at last to talking about Jesus’ headship of the church:

Authority, with its right to control and demand obedience, is not suggested. The fact that the living head of the church, Jesus, is a person with supreme authority is presented to comfort and assure it of His ability to meet its needs.... As head He is the source and origin of our life. As head He is the one who sustains the whole body and supplies all we need for growth. As head He is the one who has committed Himself to serve us and is able to bring saving transformation to our personalities. He stoops to lift us up.

Here is formidable disjunction indeed! Either Jesus as head is authoritative and has the right to control and demand obedience, or as head he stoops to lift us up! The truth of the matter is that the eternal Son humbled himself to become a man, and stoops to lift us up, *and* is authoritative and has the right to control things and demand obedience. All authority is his (Matt. 28:18); even our friendship with him is predicated on our obedience to him (John 15:14—which shows that in this sense the friendship isn't reciprocal). And these authority themes are directly connected with Jesus' headship. Richards has committed the disjunctive fallacy (as he repeatedly does) and as a result is not listening to Scripture.

Consider R. C. H. Lenski's treatment of Jesus' prayer in John 17:11, "that they may be one, *just* as (καθώς [*kathōs*] we are one." Because Lenski wishes to preserve the distinctive unity of the Trinity, he insists καθώς (*kathōs*, just as) makes it clear the oneness believers are to enjoy is analogical to that of the Trinity, not identical. Note the form of the argument: either our oneness is analogical, or it is identical; and it is the former is proved by the presence of καθώς (*kathōs*). I agree doctrinally with Lenski: believers cannot precisely duplicate the oneness that exists among the persons of the Godhead, but in certain respects they can imitate it. The steps Lenski takes to reach this conclusion, however, are invalid. In first place, a statement may be formally analogical (i.e., it may be constructed in the form "A is *just as* B") yet establish identity of relationships: for example, "A cat is an animal *just as* a dog is animal." This is formally equivalent to "Christians are one *just as* the Father and Son are one"; but in the statement about animals there is identity of relationship. But in second place, Lenski compounds his error by restricting semantic range of καθώς (*kathōs*) so it can *only* make statements that are analogical (formally *and* ontologically). The fallacy is in failing to grasp the full semantic range of the word καθώς (*kathōs*), which in the New Testament is certainly broad enough to function in *both* of my model sentences. This failure leads to Lenski's erroneous belief that the presence of καθώς (*kathōs*) justifies his theological conclusion. His theological conclusion will stand; but it needs to seek justification elsewhere.

12. Unwarranted restriction of the semantic field

There are many different ways of misunderstanding the meaning of a word in a particular context by illegitimately restricting the word's semantic range. It may be by falsely declaring it a *terminus technicus* (entry 8), by resorting to semantic disjunctions (entry 11), or abusing background material (entry 5). But the problem transcends these individual categories.

We sometimes fail to appreciate how wide the total semantic range of a word is; therefore, when we come to perform the exegesis of a particular passage, we do not adequately consider the potential options & unwittingly exclude possibilities that might include the correct one. A frequently cited example of semantic breadth is bound up with our word *board*. A board is a piece of dressed lumber, a plank. Many people pay room & board, an expression derived from the fact that in older English - the table from which one ate on special occasions - was called a festive board. A group of people gathered for business might be called a board of trustees; and if they get on a ship or a train, they will step on board and hope they do not fall overboard. The same word can function as a verb: workmen may board up a broken window, and passengers board a jetliner.

Trying to drive home the point to one of my classes a few years ago, I asked the students to give me any noun, to see if I could find more than one meaning. The class was immediately offered “roller coaster.” But even in this case, a moment’s reflection turned up the fact that someone involved in a romance that is blowing hot and cold may say, “My love life is a roller coaster!” and everyone will understand what is meant. The point is that colorful word metaphors (and new ones are being invented) must also be included in any word’s total semantic range.

Few words with broad semantic range cause more interpretative difficulties than the copula εἶμι (*eimi*, to be). Caird provides a useful list of what he calls the “main types” of copula usage in Greek:

- a. Identity: “Is the law sin?” (Rom. 7:7)
- b. Attribute: “No one is good except God alone” (Mark 10:18)
- c. Cause: “To be carnally minded is death” (Rom. 8:6)
- d. Resemblance: “The tongue is a fire” (James 3:6)

This is very helpful & is obviously pertinent to any consideration of the four most disputed words in the Bible, “This is my body.” Several branches of Christendom all treat “is” in this sentence as a statement of identity; but quite clearly the semantic range of “to be” is broad enough that identity cannot legitimately be presupposed: it must be argued. Conversely, those who oppose the view that “is” in “this is my body” establishes identity cannot legitimately do so on the ground that neither Hebrew nor Aramaic possesses a true copula; for in the first place, that argument assumes Semitic languages have so influenced the semantic range of εἶμι (*eimi*) that it too is similarly restricted—an assumption that not only needs proving but also is in fact false, and in the second place the argument assumes Hebrew and Aramaic are incapable of expressing predication by any means, which is also false.

Caird proceeds to argue that the statement *this is my body* cannot be one of identity, because “Jesus cannot be supposed to have identified the bread in his hands with the living body of which those hands were part.” But if “body” in this instance has a slightly different referent than the body of which the hands are a part, then “is” is being used metaphorically, and all metaphors belong to class d. The problem, Caird says, is that as soon as we suggest “is” here means something like “represents” or “symbolizes,”

the traditional riposte is that the eucharistic elements are not to be regarded as “mere symbols.” The fallacy in this objection lies in the assumption that symbols are invariably substitutes for the reality they signify, bearing the same relation to it as a still-life painting to real fruit and fish, whetting but not satisfying the appetite. But many symbols, such as a kiss, a handshake & the presentation of a latchkey, are a means, or even the means, of conveying what they represent. The most natural way of taking the copula in the eucharistic saying, therefore, is “represents,” with the understanding that Jesus intended the gift of bread to convey the reality it symbolized.

All this initially seems convincing; but there is one weakness in this argument. In two of the examples Caird gives, a kiss is a symbol of love that actually conveys love because it is part of love; a latchkey given to a growing child is a symbol of freedom that actually conveys freedom because it is one of the means of that freedom. But bread is not simultaneously a symbol for and a part of Jesus’ body in the same way a kiss is a symbol for and a part of love. Caird’s example of a handshake is slightly better; but my point in raising these hesitations is to show that even when “is” is correctly identified as to type of copula, all further discussion is not thereby foreclosed.

We turn now to reflect on Caird's second discussion arising from the four uses of the copula. The final clause of John 1:1, "the Word was God," looks like a statement of identity; but, Caird insists, this cannot be, because the second clause ("the Word was with God") denies it. If we try to take "the Word was God" as an attributive statement (type b—so NEB's "what God was, the Word was"), we still have a problem; for "since God is a class of one, whoever has all the attributes of God is God, so that the attributive converts into a statement of identity."⁷⁷ Caird is ultimately forced to propose a tentative and very paraphrastic rendering that in fact arouses a host of new questions; but the problem is of his own making. Statements of identity are not necessarily reciprocal: "a dog is an animal" does not imply "an animal is a dog." Thus "the Word was God" does not imply "God was the Word." It is true whoever has the attributes of God must be God; but if that person who has the attributes of God also has other attributes, we cannot say God is also that person. Caird simply *affirms* that the second clause of John 1:1 disallows the view the third clause is an identity statement; but that affirmation is demanded by neither lexical semantics nor syntax. The fourth evangelist certainly gives the impression that although God is one, he is some kind of plural unity; for he does not hesitate to have the incarnate Word addressed as Lord and God (20:28). That same perspective may permit us to let the second and third clauses of John 1:1 stand side by side without embarrassment.

In addition to these four standard types of copula usage, I want to add a fifth:

e. Fulfillment: "This is what was spoken by the prophet" (Acts 2:16, NIV).

This isn't an identity statement, since antecedent of "this" is the phenomena set associated with that first Christian Pentecost, not the prophecy itself. The statement really means, "This fulfills what was spoken by the prophet." The same is likely true of the Golden Rule (Matthew 7: 12). The Golden Rule "is" the Law and the Prophets; but since this cannot be an identity statement, some have taken it type d. It's contextually superior to take it as type e: the Golden Rule fulfills the Law and the Prophets, which are presented in Matthew as having a prophetic role in both proposition and type (see 5:17–20; 11:11–13).

Be this as it may, my point is that the unwarranted and premature restriction of the semantic field of a word is a methodological error. The fallacy lies in thinking the correct interpretation of a passage can be discovered anyway; and in many instances that is not possible.

13. Unwarranted adoption of an expanded semantic field

The fallacy in this instance lies in the supposition that the meaning of a word in a specific context is much broader than the context itself allows and may bring with it the word's entire semantic range. This step is sometimes called the *illegitimate totality transfer*. I presented one example of this danger, a special case, in the discussion of problems surrounding synonymy (entry 9). Silva describes many more. Of these I pass on one: "It would be admittedly invalid to overload Acts 7:38 with all the senses in which ἐκκλησία [*ekklēsia*, "church"] is used by the apostles; some of these senses (reference to the so-called universal church) would actually be contradictory in this verse. However, it's easy, especially in course of a sermon, to comment on the broad meanings of a word at the risk of obscuring its specific function in a given text."

14. Problems relating to the Semitic background of the Greek New Testament

There is a large nest of difficult questions that can be grouped together under this heading, and a corresponding array of fallacies. The kinds of problems I have in mind may be brought out by asking a few rhetorical questions: To what extent is the vocabulary of the Greek New Testament shaped by the Semitic languages which underlie large parts of it (especially the Gospels & parts of Acts)? To what extent are the normal semantic ranges of New Testament Greek words altered by the impact of the writer? Or by his reading of the Hebrew Testament, where applicable? Or by indirect influence of the Hebrew Old Testament on the Septuagint, which has in turn influenced the New Testament?

15. Unwarranted neglect of distinguishing peculiarities of a corpus

Because Paul uses δικαιοῦω (*dikaioō*) to mean “to justify,” and often uses δικαιοσύνη (*dikaiosynē*) to mean “justification,” many scholars have applied this meaning to the term when it’s used by other writers. Not a few, for instance, take “justification” to be the meaning of δικαιοσύνη (*dikaiosynē*) in Matthew 5:20; but Benno Przybylski has convincingly shown δικοσύνη (*dikaiosynē*) in Matthew always means an individual’s conduct of righteous life, not forensic righteousness imputed to him. The “call” of God in Paul is effective: if someone is “called,” he is a believer. By contrast, in the synoptic Gospels, “call” means something like God’s “invitation,” for in these writers’ usage many are “called” but few are chosen (Matt. 20 :16; 22: 14). The fallacy involved in this case is the false assumption that one New Testament writer’s predominant usage of any word is roughly that of all the other New Testament writers; very often that is not the case.

16. Unwarranted linking of sense and reference

Reference or denotation is indication of some nonlinguistic entity by means of a linguistic symbol (for our purposes, a word). Not all words are referential. Proper names clearly are: “Moses” denotes or refers to a certain historical man with that name; “grace” in many Pauline contexts is at least partially referential, in it refers to or denotes an attribute of God. However, the sense or meaning of a word is not its referent but the mental content with which that word is associated. Some words, notably abstract adjectives, have meaning but no referent (e.g., “beautiful”).

Clearly, then, sense and reference can be distinguished. But probably the majority of biblical scholars use these categories with less precision than linguists do. For instance, an expositor may say that such and such a word denotes X—where X is not the referent but the sense of the word.

But the reason these considerations are important for our purposes is that many of the word–study fallacies considered in this chapter presuppose a reference view of meaning—that is, words in this view are thought to be related to reality by naming real entities. This encourages the faulty notion that a word has a “basic meaning.” Perhaps the best refutation of this view is of Gilbert Ryle, who compares two sets of five words:

- a. three is a prime number
- b. Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Locke, Berkeley

Now if every word were a name, then each of the five words in the two sets would have to refer to an extralinguistic reality. This is true for b, but it misses the point of a, which, unlike b, is a sentence. A sentence cannot be analyzed into the things each word in the sentence “names.” It follows that the meaning of words in a grammatically coherent array, as in a, is different from the theoretical referent of each word.

Failure to understand these matters was one of the forces that led to *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, especially the early volumes. The very nature of the presentation argues implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) that **words primarily refer to extralinguistic realities, so that not only can the realities be understood by word studies, but the words themselves take on immense freight.** But as important as word studies are, it is very doubtful if profound understanding of any text or of any theme is really possible by word studies alone.

The Heart of the Matter: Coping with Context

Perhaps principal reason why word studies constitute a particularly rich source for exegetical fallacies is many preachers & Bible teachers know Greek only well enough to use concordances, or perhaps a little more. There is little feel for Greek as language; and so there is the temptation to display what has been learned in Bible study, which as often as not is a great deal of lexical information without restraining influence of context. The solution, of course, is to learn more Greek, not less, and to gain at least a rudimentary knowledge of linguistics.

The heart of the issue is that semantics, meaning, is more than the meaning of words. It involves phrases, sentences, discourse, genre, style; it demands a feel for not only syntagmatic word studies (those that relate words to other words) but also paradigmatic word studies (those that ponder why *this* word is used instead of *that* word).⁴

⁴ Carson, D. A. (1996). *Exegetical fallacies* (2nd ed., pp. 27–64). Carlisle, U.K.; Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster; Baker Books.

A good word study will evaluate many contexts to determine the range of meanings available to the writer/speaker during a specific time period.

The biblical authors were not explicitly thinking in grammatical categories. Nor did their first readers use grammar consciously to understand what they were hearing or reading.

Grammatical Fallacies

One might expect a series on exegetical fallacies to include more examples, and a greater diversity of examples, drawn from the grammatical arena than from word studies. After all, in complex syntactical units there is a greater number of variables than in single words, and therefore a greater number of things to go wrong. It is like comparing a stripped-down Chevy & a space shuttle: assuming reasonable equality in workmanship when the two machines were put together, the shuttle will suffer far more breakdowns and require much more maintenance than the Chevy. I have been thinking of developing a corollary to Murphy's Law, to the effect that in any system the law triumphs either in proportion to the number of components in the system or in exponential proportion to the number of components in the system.

Nevertheless, I am keeping this chapter briefer than the preceding one; and my examples will by and large be fairly easy ones. There are several reasons for this decision. First, word studies cast up as many fallacies as they do because seminary – trained pastors have enough equipment to generate them, but do not have enough equipment to make out some kinds of grammatical error. Many students who has looked up every instance of ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*) in the New Testament and drawn some questionable conclusions; but how many have looked up every instance of the genitive absolute in the New Testament, performed an inductive study, and drawn questionable conclusions? Until very recently, such a list could be compiled only by reading through the Greek New Testament and noting every instance; therefore, hundreds of common constructions have never been subjected to the inductive scrutiny which words have undergone. Second, grammatical analysis has not been popular in the last few decades of biblical study. Far more time and energy have been devoted to lexical semantics than to grammar. The result is broad assumption that many grammatical questions are closed, when in fact they are not. And third, some grammatical fallacies raise questions of such enormous complexity that they ought to be treated in separate monographs before being introduced at a semi-popular level. I shall shortly refer to one or two of these.

