

## THE PRESERVATION OF SCRIPTURE

### Pagans and Christians

- “I [a pagan who moved to America from Europe] retained a somewhat naïve belief in the power of rational argument over superstition and pointed out that the American English of his Bible [a fundamentalist Christian] was many times removed from the original manuscripts written in the centuries before and after Jesus lived. I argued that the original texts would have been written in variations of archaic Hebrew, then at some point translated into Greek, then Latin and eventually old English. Each time they were transcribed, laboriously by hand, the texts were open to political and personal interpretations relevant to the times, as well as simple human errors. The famous King James version was as much a political statement about Jacobean England as it was a true historical record of events thousands of years earlier in lands thousands of miles distant. I maintained that the process of translation and transcription over millennia made it impossible to take the meanings of Biblical texts literally as the word of God. Too many stray human hands had interfered. Needless to say, this logic did not impress my conversational colleague. He could no more reach me with his blind faith than my rational arguments could open up his mind.” (David Walters, “Pagans & Christians,” *Creative Loafing Magazine*, April 25-May 1, 2001, p. 15)

### Theological Liberalism

- “If one wants to insist that God inspired the very words of scripture, what would be the point if we don’t have the very words of scripture? In some places...we simply cannot be sure that we have reconstructed the original text accurately.”<sup>1</sup>
- “When I talk about the hundreds of thousand of differences, it’s true that a lot are insignificant. But it’s also true that a lot are highly significant for interpreting the Bible. Depending on which manuscript you read, the meaning is changed significantly.”<sup>2</sup>

### The Preservation of the Biblical Text

- The original “autograph” is what is inspired and inerrant. And insofar as a translation accurately represents that original, then we have an inspired, inerrant Bible.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Bart D. Ehrman, “Did Jesus Really Say That?,” *The Charlotte Observer*, 12/17/05.

<sup>2</sup> Ehrman

- “God has caused that the books of the Bible should be marvelously preserved. We can get extremely near to the precise text as it came from the hand of the authors, but there are many minor points on which we cannot be sure. None of these points affect any important fact of Christian doctrine or life.”<sup>3</sup>
- “There is more material available to see how the Bible has been translated and to try to get near to the exact words of the original authors than of any other book from ancient times. We can be very sure that we are very near to the original text. We cannot say that we have it exactly.”<sup>4</sup>
- “Textual Criticism. The scholarly discipline of establishing the text as near to the original as possible or probable (also known as lower criticism). Since we no longer have any original manuscripts, or “autographs,” scholars must sort and evaluate the extant copies with their variant wordings.... The textual critic not only sorts through manuscripts and fragments for the copyist errors but also considers early translations (such as the Vulgate or Peshitta) and lectionaries for their witness to the text.”<sup>5</sup>
- “In the New Testament only one word per 1,000 is in any way doubtful, and no point of doctrine is lost when verses not “in better manuscripts” are omitted.... Such has been God’s “singular care and providence” in preserving his written Word for us (Westminster Confession I.viii).”<sup>6</sup>

#### Basic Sources of Information for NT

1. Greek NT manuscripts
2. Early translations of the NT (Latin, Syria, etc)
3. Quotations of the NT by early Christian writers
4. Lectionaries (collection of readings) of the NT

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Allan A. MacRae and Dr. Robert C. Newman, “Textus Receptus”

<sup>4</sup> MacRae and Newman

<sup>5</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki & Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies*, p. 114.

<sup>6</sup> J.I. Packer, “Text Criticism and Inerrancy,” *Christianity Today*, October 7, 2002, p. 102.

### EXAMPLE 1

Romans 8:1	
English Standard Version	King James Version
[1] There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.	[1] There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, <u>who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.</u>
[2] For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.	[2] For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

## EXAMPLE 2

1 John 5:6-8	
English Standard Version	King James Version
[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.	[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 testify:	[7] <u>For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.</u>
[8] the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.	[8] And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

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“There’s only one verse in the NT that explicitly states the doctrine of the trinity (that there are three persons in the godhead, but that the three all constitute just one God). It’s 1 John 5:7-8. You’ll find the verses in the KJV, and they’ve always been used as an explicit statement of the doctrine of the trinity. But those verses aren’t found in any of the Greek manuscripts down to the 14<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>7</sup>

## EXAMPLE 3

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<sup>7</sup> Ehrman

## The Ending to the Gospel of Mark (16:9-20)

### Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene (vv. 9-11)

[9] Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. [10] She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. [11] But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

### Jesus Appears to Two Disciples (vv. 12-13)

[12] After these things he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. [13] And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.

### The Great Commission (vv. 14-20)

[14] Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. [15] And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. [16] Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. [17] And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; [18] they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

[19] So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. [20] And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

## The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Old Testament

- “The preservation of the Hebrew text is excellent,” say Max Polley, professor emeritus of religion at Davidson College. “It’s pretty remarkable that the accuracy is as fine as it is.”<sup>8</sup>
- “Says [Dr. Peter] Flint: “This is very important. There are people who say the Bible has been changed and altered and tampered with. The Dead Sea Scrolls are very affirming. You can check it for yourself.”<sup>9</sup>

## 220 Biblical Scrolls

- “One was a complete scroll of the Book of Isaiah, copied by scribes 100 years before the time of Jesus. Additional findings in ten other caves in Qumran region over the next decade gave the world a jigsaw puzzle of 100,000 pieces of ancient Jewish religious texts that were the remains