The Flexibility of New Testament Greek

Before we begin this survey of some elementary grammatical fallacies, it is important to remember the principle of entropy operates in living languages as well as physics. Languages “break down” with time: syntax becomes less structured, the number of exceptions increases, the morphology is simplified, etc. The practical significance of this fact is that the relatively more structured grammar of the period of classical Greek cannot legitimately be applied holus-bolus to the Greek New Testament. The results of the great papyrological finds that alerted New Testament scholars to this truth were widely disseminated only near the end of the past century. That means technical commentaries on the New Testament Greek text written much before the end of the past century are unreliable on many grammatical points. J. A. Robinson in his commentary on Ephesians, for instance, tries to apply classical structures to the use of πᾶς (*pas*, all, every, whole) in that epistle & draws many conclusions that are demonstrably wrong.

Distinctions in classical Greek may be observed only relatively more frequently than in Hellenistic Greek; but even so, grammarians who have been trained in the classics need reorientation to Hellenistic Greek if they are to avoid certain errors when they read the New Testament.

Fallacies Connected with Various Tenses and Moods

It is not altogether clear that “tense” is a very accurate way of referring to the “Greek tenses.” The word *tense* calls up notions of time: present tense, future tense, and so forth. But suppose a verb form is *morphologically* “present tense” while not in fact referring to present time but to past time: then shall we refer to such an example as “past present tense”? The possibilities for confusion are boundless. To aid in clarity of the following discussion, I shall use “tense” only to refer to morphological form, with *no* implications whatsoever with respect to time.

The majority of contemporary students of Greek grammar argue that Greek tenses are time-related in the indicative and reflect *Aktionsart* (“kind of action”) outside the indicative. I’m not persuaded this is right. A rising number of Greek grammarians argue the fundamental semantic force of the Greek tense is “aspect”: it reflects the author’s choice of how to present an action. The time of the action is not conveyed by the Greek tense (which virtually all sides concede is true outside the indicative anyway), nor the kind of action that took place, but by the author’s conception of that action — for example, an author might think of a particular action as a “complete” action, even if it took a very long time, and choose to use the aorist tense.

With these distinctions in mind, it is worth reviewing some recent discussion of particular tenses (remember: by this I mean “tense forms”). I shall begin with the “standard” categories that are commonly deployed in Greek grammars, point out the difficulties and fallacies, and move toward an aspectual approach.

1. *The aorist tense*

More than two decades ago, Frank Stagg wrote an article about “The Abused Aorist.” The problem as he saw it was that competent scholars were deducing from the presence of an aorist verb that the action in question was “once for all” or “completed.” The problem arises in part because the aorist is often described as the punctiliar tense. Careful grammarians, of course, operating within the traditional categories, understood and explained that this does not mean the aorist could be used only for point actions. The aorist, after all, is well-named: it is a-orist, without a place, undefined. It simply refers to the action itself without specifying whether the action is unique, repeated, ingressive, instantaneous, or accomplished. The best grammarians understood this well & used the term *punctiliar* much the way a mathematician uses the term *point* in geometry — to refer to a location without magnitude. But just as the mathematical notion is not intuitively obvious, so also has the notion of punctiliar action been a stumbling block to many interpreters. Stagg provided many examples of grammarians & commentators who insist, for instance, the phrase *all sinned* (ἧμαρτον [*hēmarton*]) in Romans 5: 12 must indicate a once-for-all action, presumably when Adam sinned; that the presentation of the body in Romans 12:1 is a once-for-all commitment; that the repentance noted in Revelation 3:19 must be once-for-all action because the verbal form is μετανόησον (*metanoēson*); that the aorist ἐτύθη (*etuthē*) in 1 Corinthians 5:7 (“for Christ our passover lamb *was sacrificed*”) means that Christ’s death is a completed, once-for-all event & so forth.

And if grammarians and commentators draw such conclusions, who can blame the busy pastor for trading on the aorist to gain theological capital? Stagg proceeded to give numerous counterexamples, a few of which I now pass on:

- “so then, my loved ones, as you have always obeyed” (ὕπηκούσατε [*hypekousate*], Phil. 2:12)—clearly not a once-for-all action or a temporally punctiliar action
- “but you, whenever you pray, go into (ἔισελθε [*eiselthe*]) your room” (Matt. 6:6)—again, repetition is presupposed
- “what you have heard (ἠκούσατε [*ēkousate*]) from the beginning” (1 John 2:24, NIV)—clear extension over time
- “five times I received (ἔλαβον [*elabon*]) the thirty-nine lashes” (2 Cor. 11:24)
- “they lived (ἔζησαν [*edzēsan*]) and reigned (ἐβασίλευσαν [*ebasileusan*]) a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4)
- “these all died (ἀπέθανον [*apethanon*]) in faith” (Heb. 11:13)—but clearly not all at the same time!
- “transgressions and sins, in which you used to walk (περιπατήσατε [*periepatēsate*]) when you followed the ways of the world” (Eph. 2:1–2)
- “guard yourselves (φυλάξατε [*phylaxate*]) from idols” (1 John 5:21)—which clearly does not mean that if we have guarded ourselves once, the danger is over
- “that he might show (ἐνδείξεται [*endeixētai*]) in the coming ages the incomparable riches of his grace” (Eph. 2:7)—which clearly does not mean God will display his grace just once in all eternity and get it over with

Even in the indicative, where the aorist usually refers to some action in past time, the pastness of the time cannot be counted on:

- “in you I am well pleased” (εὐδόκησα [*eudoxēsa*], Mark 1:11)
- “the grass withers” (ἐξηράνθη [*exēranthē*], 1 Peter 1:24, NIV)

Stagg recognized, of course, that the presence of an aorist verb does not mean the action is *not* once-for-all or located in past time or temporally punctiliar. When we read that Sapphira fell (ἔπεσεν [*epesen*]) at Peter’s feet, context makes it clear that her falling was as “instantaneous” an action as that kind can ever be. Similarly, there may be contextual reasons for thinking that all persons did in fact die when Adam committed his first sin (Romans 5:12); it is just that the aorist verb ἡμαρτον (*hēmarton*) does not prove it. No believer doubts that Jesus Christ was sacrificed once only (1 Cor. 5:7), since after all some passages explicitly affirm this (e.g., Heb. 10:12); but this theological conclusion, as important as it is, derives no sure support from the presence of an aorist verb.

Stagg has not been the only one to warn against the abuse of the aorist; yet one still finds not only preachers but also competent scholars making the mistake of resting too much weight on it. For instance, in the excellent commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews by Philip E. Hughes, we are told, regarding opening verses, “The aorist tense, used both of God’s speaking by prophets (λαλήσας [*lalēsas*]) and also of his speaking by Christ (ἐλάλησεν [*elalēsen*]), indicates that God has finished speaking in both cases.” The conclusion, arguably, is theologically correct; but it is not proved by this argument. Commenting on 1:4, with respect to the Son’s “becoming” superior to the angels, Hughes writes, “The aorist participle γενόμενος [*genomenos*], ‘having become,’

refers, as Spicq points out, to ‘a dated event of history.’ ” A final example comes from a recent article in which Heikki Räisänen, commenting on Romans 3:27 (“Where, then, is boasting? It is *excluded*”; NIV, italics added), writes, “In any case, the aorist (ἐξεκλείσθη [*exekleisthē*]) certainly means that the exclusion was a once-for-all act.”

Linguistically, this means we should distinguish between the “semantics” (“meaning”) of the morphological form and the “pragmatics” (of the context). From the preceding discussion, it should be clear that failure to make this distinction contributes to two different fallacies. The more common one falsely holds that the aorist tense always bears a highly specific meaning (usually identifiable as one of its “pragmatic” uses). The evidence clearly refutes this fallacy.

None of this directly answers the question what a tense actually means when it’s stripped out of any context — for example, what the semantics of the aorist tense are. Increasingly, grammarians who’re linguistically trained argue for such meaning as the following: the aorist tense “grammaticalizes” (that is, it puts into morphological form, into grammar) the author’s or speaker’s conceptualization of an event as a complete event. I know that sounds complicated. But the point of such a definition is that there is no one-to-one connection between the Greek tense-form and the *time* of the action, or between the Greek tense-form and the *kind* of action (as if a certain kind of action absolutely demands a specific tense), but between Greek tense-form and the author’s choice of how the action will be conceived. Temporal constraints are introduced by other factors in the sentence or discourse (as in, say, Hebrew, Chinese & many other languages). I suspect that over the next few decades the categories of linguistic analysis, and especially the categories of aspect theory, will gradually work themselves into the standard grammars and commentaries on the Greek New Testament.

2. The first person aorist subjunctive

We begin by asking, What is a deliberative subjunctive? When is a deliberative subjunctive used? The answer, typically, is that the deliberative subjunctive is a first person (sing. or pl.) use of the subjunctive in interrogative sentences that deal with what is necessary, desirable, possible, or doubtful. The need is for a decision about the proper course of action; sometimes the question is rhetorical and sometimes an answer is expected.

What I want to point out here is not exactly a fallacy, unless we can include under that rubric those grammatical labelings which inadequately hide more than they reveal. The typical definition of a deliberative subjunctive (and there are several variations) covers three separate categories. The true deliberative, like the hortatory subjunctive, is intramural — the first person(s) denoted by the subject of the verb pose(s) a question that must be answered by himself (themselves)... The owner of the vineyard asks himself, “What shall I do?” (Luke 20:13); and the result of his deliberation is his own answer, expressed in his resolve to send his son. There are only seven examples of this true deliberative subjunctive in the New Testament.

The second and third categories are both pseudodeliberations. The first person subject(s) of the subjunctive ask(s) the question not of himself (themselves) — which would make it a true deliberative subjunctive—but either of someone else, seeking a direct answer (a direct-question pseudodeliberative subjunctive), or else merely as device to introduce a statement, with no hint of deliberation or of a search for an answer from an outsider (a rhetorical pseudodeliberative subjunctive).

“Should we pay or not pay?” the Pharisees and Herodians ask Jesus (Mark 12:14). The form is “deliberative” in the broadest sense: it is a question in the first person subjunctive (δῶμεν ἢ μὴ δῶμεν [*dōmen ē mē dommen*]). But of course, it is not a true deliberative at all, since the whole point of the question is to force Jesus into making a statement. This is a direct–question pseudo-deliberative subjunctive. Similar could be said of Mark 6:24, where Salome asks τί αἰτήσωμαι (*ti aitēsommai*, “What shall I ask for?”). The subjunctive, not the indicative is used, because there is some uncertainty in her mind, some “deliberation” as to what the answer should be; but the example is nevertheless distinguishable from the true deliberative, since the subject confidently expects another party, in this case her mother Herodias, to furnish her with an answer.

Similarly, when the Apostle Paul in Romans 6:15 asks ἁμαρτήσωμεν ὅτι οὐκ ἐσμὲν ὑπὸ νόμου (*hamartēsommen hoti ouk esmen hypo nomon*, “Shall we sin because we are not under law....” [NIV]), the subjunctive is retained because the question is formally open-ended, deliberative. But it is certainly not a true deliberative, since Paul does not pose the question as a reflection of his uncertainty, of his thoughtful deliberation. Nor is this a direct–question pseudodeliberative, since he is not asking the Roman believers for their opinions. Rather, he is using a rhetorical device to draw his readers into his argument, a device that sets up the hearty μὴ γένοιτο (*mē genoito*, “By no means!” [NIV]). In other words, this is a rhetorical pseudodeliberative use of the subjunctive.

My point is fourfold: much grammatical territory remains to be won, the results can be exegetically useful, systematic distinctions must be worked out between semantics (of the morphological form) and pragmatics (of the context) and meanwhile not a few grammatical categories mask as much as they reveal.

3. *The middle voice*

The most common fallacy in connection with the middle voice is the supposition that virtually everywhere it occurs it is either reflexive or suggests that the subject acts of itself.

In particular, several authors have strenuously argued that the middle verb παύσονται (*pausontai*) in 1st Corinthians 13: 8 is exegetically highly significant...

Prophecies will be destroyed (καταργηθήσονται [*katargēthēsontai*]), knowledge will be destroyed (καταργηθήσεται [*katargēthēsetai*]); but tongues will cease (παύσονται [*pausontai*])—that is, there is no need for tongues to be destroyed (passive) by someone or something, for the middle (it is argued) suggests that tongues *will cease by themselves, because of something intrinsic to their very nature*. This interpretation of the middle is then sometimes linked with the view that tongues played a useful role in the church until the canon was complete (some take τὸ τέλειον [*to teleion*], “the perfect thing” in v. 10 to refer to the canon); but from that point on, they are intrinsically obsolete and cease. The conclusion to be drawn is that there is no valid gift of tongues today.

When we examine the use of the verb παύω (*pauo*) in the New Testament, we discover that it regularly appears in middle form. In the active voice, its lexical meaning is “to stop, to cause to stop, to relieve”; in the middle, either “to stop oneself” (reflexive usage), or “to cease” (i.e., it becomes equivalent to a deponent with intransitive force). It never unambiguously bears the meaning “to cease of itself” (because of something intrinsic in the nature of the subject); and several passages rule out such overtones as automatic semantic force of the middle voice form of this verb. For instance, in Luke 8:24, we read that Jesus rebuked the wind and the raging waters, and they “subsided” (NIV; ἐπαύσαντο [*epausanto*])—which clearly cannot mean that they ceased because of something intrinsic to their nature. Something similar can be said of the rioters who

“stopped” (ἐπαύσαντο [*epausanto*]) beating Paul (Acts 21:32): they did so because they saw the soldiers, not because of some internal constraint (see also 1 Peter 4:1).

Fallacies Connected with Various Syntactical Units

1. Conditionals

Three fallacies deserve mention under this heading. The first is a common one. In first-class conditions, often called “real” conditions, it is often thought the protasis is assumed to be true; that is, the thing assumed is real. On this basis, many prefer to begin every first-class protasis with “since” instead of “if.” For instance, in one commentary on 1st Corinthians, we are told, regarding 1st Corinthians 15: 12–16: “The conditional sentences throughout this section begin with *ei de*, the condition being an assumed fact: ‘If it is preached (as it is) that Christ has been raised ...’ (v. 12). The same is true of vv. 13, 14, 16, 17, and 19.”

This is in fact a fallacy. In a first-class condition the protasis is assumed true for the sake of the argument, but the thing actually assumed may or may not be true. To put it another way, there is stress on the reality of the assumption, but not on the reality of content that is assumed. Thus, in Matthew 12:27, when Jesus asks, “Even if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out?” the assumption that Jesus casts out demons by Beelzebub is real, in order for the argument to work; but the thing assumed remains unreal, for Jesus didn’t in fact cast out demons by Beelzebub. Of course, in the example from 1st Corinthians 15:12–16, both the assumption & the thing assumed are in fact real; but that fact couldn’t be established simply on the ground that the conditional structure to which this protasis belongs is first class.

Second, it is a fallacy to hold that third – class conditions (ἐάν [*ean*] plus the subjunctive in the protasis) have some built-in expectation of fulfillment, doubtful or otherwise. James Boyer has convincingly shown that the third – class condition simply indicates futurity without any implication about possible or impossible, likely or unlikely fulfillment.

But third, Boyer himself falls foul of a fallacy when he argues that there is no clear “time reference” in the apodosis of third – class conditionals. After all, he argues, every apodosis is future in meaning, whether the verb is an aorist imperative, an οὐ μή (*ou mē*) subjunctive, with a present indicative, a future indicative, an aorist subjunctive with ἵνα (*hina*) or some other form.

Present indicative verbs in the apodosis indicate action coincident with the time in which the action of the protasis is fulfilled; future indicative verbs in the apodosis indicate action that is subsequent to the time in which the action of the protasis is fulfilled (similarly the apodosis with οὐ μή [*ou mē*] plus the subjunctive). But all of this presupposes that the verb tenses are primarily time-based in the indicative. There are too many objections to allow that supposition to stand.

Boyer is wrong to suggest that all the apodoses of third-class conditionals are future-referring;

FIGURE 4

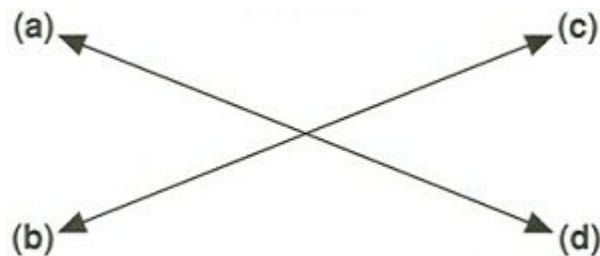
	Use 1	Use 2
Articular	(a) definite	(c) generic
Anarthrous	(b) indefinite—i.e., qualitative	(d) nongeneric (individual item)

I was wrong to suggest so easy an alignment with the verb tenses of the apodosis. For example, in Mark 3:24–25 Jesus says, “If a kingdom is divided against itself [third–class conditional], that kingdom cannot stand (οὐ δύναται [present tense] σταθῆναι [*ou dynatai stathēnai*]). If a house is divided against itself [third–class conditional], that house cannot stand (οὐ δυνήσεται [future tense] ἡ οἰκία σταθῆναι [*ou dynēsetai hē oikia stathēnai*]).” Clearly, “Jesus is not saying that whereas a divided kingdom is currently unable to stand a house will only fall in the future.” Two or three explanations of the change of tense in the verb δύναμαι (*dynamai*) are possible, but the temporal one will not work. Similarly, in Matt. 18:13: “If he finds it [third–class conditional] he rejoices” — where the present tense in the apodosis clearly refers to action that is future with reference to the time of the protasis, not contemporaneous with it. Numerous other examples could be given.

2. The article: preliminary considerations

The definite article in Greek is extraordinarily difficult to classify exhaustively. I suspect that some uses are determined more by the “feel” of the speaker or writer of the language than by unambiguous principles. Nevertheless, some guiding principles exist & many errors are made by those who ignore them or fail to understand them. In particular, it is a fallacy to suppose that because the Greek text has an article, the English translation must have one, or because Greek text is anarthrous at some point, the English translation must follow suit. Unlike English, Greek has no indefinite article; and its definite article often has functions widely different from the use in English of either the definite or the indefinite article. At the risk of oversimplification, we can schematize the fundamental uses of the Greek article as in figure 4. The chart is reasonably self–

FIGURE 5



explanatory. One use of the definite article is to specify, to make a substantive definite. The corresponding anarthrous usage leaves the substantive *indefinite*, not so much specifying it as leaving it “qualitative.” The second general use of the article, however, is the generic (e.g.,

ἄξιός ὁ ἐργάτης τοῦ μισθοῦ αὐτοῦ [*axios ho ergatēs tou misthou autou*] [Luke 10:7], lit. “the worker is worthy of his wages,” but English idiom prefers “a worker is worthy of his wages”; the corresponding anarthrous usage suggests the substantive is *nongeneric*; that is, individualized (e.g., “a [certain] worker”). Many of the uses of the Greek article are subsets of one of these two general categories. For example, the anaphoric usage is a subset of (a); the preference of abstract nouns to retain the article can be considered a subset of (c).

What immediately stands out from this table is that there is a surprising conceptual crossover, schematized in figure 5. That is, the articular usage under use 1 has certain conceptual affinities with the anarthrous usage under use 2 & the anarthrous usage under use 1 has certain conceptual affinities with the articular usage under use 2. The very least that this means is that the exegete must be careful regarding conclusions drawn from mere presence or absence of an article. Apart from certain idioms, only context and the feel gained by experience in the Greek text will serve as adequate control.

Grammarians understand these things; but it is surprising how many commentators do not seem to. Lenski is notoriously unreliable in his treatment of the Greek article, frequently making appeal either to the presence (or absence) of the article in Greek to establish the corresponding pattern in English, or aligning the articular noun with a specific meaning (e.g., articular νόμος [*nomos*] represents Mosaic law; anarthrous νόμος [*nomos*] represents the principle of law).

3. The article: the Granville Sharp rule

Some grammars present the rule in a rather simplistic form, such as the following:

Sharp’s rule states: if two substantives are connected by καί and both have the article, they refer to different persons or things . . .; if the first has an article and the second does not, the second refers to the same person or thing as the first. . . . Of course, the rule could also be applied to a series of three or more.

The initial fallacy is in formulating the Granville Sharp rule with less care than Granville Sharp did. Sharp’s rule is in fact quite complex, too complex to analyze here. What is quite clear, however, is that he excluded plural nouns from his rule (not to mention other restrictions). Thus, if one article governs two plural substantives joined by καί (*kai*), there is no reason to think that the two substantives refer to the same thing, even though the article groups them together so that in certain respects they function as a single entity.

Failure to recognize this point lies behind the insistence of some scholars that Matthew is anachronistic in his treatment of the Jewish leaders. In Matt. 16: 1, 6 and elsewhere, Matthew lumps Pharisees & Sadducees together under one article. Only those so far removed from Jesus’ day (it is said) that they were unaware that Pharisees and Sadducees were separate and distinct parties could have used such a construction here. The fallacy, of course, lies in relying upon the Granville Sharp rule where Sharp himself explicitly insists his rule doesn’t operate. The error of commentators is at least understandable, since so many of the standard grammars also get this point wrong, but Sharp himself can scarcely be blamed. As I have shown elsewhere, only one article governs both nouns in expressions like “the Epicureans and Stoics” (Acts 17:18). Indeed, the only place where τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ Σαδδουκαίων (*tōn Pharisaiōn kai Saddoukaiōn*) is found outside Matthew is in Acts 23: 7; and in this context the doctrinal disparity between the two groups is presupposed. In each pair, the two nouns are linked together for the purpose at hand. In Acts 23:7, the purpose at hand is the dispute that broke out between them.

In Matthew 16:1, the Pharisees and Sadducees are linked in their question to Jesus, presumably as they function together as representatives of the Sanhedrin. In 16:6, 11, 12 the use of the phrase τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ Σαδδουχαίων (*tōn Pharisaiōn kai Saddoukaiōn*, of the Pharisees and Sadducees) doesn't mean the evangelist thought the teaching of the two groups was identical, but only in certain respects their teaching was alike—in particular its antipathy toward Jesus and the revelation he was bringing.

At the other end of the scale, καὶ ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν (*kai ho nikōn kai ho teromn*, Rev. 2:26) does not in context refer to two people, one who conquers and another who keeps God's word. Rather, it appears to be a slightly cumbersome idiom to invest this obedient conqueror with a weighty label. The point in this case is that even where the text doesn't have one article governing two substantives, but two articles, one for each substantive, it does not follow that the inverse of the Granville Sharp rule holds true, such that there *must* be two separate referents.

4. The article: the Colwell rule and related matters

It is now well known that in a clause like καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος (*kai theos ēn ho logos*, usually rendered “and the Word was God,” John 1:1), the noun with the article is the subject, even though it is placed after the verb. The more difficult question in such cases is whether any rule governs the anarthrous noun before the verb: how do we know whether it is definite or it's indefinite, “God” or “a god”?

In 1933 E. C. Colwell published an important article that addressed the matter. He studied definite predicate nouns (their “definiteness” was determined by his own judgment) both before and after the verb, both with and without the article. He observed, among other things, that if a definite noun preceded a copulative verb, it was normally anarthrous; if it followed, it was articular. Applied to John 1:1, this rule means it's quite responsible to take θεός (*theos*) to mean the definite “God,” not the indefinite “a god,” since according to Colwell 87 percent of definite predicates before the verb in the Greek New Testament are anarthrous.

Colwell's work has been widely cited, but it has some methodological weaknesses:

... while the [Colwell] canon may reflect a general tendency it is not absolute by any means; after all, it takes no account of relative clauses or proper nouns, and he has also omitted a considerable class of “qualitative” nouns like that in ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν. Moreover, he is the first to admit the lack of objectivity in his method of counting: he professes to include only *definite* nouns among his anarthrous predicates, and the degree of definiteness is extremely difficult to assess.

Beyond even these limitations, however, Colwell's rule can easily be abused. The fallacy in many popular appeals to Colwell is in thinking the part of his rule that pertains to John 1:1 is based on an examination of all anarthrous predicates that precede copulative verbs. If that were the case, his figure of 87 percent would be impressive. But he only claims to have examined definite anarthrous nouns (as he determines “definiteness”). Recently one of my students, Ed Dewey, used our GRAMCORD facilities to retrieve every anarthrous noun (including definite, indefinite, qualitative, and proper nouns, with a residue of ambiguous entries) that precedes the copulative verbs γίνομαι (*ginomai*) and εἰμί (*eimi*) in the Greek New Testament. He discovered that definite nouns and indefinite nouns make up an approximately equal proportion of the entire list.

In other words, it is a fallacy to argue, on the basis of the fact that a predicate noun preceding a copulative verb is anarthrous, that it is highly likely to be definite. Statistically this is no more likely than the conclusion it is *indefinite*. Colwell's rule never claims otherwise: it *begins* with the criterion of "definiteness" and then develops its breakdown. As such, it is still valuable, and certainly allows for the interpretation "and the Word was God" in John 1:1, if other contextual indicators suggest it (and they do). Moreover, McGaughy has developed a new rule that makes the conclusion quite certain in this case. But Colwell's rule itself must not be abused.

5. Relationships of tenses

Exegetical and theological fallacies arise in this area when conclusions are drawn without adequate attention being paid to the relationships between clause & clause, established (usually) by the verbal forms. For instance, I. Howard Marshall interprets Hebrews 3:6b ("And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast," NIV) and Hebrews 3:14 ("We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first," NIV) as if they say exactly the same thing, that "membership of God's household is conditional upon perseverance."²⁸ In one sense, of course, that is correct; but close attention to the tenses in their context in Hebrews 3: 14 reveals an extra ingredient in this verse. We have become (γεγόναμεν [*gegonamen*]) — past reference, I would argue—partakers of Christ if we now, in the present, hold firmly to the confidence we had at first. It follows from this verse that although perseverance is mandated, it is also the evidence of what has taken place in the past. Put another way, perseverance becomes one of the essential ingredients of what it means to be a Christian, of what a partaker of Christ is and does. If persevering shows we have (already) come to share in Christ, it can only be because sharing in Christ has perseverance for its inevitable fruit.⁵

⁵ Carson, D. A. (1996). [*Exegetical fallacies*](#) (2nd ed., p. 86). Carlisle, U.K.; Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster; Baker Books.

3 Good Reasons to Believe the Bible Has Not Been Corrupted

by [Dave Miller, Ph.D.](#)



[EDITOR'S NOTE: The image on the front cover of this month's R&R is St. Catherine's Monastery where Codex Sinaiticus was discovered by Constantin von Tischendorf in 1844.]

Many are those who insist that the Bible has been corrupted over time, that we do not really know which verses belong in the Bible, and that translation errors are so plentiful that we do not have the original message. Yet these allegations have been confronted and refuted time and time again. Apart from the Old Testament (which has been fully verified), a myriad of books over the years have masterfully demonstrated the integrity of the New Testament text, including such volumes as J.W. McGarvey's *Evidences of Christianity*, Kurt and Barbara Aland's *The Text of the New Testament*, F.F. Bruce's *The Canon of Scripture*, Bruce Metzger's *The Text of the New Testament*, F.H.A. Scrivener's *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, Sir Frederic Kenyon's *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, Benjamin Warfield's *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, and many others. Those who cast aspersions upon the integrity of the biblical text manifest either abysmal, inexcusable ignorance of the long established facts of the matter or deliberate bias. If the reader desires the truth regarding the authenticity and integrity of the Bible, **the evidence is available**—if the individual is willing to spend the time and effort to weigh that evidence and arrive at the proper conclusion (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1). Do we have the message that the original authors penned? The fact is that the books of the New Testament are the most extensively verified books of ancient history. The facts completely undermine and discredit any attack on the integrity and transmission of the Bible.

REASON #1: THE NEW TESTAMENT GREEK TEXT HAS BEEN AUTHENTICATED

We know how the original New Testament books read because **we have three surviving classes of evidence by which to reconstruct the original New Testament**: Greek manuscripts, ancient versions, and patristic citations. The current number of Greek manuscript copies containing all or part of the New Testament now stands at 5,795. This amount of manuscript evidence for the text of the New Testament is **far greater than that available for any ancient classical author**. The time between the writing of the original books of the New Testament and the earliest surviving copies is **relatively brief**. Although no two manuscript copies agree in every detail, the degree of accuracy achieved by most scribes was **remarkably high**. The vast majority of textual variants involve **minor** matters that do not alter any basic teaching of the New Testament. **No feature of Christian doctrine is at stake**. Suitable solutions to these differences are detectable. Even if they weren't, manuscript evidence is so prolific that **the original reading is one of the extant options**. Even those variants that some might deem "doctrinally significant" (e.g., Mark 16:9-20; John 7:53-8:11) pertain to matters that are treated elsewhere in the Bible where the question of genuineness/certainty is unquestioned. We can confidently affirm that we have 999/1000^{ths} of the original Greek New Testament intact. The remaining 1/1000th pertains to inconsequential details.

Additionally, a wealth of ancient versions provides further verification of the purity of the biblical text, including Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Gothic, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, Old Slavonic, and others. Textual critics through history have steadfastly affirmed the value of these ancient versions in reconstructing the New Testament text. For example, Vaganay observed: "After the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, the versions constitute the most valuable source for writing the history of this text" (1934, p. 28; cf. Vogels, 1923, p. 84—"The versions are very valuable for establishing the original text of the Bible."). Though noting the limitations, the Alands admitted: "[T]he importance of the versions is substantial" (1987, p. 182).

The same may be said for the wealth of textual materials available via the so-called "Church Fathers," i.e., early Christian writers who quoted, paraphrased, and otherwise alluded to passages from Scripture in their letters, commentaries, and correspondence. This latter source of information is so prolific that Metzger affirmed: "Indeed, so extensive are these citations that if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament" (1968, p. 86).

These contentions have been verified by the greatest textual critics and linguistic scholars of the past two centuries. Their conclusions have not become outdated, but remain as valid today as when first formulated. If the integrity of the text of the Bible was fully authenticated in their day, **it remains so today**. Consider the following statements by some of these world class authorities.

Scholarly Verification of the Purity of the New Testament Text

F.F. Bruce (1910-1990) was a biblical scholar who taught Greek at the University of Edinburgh and the University of Leeds, chaired the Department of Biblical History and Literature at the University of Sheffield, received an honorary Doctor of Divinity from Aberdeen University, and served as the Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester. He wrote over 40 books and served as Editor of *The Evangelical*

Quarterly and *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*. Bruce declared: “The variant readings about which any doubt remains among textual critics of the N.T. **affect no material question of historic fact or of Christian faith and practice**” (1975, pp. 19-20, emp. added). He also stated:

In view of the inevitable accumulation of such errors over so many centuries, it may be thought that the original texts of the New Testament documents have been corrupted beyond restoration. Some writers, indeed, insist on the likelihood of this to such a degree that one sometimes suspects they would be glad if it were so. **But they are mistaken.** There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament (1963, p. 178, emp. added).

Bruce further insisted:

Something more ought to be said, and said with emphasis. We have been discussing various textual types, and reviewing their comparative claims to be regarded as best representatives of the original New Testament. **But there are not wide divergencies between these types, of a kind that could make any difference to the Church’s responsibility to be a witness and guardian of Holy Writ....** If the variant readings are so numerous, it is because the witnesses are so numerous. But all the witnesses, and all the types which they represent, **agree on every article of Christian belief and practice** (1963, p. 189, emp. added).

Bruce Metzger (1914-2007) was also a scholar of Greek, the New Testament, and New Testament Textual Criticism, serving as professor at Princeton Theological Seminary for 46 years. Described by prominent biblical scholar Raymond Brown as “probably the greatest textual specialist that America has produced” (as quoted in Ehrman and Holmes, 1995, p. xi), Metzger was a recognized authority on the Greek text of the New Testament. He served on the board of the American Bible Society, was the driving force of the United Bible Societies’ series of Greek Texts, and served as Chairperson of the NRSV Bible Committee. He is widely considered one of the most influential New Testament scholars of the 20th century. Concerning ancient versions, Metzger stated:

...even if we had no Greek manuscripts today, by piecing together the information from these translations from a relatively early date, we could actually reproduce the contents of the New Testament. In addition to that, even if we lost all the Greek manuscripts and the early translations, we could still reproduce the contents of the New Testament from the multiplicity of quotations in commentaries, sermons, letters, and so forth of the early church fathers (as quoted in Strobel, 1998, p. 59).

Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901) was a British bishop, biblical scholar and theologian, serving as Bishop of Durham and holding the Regius Professorship of Divinity at Cambridge. His colleague, **Fenton John Anthony Hort** (1828-1892), was an Irish theologian who served as a Professor at Cambridge. Together, they pioneered the widely recognized Greek text *The New Testament in the Original Greek* in 1881. They are still considered to be renowned textual critics. They forthrightly asserted:

With regard to the great bulk of the words of the New Testament...there is no variation or other ground of doubt.... [T]he amount of what can in any sense be called substantial variation is but a small fraction of the whole residuary variation, and **can hardly form more than a thousandth part of the entire text.** Since there is reason to suspect that an exaggerated impression prevails as to the extent of possible textual corruption in the New Testament...**we desire to make it clearly understood beforehand how much of the New Testament stands in no need of a textual critic’s labours** (1882, pp. 2-3, emp. added).

These peerless scholars also insisted: “[I]n the variety and fullness of the evidence on which it rests **the text of the New Testament stands absolutely and unapproachably alone** among ancient prose writing” (p. 278, emp. added). They add: “The books of the New Testament as preserved in extant documents assuredly speak to us in every important respect in language identical with that in which they spoke to those for whom they were originally written” (p. 284).

Benjamin Warfield (1851-1921) was a Professor of Theology at Princeton Seminary from 1887 to 1921. He is considered to be the last of the great Princeton theologians. In his *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, Warfield insightfully observed:

[S]uch has been the providence of God in preserving for His Church in each and every age a **competently exact text of the Scriptures**, that not only is the New Testament unrivalled among ancient writings in **the purity of its text** as actually transmitted and kept in use, but also in the abundance of testimony which has come down to us for castigating its **comparatively infrequent blemishes**.... The great mass of the New Testament, in other words, has been transmitted to us with **no, or next to no, variation** (1886, pp. 12-13,14, emp. added).

Richard Bentley (1662-1742) was an English classical scholar, critic, and theologian who served as Master of Trinity College, Cambridge and was the first Englishman to be ranked with the great heroes of classical learning. He was well-known for his literary and textual criticism, even called the “Founder of Historical Philology,” and credited with the creation of the English school of Hellenism. Here are his comments on the integrity of the New Testament text:

[T]he real text of the sacred writers does not now (since the originals have been so long lost) lie in any single manuscript or edition, but is dispersed in them all. **‘Tis competently exact indeed even in the worst manuscript now extant; nor is one article of faith or moral precept either perverted or lost in them** (1725, pp. 68-69, emp. added).

Marvin Vincent (1834-1922) graduated from Columbia University and became professor of New Testament Exegesis and Criticism at Union Theological Seminary in New York City in the late 19th century. He is best known for his Greek analysis of the words of the New Testament in his *Word Studies in the New Testament*. Regarding the integrity of the text, he observed:

The vast number of variations furnishes no cause for alarm to the devout reader of the New Testament. It is the natural result of the great number of documentary sources. A very small proportion of the variations materially affects the sense, a much smaller proportion is really important, and **no variation affects an article of faith or a moral precept** (1899, p. 7, emp. added).

Sir Frederic George Kenyon (1863-1952) was a widely respected, eminent British paleographer and biblical and classical scholar who occupied a series of posts at the British Museum. He served as President of the British Academy from 1917 to 1921 and President of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem. He made a lifelong study of the Bible as an historical text. In his masterful *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, Kenyon affirmed:

One word of warning...must be emphasized in conclusion. **No fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading**. Constant references to mistakes and divergencies of reading...might give rise to the doubt whether the substance, as well as the language, of the Bible is not open to question. **It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain**. Especially is this the case with the New

Testament. The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the Church is so large, that it is practically certain that **the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities**. This can be said of no other ancient book in the world (1895, pp. 10-11, emp. added).

In his monumental *The Bible and Archaeology*, Kenyon further stated:

The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that **the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written** has now been removed. **Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established** (1940, pp. 288-289, emp. added).

Indeed, “the Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear of hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, faithfully handed down from generation to generation throughout the centuries” (1895, pp. 10-11).

Samuel Davidson (1806-1898) was an Irish biblical scholar who served as Professor of Biblical Criticism at Royal College of Belfast and Professor of Biblical Criticism in the Lancashire Independent College at Manchester. He authored many books on the text of the Bible. Referring to the work of textual criticism, Davidson concluded:

The effect of it has been to **establish the genuineness of the New Testament text** in all important particulars. No new doctrines have been elicited by its aid; nor have any historical facts been summoned by it from their obscurity. **All the doctrines and duties of Christianity remain unaffected....** [I]n the records of inspiration there is no material corruption.... [D]uring the lapse of many centuries **the text of Scripture has been preserved** with great care.... Empowered by the fruits of criticism, we may well say that **the Scriptures continue essentially the same as when they proceeded from the writers themselves** (1853, 2:147, emp. added).

Frederick H.A. Scrivener (1813-1891) was a prominent and important New Testament textual critic of the 19th century. Having graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge, he taught classics at several schools in southern England. His expertise in textual criticism is self-evident in that he served as a member of the English New Testament Revision Committee (Revised Version), edited the Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis and several editions of the Greek New Testament, collated the Codex Sinaiticus with the *Textus Receptus*, and was the first to distinguish the *Textus Receptus* from the Byzantine text. In his *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, Scrivener admitted:

[O]ne great truth is admitted on all hands—the almost complete freedom of Holy Scripture from the bare suspicion of wilful [*sic*] corruption; the absolute identity of the testimony of every known copy in respect to doctrine, and spirit, and the main drift of every argument and every narrative through the entire volume of Inspiration.... **Thus hath God's Providence kept from harm the treasure of His written word**, so far as is needful for the quiet assurance of His church and people (1861, pp. 6-7, emp. added).

J.W. McGarvey (1829-1911) was a minister, author, educator, and biblical scholar. He taught 46 years in the College of the Bible in Lexington, Kentucky, serving as President from 1895 to 1911. He summarized the point: “All the authority and value possessed by these books when they were first written belong to them still” (1974, p. 17).

Elias Boudinot (1740-1821) was a prominent Founding Father of America. He served in the Continental Congress (1778-1779, 1781-1784), as its President in 1782-1783, and was the founding president of the American Bible Society. In his refutation of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*, Boudinot explained: "[T]he facts upon which the Christian religion is founded, have a stronger proof, than any facts at such a distance of time; and that the books which convey them down to us, **may be proved to be uncorrupted and authentic**, with greater strength than any other writings of equal antiquity" (1801, p. 239, emp. added). This Founding Father's view of the purity of the text of the New Testament was the view of the vast majority of the Founders.

With all the kindness one can muster, these eminent, well-studied, competent, peerless scholars, whose expertise in the field of Textual Criticism is unsurpassed, are far more qualified and accurate in their assessment of the credibility, integrity, and authenticity of the biblical text than any alleged scholar or skeptic living today. Truthfully, God knew that the original autographs would not survive, and that His Word would have to be transmitted through the centuries via copies. **The transmission process is sufficiently flexible for God's Word to be conveyed adequately by uninspired, imperfect copyists.** Indeed, the original text of the New Testament has been thoroughly and sufficiently authenticated.

REASON #2: THE TRANSLATION PROCESS WORKS

God knew that the vast majority of the human race could not learn Greek or Hebrew. He knew that His Word would have to be read **in translation** in the language of the common people. The translation process is sufficiently flexible for God's Word to be conveyed adequately by uninspired, imperfect translators. While some English translations may well seek to advance a theological agenda, generally speaking, most translations do not differ on the **essentials**. Most English versions convey these essentials: (1) what one must do to be saved and (2) what one must do to stay saved. As imperfect as translations might be, most still convey this basic information. This fact is verified by Jesus and the apostles' own use of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew text *en vogue* in first-century Palestine. Some think this translation was achieved by 72 Jewish scholars who were invited to Alexandria, Egypt roughly two and a half centuries before Christ. Though considered by scholars as an imperfect translation of the Hebrew, most of the direct quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament are taken from the Septuagint. Hence, the Bible gives implicit divine endorsement to the use of imperfect, manmade translations, further implying that God's Word has been adequately transmitted down through the centuries via translation.

A host of books have been published over the years that discuss principles of Bible translation (e.g., Nida, 1964; Beekman and Callow, 1974; Ryken, 2009; Grant, 1961; et al.). All human languages share in common a variety of linguistic features that may be suitably utilized to transmit God's meanings. The United Nations stands as an indisputable testimony to the fact that meaning can be conveyed from one language to another. Indeed, messages all over the world are effectively translated into different languages every day. Likewise, the meanings of the words, grammar, and syntax of the biblical (parent) languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek have been amply transferred to English Bible translations. Even when English translations differ with each other on any given passage, further study will enable the Bible student to ascertain the meaning(s) intended. As with the transmission of the Greek text, the translation process provides the individual with the possibilities when more than one meaning is possible. When all is said and done, one may confidently say that God's message has been suitably transferred from the original biblical languages into English.

REASON #3: THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH TRANSLATION DEMONSTRATES PRESERVATION

All languages are in a constant state of flux. Thus new translations are inevitable and necessary. But though the Greek text has been verified, and though we know that translation can be done accurately, how do we know that today we have God's Word available since the translating has been done by many different people over several centuries? Answer: Because the history of English translation has been traced and verified. We know that the Hebrew and Greek texts were translated into Latin early on, and eventually began to be transferred to English in the 14th century. The hall of fame of great Bible translators in the English-speaking world **verifies the accomplishment of this transference of God's Word to the present:** John Wycliffe, William Tyndale, Miles Coverdale, John Rogers (the Matthew's Bible), Richard Taverner, the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, Matthew Parker (the Bishop's Bible), the King James Bible (1611), the English Revised Version (ERV—1888) and its American counterpart, the American Standard Version (ASV—1901), and the host of English translations that have appeared in the 20th and now 21st centuries (cf. Lewis, 1991). We know the Bible has not been corrupted because we have the English translations generated through the centuries that enable us to examine and verify the text of the Bible. Coincidentally, even if we did not know English translation history, we can take the authenticated Greek text and make a completely new translation in English.

CONCLUSION

The evidence is available and it is decisive. Currently circulating copies of the Bible do not differ substantially from the original. Those who reject the Bible's divine authority must do so for reasons other than their ability to know what God intended to communicate to the human race.

All human beings can know the truth and be saved. All can know that God exists and that the Bible is His Word. All can know that Christianity is the only true religion and that all must obey the Gospel of Christ in order to be forgiven of sin and saved. All can know that we must live the Christian life, worshipping God correctly, and living faithfully to God in daily behavior.

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Dealing Fairly with Alleged Bible Contradictions [Part I]

by [Eric Lyons, M.Min.](#)



Through the centuries, people have attempted to justify their rejection of the inspiration of the Bible for a number of different reasons. Some have assumed that the Bible is uninspired ever since their parents taught them as children that it was merely a product of ancient man. Others have never read the Bible nor studied any of the proofs for its divine origin. Their chosen road of disbelief may stem more from indifference than anything else. Some have rejected the Bible because most of the professed adherents that they know act ungodly, divisively, or hypocritically. Others simply have no desire to live according to the will of God, and do not want to be told by Jesus, His apostles, or the prophets what to do. These individuals refuse to believe because if they did, they might feel compelled to give up their pleasurable, immoral activities.

Perhaps the most frequently cited reason in the 21st century why individuals reject the Bible's claim of inspiration is because of presumed contradictions in Scripture. It is alleged that the Bible writers made numerous mistakes in their writings, often contradicting either what another biblical penmen wrote or some known historical, geographical, or scientific fact. A plethora of books and Web sites dedicated to trumpeting "Bible contradictions" have been published in recent years. For example, in his book *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy*, Dennis McKinsey stated:

Every analyst of the Bible should realize that the Book is a veritable miasma of contradictions, inconsistencies, inaccuracies, poor science, bad math, inaccurate geography, immoralities, degenerate heroes, false prophecies, boring repetitions, childish superstitions, silly miracles, and dry-as-dust discourse. But contradictions remain the most obvious, the most potent, the most easily proven, and the most common problem to plague the Book (1995, p. 71).

Mike Davis, author of *The Atheist's Introduction to the New Testament*, claimed in the first three pages of his book:

When I started to study the New Testament seriously...I found it to be filled with more contradictions and inconsistencies than I ever imagined or remembered from my days in Baptist Sunday School.... [Y]ou can use the Bible to prove that the Bible itself is untrustworthy. If you are familiar with these biblical flaws, you can easily prevail in any debate with the typical Christian fundamentalist....

The basic writings of the Christian religion are so full of absurdity, contradiction and discord that the only way to maintain the truth of Christian doctrine is to ignore the Bible itself. Fortunately for most Christian churches, this is not a problem, because most Christians do not read the Bible seriously, and are woefully unaware of its contents, except for what their preachers tell them on Sunday mornings (2008, pp. 1-3).

In the introduction to his popular Web site, *The Skeptic's Annotated Bible*, Steve Wells contends that "contradictions and false prophecies show that the Bible is not inerrant.... It is time for us all to stop believing in, or pretending to believe in, a book that is so unworthy of belief" (2013). Dan Barker, co-president of the Freedom from Religion Foundation and one of America's most popular atheists, wrote in his book *godless*: "People who are free of theological bias notice that the bible contains hundreds of discrepancies.... [N]o honest person can pretend it is a perfect book.... [C]ontradictions underscore the fact that, on balance, the bible is not a reliable source of truth" (2008, pp. 222,242).

For example, allegedly Jesus was mistaken when He stated 2,000 years ago that "this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place" (Matthew 24:34). [According to Mike Davis, "Jesus tells his listeners that the judgment day will come before the generation he's speaking to passes away.... It's been 2000 years now since that generation passed away.... Jesus was wrong" (p. 1).] Supposedly, since Matthew wrote that "the robbers" (plural) reviled Jesus on the cross (Matthew 27:44), while Luke wrote that "**one** of the criminals" blasphemed Jesus (Luke 23:39, emp. added), either Matthew or Luke was mistaken (see Wells). And, since Jesus claimed that Zechariah was the "son of Berechiah" (Matthew 23:35), while the chronicler referred to "Zechariah the son of Jehoiada" (2 Chronicles 24:20), Jesus must have made another mistake (see McKinsey, 2000, p. 30).

On and on they go. One presumed contradiction after another is listed. Page after page of "Bible discrepancies" is published on-line or in print. Just five years after Dennis McKinsey released his 550-page *Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy* (1995), he penned an **850-page** reference guide titled *Biblical Errancy*—a volume that purports to address "virtually every significant topic of Scripture containing errors, contradictions, and fallacies, delineating the problems within each" (2000, p. 13).

To unbelievers, Bible "errors" are one of the main reasons, if not the chief reason, why they have rejected the Bible as God's Word. A few years ago, a gentleman wrote Apologetics Press mentioning why he became an unbeliever: "The turning point for me," he said, "was when I realized that the Bible was not inerrant." Another gentleman contacted us some time ago, identified himself as a non-Christian, and indicated that "these Bible discrepancies are one of the biggest factors of my still not being a Christian." In reaction to a 2010 article that atheist John Loftus wrote on why he rejects the Bible, one responder said, "The chief reason I do no[t] believe the Bible is god's 'Word' is because of biblical errancy. I believe that there are numerous contradictions, errors, and failed prophecies in the Bible" (quoted in Loftus, 2010).

Although some Christians have incorrectly argued that inerrancy is not inherent in the inspiration of the Scriptures and that debating the matter is harmful to the cause of Christ

(cf. Cukrowski, et al., 2002, p. 44), the fact is (as the skeptic knows all too well), if the Bible writers made mistakes—if they contradicted each others' accounts—then the Bible originated in the mind of men, not God (cf. 2 Peter 1:20-21). One of the first things that any honest truth-seeker would want to know, if someone came to him claiming to be in possession of revelation from God, is if the “revelation” was factually accurate. The fallibility of the message would be the first indication that it was man-made and not Heaven-sent (see Lyons and Miller, 2004 for more information). On the other hand, factual accuracy would be the first thing to expect from any document claiming to be God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16).

The skeptic has logically argued that, if the “inspired” apostles and prophets made mistakes in their writings, then they were not guided “by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16). Where skeptics have gravely erred, however, is concluding that the Bible writers made mistakes. In truth, the “contradictions” that the Bible writers supposedly made are actually mere presumptions or misinterpretations on the part of the reader. Anyone truly attempting to understand the Bible or any work of antiquity must consider some basic principles of interpretation that allow for a reasonable treatment of the work under consideration. In order to be as fair with the Bible writers as we would want others to be with us, the following rules of interpretation must be implemented. Without such principles in place, a fair and just understanding of the Scriptures is hopeless.

PRINCIPLES FOR DEALING WITH ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS

#1—Bible Writers are Innocent Until Proven Guilty

Imagine how chaotic life would be if we presumed that everything anyone ever said or did was dishonest. If we assumed that everything our parents told us was a lie, we might have drunk Drano® or overdosed on prescription medicine, which they said would kill us. If we supposed that everything we learned about history was a lie, we would never be able to build upon the advancements of past generations. If we lived every day under the assumption that everyone with whom we communicate is lying to us about everything, life would be virtually unlivable.

Generally speaking, people understand the importance of the principle of being “innocent until proven guilty.” A teacher cannot justifiably assume that a student who makes a perfect score on a test without studying for it, cheated. It might be that he had received all of the information elsewhere at another time. It could be that he learned everything well enough in class that he did not have to study at home. Or, it may be that he simply “got lucky” and guessed correctly on the questions he did not know. A teacher could not justifiably punish such a student without evidence that the student cheated. A policeman is not justified in assuming that because a murder was committed by a man wearing green tennis shoes, then the first person the policeman finds wearing green tennis shoes is the murderer.

In our daily lives, we generally consider a person to be **truthful** until we have actual **evidence** that he or she has lied. If a secretary informs a caller that her boss is on vacation, yet the caller receives a detailed e-mail from that boss only an hour later about a work-related matter, is the caller justified in concluding that the secretary is a liar? Not at all. (How many people work while on vacation?) The boss could actually even be in the building for some reason, but still actually be taking “vacation days.” (How many of us have stopped by the work place for an extended amount of time while “on vacation”?) Suppose someone asks you where you are going, and you respond by saying, “I’m going home.” However, on the way home you stop to get milk and eggs at the grocery store. If the same person who asked you that question sees you at the grocery store, would he be right to conclude that you lied because on your way home you stopped by the store? Certainly not! The fact is,

most conscientious, reasonable people understand that we are “innocent until proven guilty,” and that false allegations are reprehensible.

We give people the benefit of the doubt and generally consider them to be truthful about a matter unless we have evidence to the contrary. When we read a historical document or book, the same rule should apply. The writing is considered to be truthful until it can be proven otherwise. Do we have proof that an author of antiquity was lying or mistaken about a matter? If not, we should be careful about falsely accusing the writer. William Arndt properly argued:

The *apriori* assumption must always be that the author has not contradicted himself. This rule is observed in dealing with secular authors. At what pains, for instance, have not editors been to bring about agreement between seemingly conflicting statements in the writings of Plato! The principle by which they were guided was that **no contradiction must be assumed unless all attempts at harmonizing fail**. That is in accordance with the dictates of fairness. Let but the same amount of good will be manifested in the treatment of the difficult passages in the Bible (1955, p. vii, emp. added).

A book is to be presumed internally consistent until it can be shown conclusively that it is contradictory. This approach has been accepted throughout literary history, and is still accepted today in most venues. (You cannot expect to have a coherent ancient history class using Herodotus, Thucydides, Josephus, etc. if you presume that they were all liars.) Respected 19th-century Harvard law professor, Simon Greenleaf, dealt with this principle in his book, *The Testimony of the Evangelists: The Gospels Examined by the Rules of Evidence*:

The rule of municipal law on this subject is familiar, and applies with equal force to all ancient writings, whether documentary or otherwise; and as it comes first in order, in the prosecution of these inquiries, it may, for the sake of mere convenience, be designated as our first rule: “Every document, apparently ancient, coming from the proper repository or custody, and bearing on its face no evident marks of forgery, **the law presumes to be genuine, and devolves on the opposing party the burden of proving it to be otherwise**” (1995, p. 16, emp. added).

Indeed, the logically accepted way to approach ancient writings is to assume innocence, not guilt. The Bible surely deserves this same treatment.

#2—Possibilities Will Suffice

If a cantankerous co-worker saw you getting \$20 out of the petty cash box at work one Thursday afternoon, would he be justified in immediately notifying everyone in the office that you are a thief? The **only** thing this accuser knows is that you took some cash from the money box at work. He has no idea if the boss gave you permission to get the money. He does not know if you were reimbursing yourself for a purchase you made for the company. He is unaware of any pre-arrangement you may have made with the general manager to use the money on the way into work the next morning to purchase doughnuts for everyone in the office. All that this irritable colleague knows is that (1) he doesn’t like you and (2) here is “reason” you should be fired.

Most anyone who considers such a scenario quickly sees how immoral it would be to jump to such a conclusion. Why? Because there are many possibilities why you might honestly and legitimately be taking \$20 from the company’s petty cash drawer. Without further information and adequate evidence, the legitimate possibility of your innocence must be presumed until actually proven guilty. If a person or a historical document (e.g., the Bible)

must be considered “innocent until proven guilty,” then, without further evidence, any **possible** answer should suffice.

Suppose that video footage of you taking the \$20 was made available 50 years after your death and no one was alive who could verify one way or another about your innocence or guilt. Yet, since the owner of the video has an axe to grind with your grandchildren, he posts the video on the Internet and labels your grandchildren as descendants of a thief. Again, no fair and just person would think that such an act was right. Why? Because even though no one on Earth knew about the circumstances surrounding the \$20, they knew that there were many legitimate **possible** reasons why you may have taken the money honestly.

Since the apostles and prophets and those to whom they originally wrote have now been dead for at least 1,900 years, when questions arise about what they wrote, it obviously is impossible to ask them what they meant. Although we might like to know why Matthew worded something one way and Luke another way, we may never know for sure. The pertinent question is: “Is it genuinely possible for both accounts to be true?”

For example, Matthew and Mark wrote that “the robbers” (plural) reviled Jesus on the cross (Matthew 27:44; Mark 15:32). Luke, on the other hand, mentioned that “**one** of the criminals” blasphemed Jesus (Luke 23:39, emp. added). Luke’s account is obviously different than Matthew and Mark’s, but is it necessarily contradictory? In other words, is it possible for all of these accounts to be true?

Consider two real possibilities for the differences concerning the thieves who were hanged alongside Jesus. First, it is quite possible that, initially, both thieves reviled Christ, but then one of them repented. After hearing Jesus’ words on the cross, and seeing His forgiving attitude, the one thief may have been driven to acknowledge that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. How many times have we made a statement about someone or something, but then retracted the statement only a short while later after receiving more information?

A second possible explanation for the differences involves the understanding of a figure of speech known as synecdoche. Merriam-Webster defines this term as “a figure of speech by which a part is put for the whole (as *fifty sail* for *fifty ships*), the whole for a part (as *society* for *high society*)...or the name of the material for the thing made (as *boards* for *stage*)” (2013, italics. in orig.). Just as Bible writers frequently used figures of speech such as simile, metaphor, sarcasm, and metonymy, they also used synecdoche. As seen in the definition of synecdoche, this figure of speech can be used in a variety of ways (Dungan, 1888, pp. 300-309):

- A whole can be put for the part.
- A part may be put for the whole.
- Time might be put for part of a time.
- The singular can be put for the plural.
- The plural can be put for the singular.

It is feasible that Matthew and Mark were using the plural in place of the singular in their accounts of the thieves reviling Christ on the cross. Lest you think that such might be an isolated case, notice two other places in Scripture where the same form of synecdoche is used.

- Genesis 8:4 indicates that Noah’s ark rested “on the **mountains** of Ararat.” Question: Did the ark rest on one of the mountains of Ararat, or did it rest on all of them at the

same time? Although the ark was a huge vessel, it obviously did not rest on the many mountains of Ararat; rather, it rested on one.

- In Genesis 21:7 Sarah asked, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse **children**? For I have borne him a son in his old age.” Anyone who knows much about the Bible recalls that Sarah had but **one** child. In certain contexts, however, one might use a synecdoche and speak of one child (as did Sarah) by using the word children. Often, when I call for the attention of my children, I refer to them as “boys and **girls**.” I have two sons, but I actually only have one daughter. However, summoning my children with the expression “boys and **girl**” simply does not flow as well as “boys and **girls**.” Thus, I frequently use the plural (“girls”) for the singular (“girl”). But in the way that I use the expression, **the emphasis is not on the singularity or plurality of the nouns, but on the particular categories** (“boys” and “girls”).

It could very well be that Matthew and Mark focused on the **categories** of people from whom the taunts came rather than the actual number of the people in those categories. Matthew mentions how “those who passed by” (27:39), the soldiers (27:27), the scribes, elders, and chief priests (27:41), and “even the robbers” (27:44) all taunted Jesus. Thus Christ’s mockers came from various **classes of people**—including thieves (even though only one may have taunted Jesus).

Again, the conscientious Bible student does not have to pin down the exact answer to an alleged contradiction; he only needs to show one or more legitimate **possibilities** of harmonization in order to remove the initial sting of any “contradiction.” Regarding the thieves who died with Jesus, the skeptic cannot deny that both of the previous explanations are plausible answers to the question of why Matthew and Mark wrote of “thieves” reviling Christ, instead of a “thief.”

Which of these possible explanations is correct? In the absence of more information, a definite answer is likely impossible. However, both answers possess merit. Either one is sufficient to answer the charge of error. Over a century ago, the reputable Bible scholar and gospel preacher J.W. McGarvey commented on this point as follows:

We are not bound to show the truth of the given hypothesis; but only that it may be true. If it is at all possible, then it is possible that no contradiction exists; if it is probable, then it is probable that no contradiction exists.... It follows, also, that when there is an appearance of contradiction between two writers, **common justice requires that before we pronounce one or both of them false we should exhaust our ingenuity in searching for some probable supposition on the ground of which they may both be true.** The better the general reputation of the writers, the more imperative is this obligation, lest we condemn as false those who are entitled to respectful consideration (1886, 2:32, emp. added).

One Bible antagonist cited a rather easy-to-explain alleged discrepancy and then proceeded to compare the Bible to a “cheating husband” who “has been caught in a contradiction, exposed as a liar, and therefore can’t be trusted to tell the truth” (Smith, 1995; cf. [Lyons](#), 2004). In truth, however, the burden of proof was on the Bible critic to verify his allegations and he did not. One must remember how equally deplorable it is to draw up charges of marital unfaithfulness when there is no proof of such. In reality, the Bible should be likened to a faithful husband who has been wrongfully accused of infidelity by prejudiced, overbearing skeptics whose case is based upon unproven assumptions. The Bible is innocent until **proven** guilty. And no guilt has ever been proven. On the contrary, legitimate **possible** explanations exist for the difficult passages of Scripture.

#3—Context is Critical

Effective communication is impossible without the participants taking into consideration the context in which statements are made. What does a mother mean when, while witnessing her son score his 30th point in a basketball game, she yells to her fireman husband, “Our son is on fire!”? She obviously doesn’t want her courageous husband to run onto the court with a fire extinguisher to “put out” their son. Later that evening, however, when the son is grilling steaks in the backyard, the mother screams those same words to her husband after seeing the propane tank explode in her son’s face. What does she mean now? Likely the husband will have no problem quickly understanding the message, given the context in which it was made.

In our daily lives both Christians and skeptics generally understand the importance of interpreting one another’s statements within the explicitly stated or implied contexts. When it comes to properly and fairly interpreting the Scriptures, however, Bible critics (and sadly even some believers) often either ignore or dismiss the actual context(s) in which the verses in question are found. Consider, for example, the very first paragraph of Mike Davis’s book *The Atheist’s Introduction to the New Testament: How the Bible Undermines the Basic Teachings of Christianity*:

For me, Matthew 24:34 was the smoking gun. It proved to me that Christianity could not possibly be true. End of story. Case closed. It’s the verse where Jesus tells his listeners that the judgment day will come before the generation he’s speaking to passes away—meaning that some of them would still be alive when the sun went dark, the stars fell from the sky, and Jesus came riding down from the heaven on clouds of glory. It’s been nearly 2000 years now since that generation passed away, and the sun is still shining, the stars still twinkle in the sky, and clouds arrive with no passengers from heaven, glorious or otherwise. For me, this sealed the issue. Jesus was wrong. Therefore, he could not have been divine, but just a guy, preaching what he believed in, and no more deserving of our belief than any other guy (2008, p. 1).

Is Davis correct? Did Jesus err when he predicted “this generation [His generation—EL] will by no means pass away till all these things take place”? According to Davis, since “Jesus tells his listeners that the judgment day will come before the generation he’s speaking to passes away,” and since that generation passed away 1,900 years ago, “the Bible itself is untrustworthy” and Jesus “could not have been divine” (pp. 1-2).

In actuality, what Davis confesses ultimately “proved” to him that the Bible and Jesus are unreliable is nothing more than a misinterpretation of Scripture—a failure to consider the context in which Jesus spoke. Jesus was **not** mistaken in His comments in Matthew 24:34—Jesus’ generation did not pass away prior to witnessing the things Jesus foretold in Matthew 24:4-34. But, Jesus did **not** foretell in those verses what Davis **assumes** He foretold. Davis and many others believe that, prior to verse 34, Jesus was describing events that would take place shortly before Judgment Day at the end of time. The fact of the matter is, however, Jesus was prophesying about the coming destruction upon Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and not the final Judgment.

When the disciples went to show Jesus the temple buildings (Matthew 24:1), Jesus said, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (24:2). Later, when Jesus was on the Mount of Olives, the disciples asked Him two questions, beginning with “when will these things be?” (24:3). In verses 4-34, Jesus responded to this first question, revealing several signs that would indicate Rome’s destruction of Jerusalem, including the temple, was near. [NOTE: “The fall of the Hebrew system is set forth in the sort of apocalyptic nomenclature that is

characteristic of Old Testament literature, e.g., when the prophets pictorially portray the overthrow of Jehovah's enemies (cf. Isaiah 13:10-11; 34:2ff; Ezekiel 32:7-8)" (Jackson, n.d.); cf. Matthew 24:29-31; see also Miller, 2003.] Then, in verses 35-51 (and all of chapter 25), Jesus answered the disciples' last question: "what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). To summarize, in Matthew 24:4-34 Jesus foretold the coming destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, while in 24:35-25:46 He commented on His future return and final Judgment of the world.

How sad it is that so many atheists and skeptics believe they have disproven the Bible and Christianity, when, in reality, they have merely ignored the context of the passage and twisted the biblical text to mean something God never intended (cf. 2 Peter 3:16). The fact that Mike Davis highlights Matthew 24:34 as the verse that once and for all proved to him the Bible is unreliable should tell us something about the extreme weakness of the skeptic's case against Christianity. In truth, when inspired biblical statements are interpreted fairly—within the context in which those statements are found—a host of contradictions will disappear like the morning fog, and sincere truth seekers will see the Bible for what it is: the inerrant Word of God.

Dealing Fairly with Alleged Bible Contradictions [Part II]

by [Eric Lyons, M.Min.](#)



#4—Understanding the Real Nature of a Contradiction

It might surprise some to learn that, although skeptics are widely known for their frequent use of the term “contradiction” in their insistence that the Bible writers made mistakes, Christian apologists are more than happy to discuss “contradictions,” and specifically, what a contradiction actually is. As with any meaningful discussion, we cannot have rational dialogue about “contradictions” unless the term first is defined and understood.

The Law of Contradiction is one of the most fundamental principles of logic. In fact, the great fourth century B.C. Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote in his renowned philosophical work, *Metaphysics*, that this principle is “the most certain principle of all” (4:3). It is a principle “which every one must have who understands anything that is...and that which every one must know who knows anything” (4:3). What is the Law of Contradiction? It is, as Aristotle noted, “that the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject and in the same respect” (4:3). In other words, if the same thing is said to be and not be (1) for the same person, place, or thing, (2) at the same time, and (3) in the same sense (or respect), then a genuine contradiction exists. For example, it is impossible for the same glass of water to be completely empty and completely full at the same time and in the same sense. However, if one of the three aforementioned variables is untrue or is unknown, a person cannot logically contend that a contradiction exists. Can we be sure that we are talking about the same glass of water at the same time and in the same sense? If so, then there is a contradiction. If not, then no contradiction exists. If the variables are

unknown, then it cannot be proven that a contradiction exists, and principle #1 (discussed in Part I of this article) applies: The Bible writers are innocent until proven guilty.

Consider the Law of Contradiction in light of two different statements: (1) “Ricky Smith is rich,” and (2) “Ricky Smith is poor.” Do these statements contradict each other? Many would be tempted immediately to say, “Of course.” However, without knowing for certain that the statements are made **about the same person**, we cannot reasonably claim that they contradict each other. It could be that the first statement is made about a rich Ricky Smith in Oklahoma, while the second statement is about a different, poor Ricky Smith who lives in New York. When comparing two statements, we must make sure that the same person, place, or thing is under consideration.

But what if we are talking about the same Ricky Smith? Would the statements “Ricky Smith is rich” and “Ricky Smith is poor” then be contradictory? Not necessarily. It may be that two different periods of time are under discussion. Ricky Smith could have been extremely poor as a child and could have continued to struggle in poverty into his early 20s. However, after working his way up in a large company over a period of 20 years, Ricky Smith could have become very wealthy by the time he was 40. Thus, if the two statements about Ricky refer to **two different times in his life**, they certainly are not contradictory.

What’s more, it is very possible that the same Ricky Smith could be rich and poor, even at the same time, if the terms “rich” and “poor” are used **in different senses**. Ricky Smith could be a billionaire, but if he is not a Christian, he is spiritually poor. On the other hand, Ricky Smith could be materially poor, yet be “in Christ” with “every spiritual blessing” (Ephesians 1:3) and thus be spiritually rich. (“Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith”—James 2:5?) Unless the terms are used in the same sense, then Ricky Smith could certainly be “rich” **and** “poor” at the same time.

When the term “contradiction” is clearly defined and understood, then both Bible students and skeptics will quickly see that so-called “contradictions” are merely legitimate differences that do not demand a contradiction. Different people, places, and things may be discussed. Different times may be under consideration. Or, words and statements may be used in different senses. Consider these three principles in light of various alleged problems in Scripture.

#5—Is the Same Person, Place, or Thing Being Considered?

Acts 12:2 vs. Acts 15:13

According to Acts 12:1-2, “Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.” Only three chapters later, however, Luke recorded that James was alive and well at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:13ff.)—an event that took place well after the death of James. How could both Acts 12 and Acts 15 be correct? How could James be dead and alive at the same time? The simple (and hopefully obvious) explanation is that Acts 12:2 and Acts 15:13 are referring to two different men—both of whom were named James. The James who lost his life at the hands of King Herod was the apostle, the brother of John (Acts 12:2), the son of Zebedee (Matthew 4:21). The James of Acts 15 was the Lord’s brother (Galatians 1:19; Matthew 13:55; Acts 12:17). The name James appears 42 times in the New Testament, referring to four different men—the two mentioned above as well as James the son of Alphaeus (Luke 6:15) and James the father of Judas (Luke 6:16). As with any person in Scripture, careful attention must be given to whom a particular writing refers.

Matthew 23:35 vs. 2 Chronicles 24:20

The example of James in the book of Acts is rather elementary. At other times in Scripture, the reference to a particular person may be less certain, and more likely to be criticized. For example, in Matthew 23:35, Jesus referred to the Jews murdering “Zechariah, the son of Berechiah...between the temple and the altar.” Skeptics have argued that this Zechariah “is actually the son of Jehoiada as is shown by 2 Chron. 24:20.... The name Barachias or Barachiah is not in the Old Testament” (McKinsey, 2000, p. 30; cf. Morgan, 2003). The fact is, however, it cannot be proven that Jesus was referring to “Zechariah the son of Jehoiada” (2 Chronicles 24:20) in his reprimand of the Pharisees in Matthew 23:35. A reasonable case can be made that Jesus was referring to one of at least three different people.

First, it may be that Jesus was referring to Zechariah the minor prophet, who preached during the days of Ezra (Ezra 5:1), some 400 years after Zechariah, son of Jehoiada. In fact, contrary to Dennis McKinsey’s comment that “the name Barachias or Barachiah is not in the Old Testament” (p. 30), Zechariah, the minor prophet, actually is called “the son of **Berechiah** (spelled Barachias in the Septuagint—EL), the son of Iddo” (Zechariah 1:1; cf. Ezra 5:1; 6:14). Although the Old Testament writers did not record his death, Jesus, the Son of God, would have known how he died, and it also could have been known through Jewish tradition. [NOTE: One must keep in mind that the Old Testament is not the only source for New Testament data concerning what took place from Creation until the coming of Christ. The New Testament writers were inspired by God (cf. 2 Peter 3:16; 1 Corinthians 14:37; John 16:13). How did Paul know that “**Jannes and Jambres** resisted Moses” (2 Timothy 3:8, emp. added) when the names of Pharaoh’s magicians are not given in the Old Testament? How did Jude know that Michael the archangel and the devil “disputed about the body of Moses” (Jude 9) when no Old Testament writer mentioned such an event? Paul and Jude either knew of these facts from tradition and recorded them by inspiration, or God miraculously revealed this information to them. Similarly, in Matthew 23:35 Jesus could have simply been referring to the death of one of the last Old Testament prophets, which was not recorded in the Old Testament, but known by God and perhaps Jewish tradition.]

Second, though many **assume** that Jesus was referring to a martyr named Zechariah from Old Testament times, a closer look at Jesus’ comments may reveal otherwise. He rebuked the Pharisees, saying:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, “If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.” Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them **you will kill and crucify**, and some of them **you will scourge** in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, **whom you murdered** between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation (Matthew 23:29-36, emp. added).

Notice that Jesus spoke to His first century enemies, saying, “**you** murdered” Zechariah, son of Berechiah (Matthew 23:35, emp. added). A straightforward reading of this passage, without assuming that Zechariah was one of the more than two dozen persons who wore the name Zechariah in the Old Testament, may mean that **the Pharisees themselves** had murdered a righteous man named Zechariah around A.D. 30. Perhaps, as Burton Coffman concluded,

Christ here referred to some secret murder perpetrated, not by the ancestors of those men, but **by them**.... Christ tried with that one last lightning stroke of truth to get through to them, but even that failed. That no such murder was recorded in either the Old Testament or the New Testament, and that there was no general knowledge of it in the days of Christ, and that no traditions were developed with reference to it—these things present no difficulty at all, but point squarely at the Pharisees and show their effectiveness in covering up their evil deeds and hiding them from popular view.... It is further evidence of their depravity that none of them ever confessed it, even after he who knew their thoughts revealed it publicly! Their guilty secret went to the grave with them, except for this ray of light from the lips of Christ who made it known on the occasion of their being sentenced to hell for their wickedness (1974, p. 375, emp. in orig.).

Third, considering the fact that God’s spokesmen occasionally spoke of things yet to come as if they had already occurred (commonly known as “prophetic perfect”; cf. Isaiah 53; 21:1-10), it may be (however unlikely) that Jesus was speaking about the death of a future Zechariah. According to Josephus, about 35 years following Jesus’ death, two zealots slew Zacharias the son of Baruch in the middle of the temple simply for being rich, hating wickedness, and loving liberty (1987, 4:5:4).

Whatever the answer to the question, “To which Zechariah was Jesus referring?,” one thing is beyond any doubt: skeptics do not have a shred of evidence that Matthew 23:35 is an uninspired, errant passage. It truly may be that Jesus was referring to an entirely different Zechariah than the one mentioned in 2 Chronicles 24:20. And, as the Law of Contradiction demonstrates, unless it can be proven that the same person is under consideration in two separate statements, it is unfair and unreasonable to assert that a contradiction exists.

#6—Is the Same Period of Time Under Consideration?

Genesis 1:31 vs. Genesis 6:6

At evilbible.com, a Web site that purports to “spread the vicious truth about the Bible” (“Biblical...,” 2013), the very first alleged “obvious contradiction” listed involves Genesis 1:31 and Genesis 6:6. Since Genesis 1:31 says, “God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good,” and Genesis 6:6 reveals that “the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart,” the Bible is said to be contradictory and untrustworthy. Allegedly, the Lord could not be both satisfied and dissatisfied with His Creation. The fact is, however, God could logically be both pleased and displeased with His Creation, **if the statements were referring to two different periods of time**. Most any Bible student knows that, though only four complete chapters separate Genesis 1:31 and 6:6, they are separated—chronologically speaking—by more than a millennium. “In the beginning” God was pleased with His Creation. Several hundred years later, after “the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5), God was **then** “sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart” (6:6). It is quite telling that such a simple explanation has apparently eluded the minds of many skeptics.

Matthew 27:5 vs. Acts 1:18

Through the years, the description of Judas Iscariot’s death has been one of the most popular alleged Bible contradictions cited by critics of biblical inerrancy. It seems as if every skeptical book or Web site that questions the integrity of the Bible lists Judas’ death as one of the most obvious inconsistencies in Scripture. Whereas Matthew recorded that Judas “went and hanged himself” after betraying Jesus for 30 pieces of silver (27:5), Luke recorded that

“falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out” (Acts 1:18). Because Matthew only mentioned Judas being hanged, while Luke mentioned Judas falling headlong and bursting open at his midsection, a “real” contradiction supposedly is evident.

The differences in these two accounts are easily (and rationally) explained when we consider that Matthew and Luke were referring to **two different times**. Matthew recorded the **initial** hanging of Judas, while Luke recorded what took place some time **later** (probably several days later). Soon after Judas took his life, his body would have begun the decomposing process. If a dead body is left to itself (with no attempt to preserve it, e.g., embalming), bacteria soon begin to break down various bodily tissues. As a result, gases are released within the body, which in turn cause it to swell. A few years ago, a news outlet reported how a large sperm whale had beached itself on the shores of Taiwan and died. While on its way to being transported through a Taiwanese city to a particular research center, the swollen, unpunctured mammal literally exploded and soaked pedestrians and motorists in blood and entrails. According to one Taiwanese scientist, “Because of the natural decomposing process, a lot of gases accumulated, and when the pressure build-up was too great, the whale’s belly exploded” (“Whale Explodes...,” 2004). In light of such decomposition, it certainly is not difficult to imagine that Judas’ decaying body, which may have been swelling for a number of days, could have fallen a short distance (from wherever it was hanging), and easily burst open once striking the ground. As Wayne Jackson concluded about Judas in his excellent commentary on Acts: “The language necessitates no conflict. Either he hanged himself from a very high place—with perhaps the rope breaking; or else, no one removed his body for a while, it eventually fell under its own weight, and the decomposing corpse burst open” (2005, p. 13). Again, the reason that Matthew 27:5 and Acts 1:18 are not contradictory regarding Judas’ death is because they are not referring to the exact same time—at least the skeptic cannot prove that they are referring to the same time—and thus the charge of contradiction is unfounded and irresponsible.

#7—Are the Compared Words and Phrases Used in the Same Sense?

Matthew 27:5-7 vs. Acts 1:18

The description of Judas’ death is not the only problem that skeptics have with Acts 1:18. Since Matthew 27:5-7 indicates that the **chief priests** used the betrayal money that Judas threw on the temple floor to purchase the potter’s field, critics contend that a contradiction exists because Acts 1:18 reveals that **Judas** purchased the field with the blood money. Obviously, Judas could not have purchased the field because he gave the 30 pieces of silver back to the priests before hanging himself. Thus, to say that Judas bought the potter’s field is allegedly contrary to the facts.

If one believes it is wrong to say that a father bought a car for his son, when in actuality the son purchased the car with the \$3,000 his father gave him, then Acts 1:18 and Matthew 27:5-7 may be considered contradictory. If one believes that it is deceitful to say an employer purchased a meal for his staff, when, in fact, it was one of the employees who handed the money to the waiter, then the events recorded in Acts 1:18 could be considered fictitious. But fair and reasonable people would not reach such conclusions as these, because most people recognize the truth of the well-known principle: “he who acts through another is deemed in law to do it himself” (“Agency,” 2010), which is based on the Latin maxim, “*Qui facit per alium, facit per se.*”

In Acts 1:18, the reader is not forced to conclude that Judas **personally** bought the potter’s field. Rather, as is seen throughout Scripture, Luke was simply indicating that Judas furnished the **means** of purchasing the field. (Remember, the burden of proof is upon the

one alleging the contradiction that Luke could not have been using the term “purchase” in this sense, and such real proof has never been produced.) The Bible writers frequently represented a man as doing a thing when, in fact, he merely supplied the means for doing it. For example, Moses wrote how Joseph spoke of his brothers as selling him **into Egypt** (Genesis 45:4-5; cf. Acts 7:9), when actually they sold him to **the Ishmaelites**—who then sold him into Egypt. John mentioned that “the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John the Baptizer (**though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples**)” (John 4:1-3, emp. added). When the Bible says, “Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him” (John 19:1), most people understand that he would have simply **ordered** Jesus to be scourged, not that he actually did the scourging himself.

Whether one says that Judas “purchased a field with the wages of iniquity” (Acts 1:18), or that the chief priests “bought with them the potter’s field” (Matthew 27:7), he has stated the same truth, only in different ways.

Matthew 23:35 vs. 2 Chronicles 24:20

While considering the different respects in which inspired penmen used words and phrases, it is appropriate to revisit Matthew 23:35 and 2 Chronicles 24:20. Suppose that when Jesus mentioned “Zechariah, the son of Berechiah” (Matthew 23:35) that He **was** referring to the Zechariah (called “the son of Jehoiada”) of 2 Chronicles 24:20. Such a reference still would not necessarily be a contradiction for at least two reasons. First, it could very well be that Berechiah and Jehoiada were the same person, but wore different names. In ancient times, people frequently had more than one name. Moses’ father-in-law was known both as Reuel and Jethro (Exodus 2:18; 3:1). Gideon acquired the name Jerubbaal after destroying an altar of Baal (Judges 6:32; 7:1; 8:29,35). In 2 Kings 15, King Jotham’s father is called both Azariah (vs. 7) and Uzziah (vs. 32). The names are different, but they refer to the same person (cf. 2 Chronicles 26:1-23; Isaiah 1:1). The apostle Peter is sometimes called Peter, Simon, Simon Peter, and Cephas (Matthew 14:28; 16:16; 17:25; John 1:42; 1 Corinthians 1:12). People have worn multiple names for centuries. In modern times, most people could think of several individuals who are called by various names. (Although most of the time my oldest son answers to his middle name, “Bo,” sometimes we call him by his first name “Elijah.” At other times, we may summon him by his full name “Elijah Bo Lyons.”) Is it not possible that Jehoiada also was known as Berechiah? Certainly! One wonders why Bible critics are so certain that Jesus made a mistake when even they themselves are accustomed to calling others by a variety of names.

It may also be that Jehoiada was Zechariah’s grandfather and Berechiah was his father. The term “son” is used in several senses in Scripture. Aside from using it to signify a son by actual birth, Bible writers used it to mean (1) son-in-law (1 Samuel 24:16; cf. 18:27), (2) grandson (Genesis 29:5), (3) descendant (Matthew 1:1), (4) son by creation, as in the case of Adam (Luke 3:38), (5) son by education (i.e., disciple—1 Samuel 3:6), etc. After reading Genesis 29:5, one might think that Laban was the son of Nahor, but Genesis 24 explains that he actually was Nahor’s grandson (24:24,29; cf. 22:20-24). Mephibosheth is called the “son of Saul” in 2 Samuel 19:24, when actually he was “the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul” (2 Samuel 9:6; 4:4). Mephibosheth was technically Saul’s grandson, though Scripture refers to him once simply as the “son of Saul.” These are only two examples where the Bible conveys to the reader that the term “son” was used to mean grandson. One can only wonder how many times the term “son” is used this way throughout Scripture, and yet, unlike the examples of Laban and Mephibosheth, were **not** explained to be grandchildren. Indeed, Zechariah, son of Jehoiada, may be just one such example. Concerning this possibility, commentator R.C.H. Lenski noted:

This is possible when we remember the great age of Jehoiada, 130 years, and when we recall his great deeds, making it highly creditable to be called his son. So in Chronicles Zachariah would be named after his illustrious grandfather but in Matthew after his father, the name of the father having been preserved by Jewish tradition or in genealogical records. The Jews also frequently called a man a son of a mighty grandsire, especially while the latter was still living (1961, p. 920).

The fact is, there are several legitimately possible explanations for why Jesus referred to Zechariah as “the son of Berechiah,” and any one of these possibilities justifiably dispels the vacuous charge of contradiction. Simply because we may not know for certain the identity of the Zechariah Jesus mentioned, does not mean we have the right to label Jesus and the Bible writers as uninspired. In truth, the only apparent contradiction regarding this matter lies, not in the Bible, but in Bible critic Dennis McKinsey’s own accusation. On page 30 of his book *Biblical Errancy*, McKinsey insisted that the Zechariah of Matthew 23:35 “is actually the son of Jehoiada.” However, later in the book, he wrote (immediately following a quotation of Matthew 23:35): “The Zecharias mentioned was killed in Jerusalem in 69 C.E.; so that Matthew makes Jesus refer to an event that occurred forty years after his death. This is the same Zecharias Barouchus who, according to Josephus, was slain in the temple a short time before the destruction of Jerusalem” (p. 195). Indeed, it is the skeptic, not Jesus, Matthew, or any other inspired writer, who is proven to be contradictory.

#8—Additional Material is Not Necessarily Contradictory

One of the most commonly neglected rules of interpretation that Bible critics overlook when attacking Scripture is that extra information is not necessarily contradictory information. When one Bible writer offers more details than another on a particular subject, it is inappropriate to assume that one of the writers is mistaken. When a journalist in the 21st century writes about a man on the side of the road who has just escaped death following a particular catastrophe, while another journalist writes how this same man **and** his wife (standing next to him) are suffering survivors of the devastating disaster, it does not mean that the first journalist was denying the wife’s existence. For his own reasons, unknown to his readers, he chose to focus on only one of the survivors.

Suppose you heard a collegiate athlete say that he tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his **left knee** while playing basketball in high school in 2012. But then, later, you hear him say that he tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his **right knee** while playing basketball in high school in 2012. Are these statements contradictory? Should you assume the man is lying? Not at all. Why? Because it may very well be that the gentleman injured his left knee **and** his right knee in the same year. (Many people have.) The addition or exclusion of information does not mean two different testimonies are contradictory; they may very well be **supplementary**. Countless times throughout Scripture, and especially within the gospel accounts, extra information is given that critics cannot justifiably prove to be contradictory.

John 19:38-40

Consider how Matthew, Mark, and Luke all wrote about how a man named **Joseph** took the body of Jesus following His crucifixion, “wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock” (Luke 23:53; cf. Matthew 27:59-60; Mark 15:46). The apostle John, however, noted that Joseph actually had help in burying Jesus. He wrote: “Joseph of Arimathea...took the body of Jesus. And **Nicodemus**, who at first came to Jesus by night, **also came**, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then **they** took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury” (19:38-40, emp. added). Are the accounts of Jesus’ burial

contradictory? Skeptics could never prove that such is the case. This incident simply is an example of extra information being given by one of the Bible writers. Had Matthew, Mark, and Luke stated that Joseph was the **only** person involved in Jesus' burial, then skeptics may have a valid point to argue. But as it stands, John simply supplemented the others' accounts, adding **additional facts** to the story.

John 18:40

When Mark and Luke recorded how the Jews petitioned Pilate for the release of Barabbas, they both called him a murderer (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:18-19; Acts 3:14). Yet when John wrote about Barabbas, he omitted all discussion about his homicidal past and simply indicated that "Barabbas was a robber" (John 18:40). Is it possible that Barabbas was both a murderer **and** a thief? Of course. How many prisons around the world today house individuals who have committed both murder and burglary?

John 20:1

Some of the most criticized portions of Scripture are those that record testimony of the resurrection of Christ. According to Dan Barker, "The resurrection of Jesus is one of the few stories that is told repeatedly in the bible.... When we compare the accounts, we see that they don't agree.... The story of the resurrection of Jesus...is hopelessly irreconcilable" (2008, pp. 281, 116). How are the accounts of Jesus' resurrection "hopelessly irreconcilable?" One reason for this false allegation is because Barker and other critics refuse to recognize the fact that additional information is not necessarily contradictory. Was it essential for the apostle John to mention every woman who came to the tomb of Jesus on the morning of His resurrection, or was he at liberty to mention as few as he wanted (John 20:1; cf. Matthew 28:1; Luke 24:1)? If Mary Magdalene was at the tomb on that Sunday morning, and John recorded that she was there, without ever denying that others (mentioned by Matthew, Mark, and Luke) also were there, could his record of the events be truthful? Of course. Differences exist among the gospel writers' accounts, but no one can prove that they are discrepant. Just as a person might say, "I went to the park with Bill, Bob, and Bubba," he might also truthfully say, "I went to the park with Bill and Betty." These statements are not contradictory. One merely supplements the other. A person may only mention Bill and Betty in one setting (e.g., at worship where the church knows the married couple), while at another setting (e.g., at the office where only the men are known), he may truthfully just mention the men.

The Bible writers may not have worded things exactly the way some may think they should have, but such personal (or cultural) preferences do not invalidate their writings. Throughout the gospel accounts, statements are supplemented. Extra evidence frequently is given. And, the truth is, such supplementation should be expected from inspired, **independent** writers who did not have to participate in collusion in order to convey accurately the Good News of Jesus Christ. When one recognizes that supplementation cannot inherently be equated with a contradiction, many of the so-called "Bible contradictions" are easily (and logically!) explained away.

CONCLUSION

Sometimes statements differ because they are contradictory. The fact is, nothing can both be and not be for the same person, place, or thing, at the same time, and in the same sense. Likewise, differences do not necessarily mean that various accounts are discrepant. In fact, it

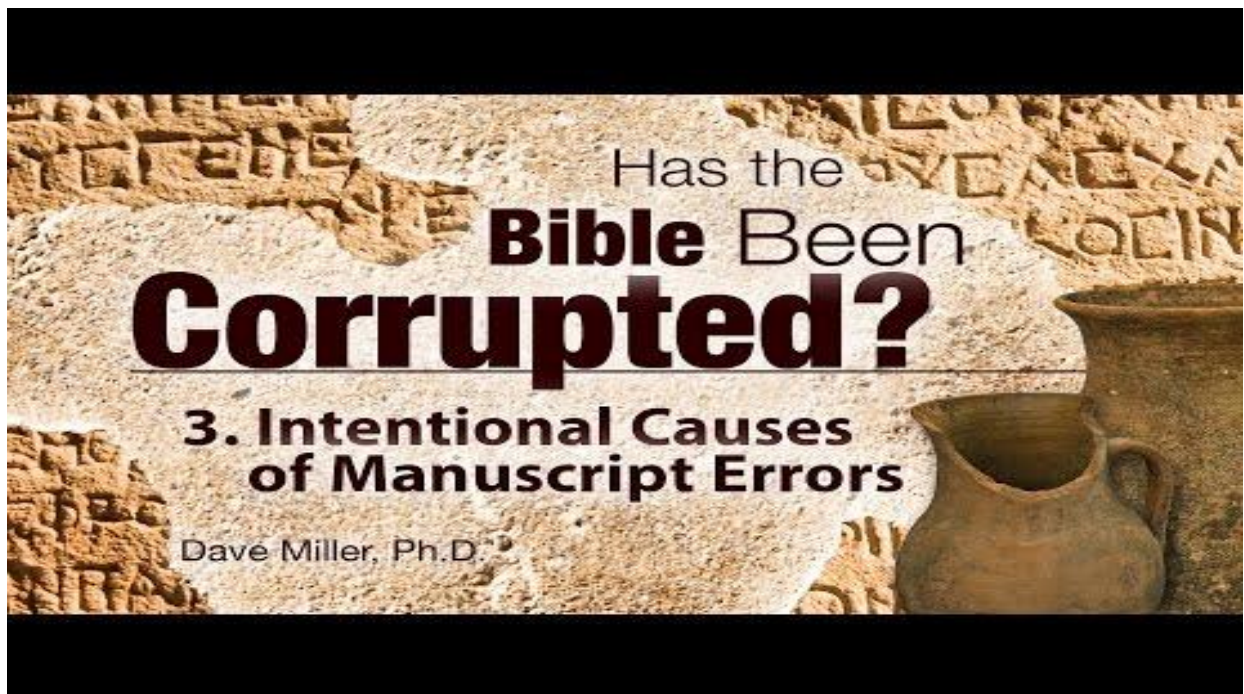
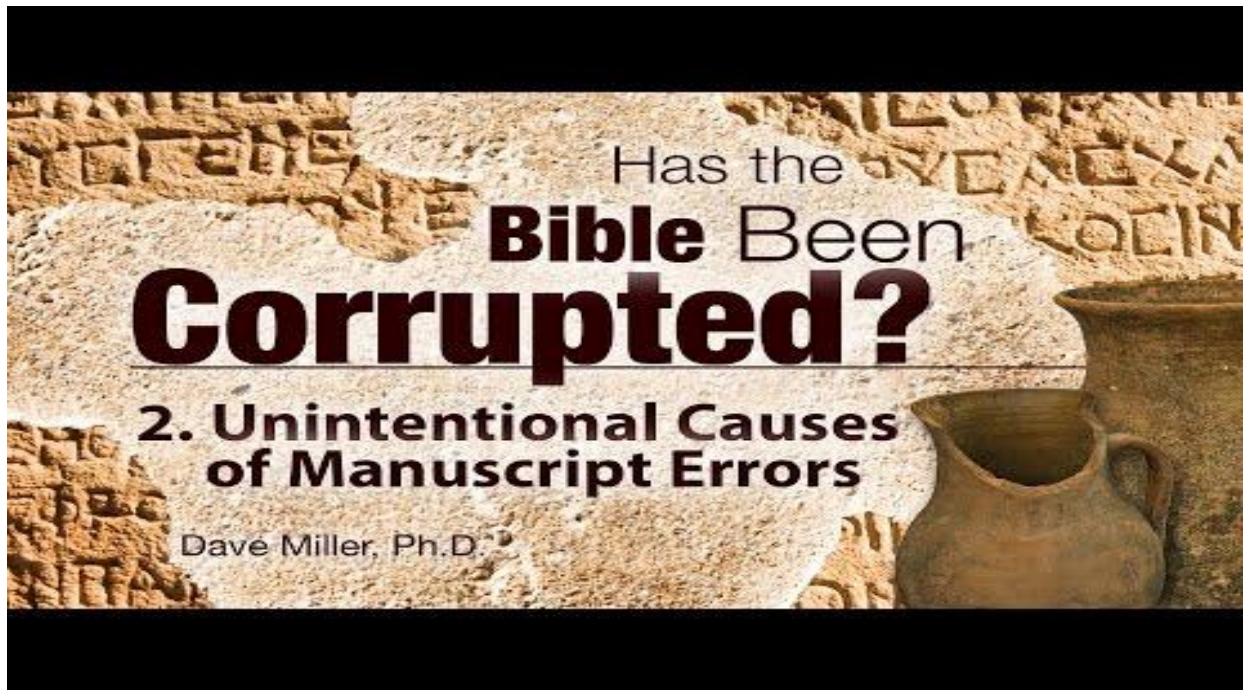
is irresponsible and unreasonable to interpret legitimately explained differences as contradictions.

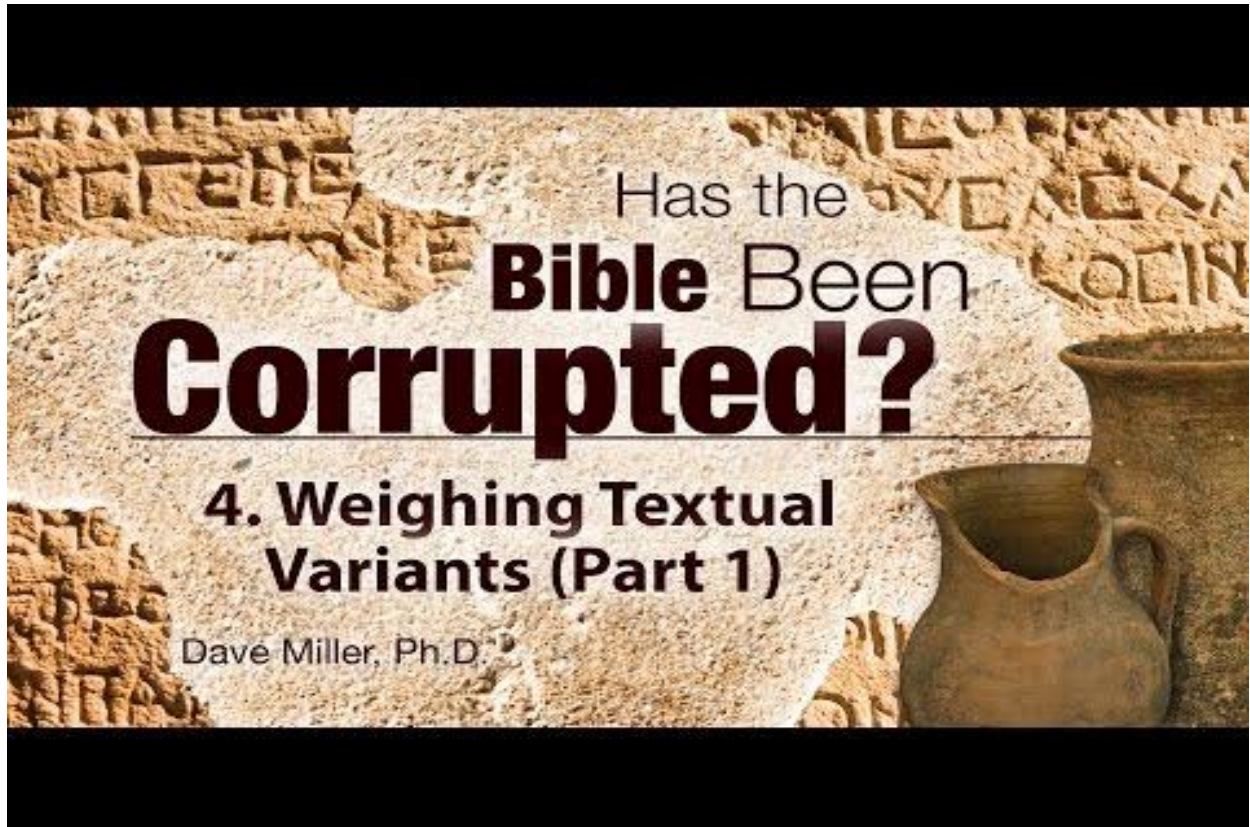
People generally understand that differences can abound in various accounts without a person needing to resort to charges of discrepancies. However, when it comes to the Bible, many people leave behind reason and fair-mindedness. To them, different accounts **must** be “contradictory.” Different wordings by different writers **must** mean someone was “wrong.” Though unproven and unprovable assertions in nearly every other area of life are quickly exposed as baseless allegations, when it comes to the Bible, differences are often thought to equal discrepancies.

In reality, the different but truthful wordings in Scripture are exactly what a person should expect to find in a book composed of 66 smaller books written by approximately 40 different writers, who wrote to different people, at different times, and in different places with different purposes. Furthermore, the differences in Scripture are parallel to the justifiable differences we expect from each other’s accounts in modern times.

The fact is, if the apostles and prophets wrote independently of each other, differences should be expected. However, the differences are not demonstrated discrepancies. They are only “contradictions” in the minds of those who reject the Law of Contradiction and the other fundamental principles discussed in this article.

QUESTION NUMBER TWO:
IS THE CANON CORRUPTED?
THE SHORT ANSWER IS NO!

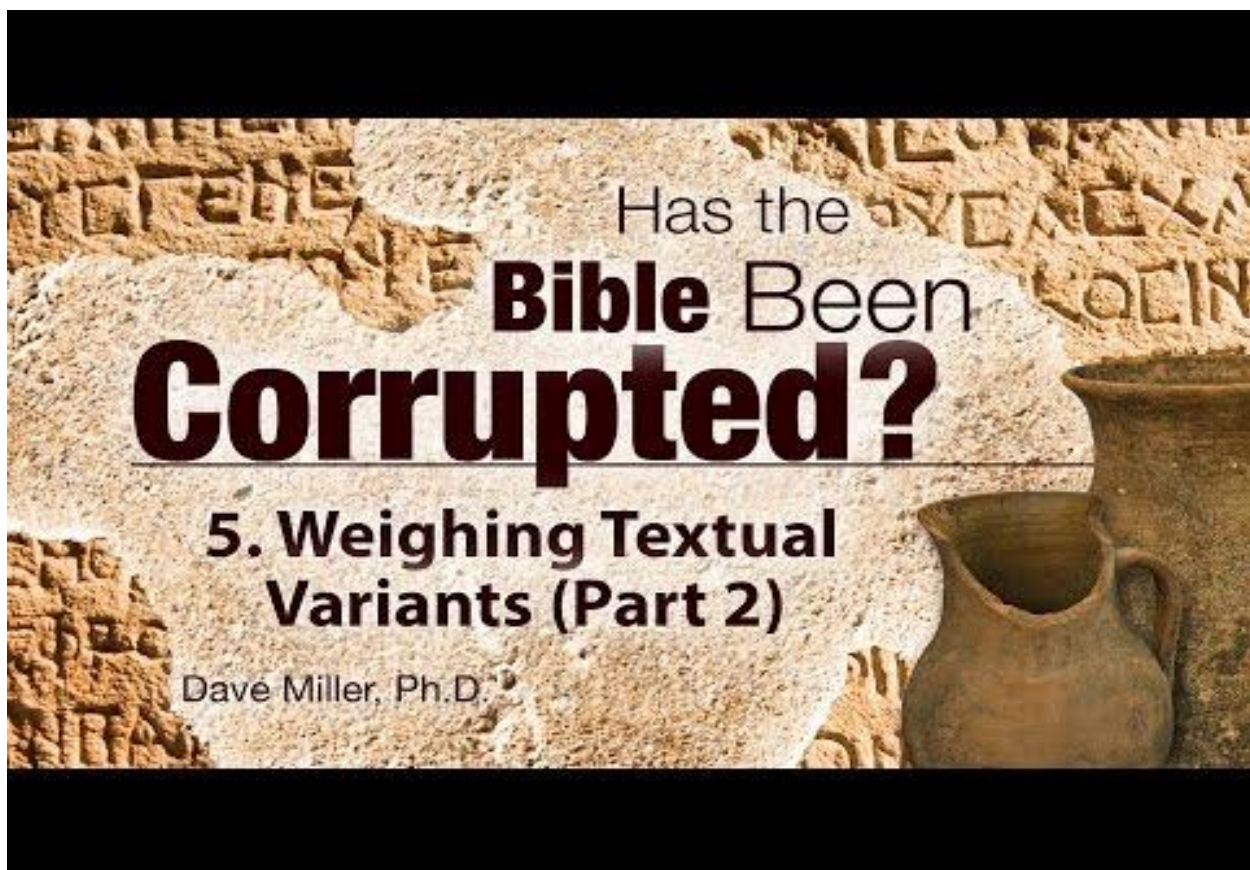


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Has the **Bible** Been
Corrupted?

**4. Weighing Textual
Variants (Part 1)**

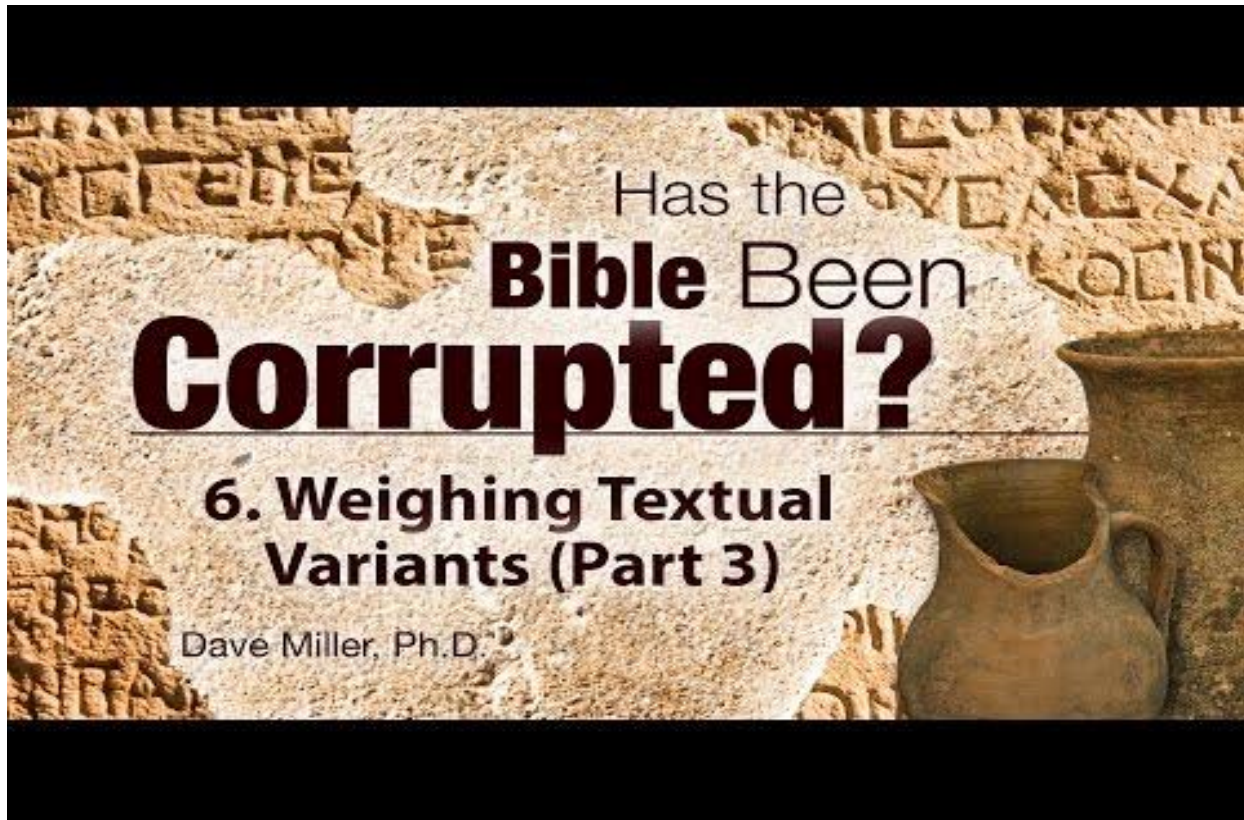
Dave Miller, Ph.D.

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Has the **Bible** Been
Corrupted?

**5. Weighing Textual
Variants (Part 2)**

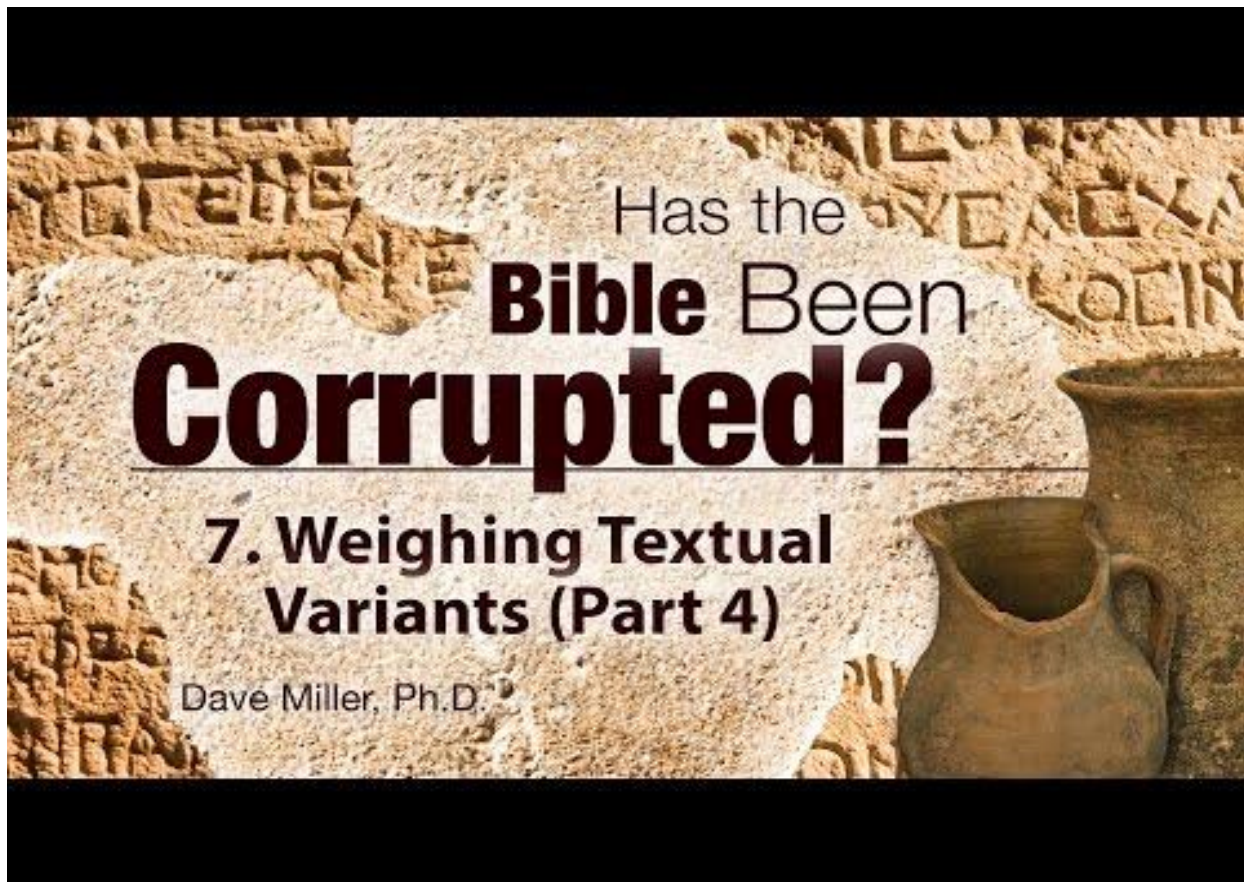
Dave Miller, Ph.D.



Has the **Bible** Been **Corrupted?**

6. Weighing Textual Variants (Part 3)

Dave Miller, Ph.D.



Has the **Bible** Been **Corrupted?**

7. Weighing Textual Variants (Part 4)

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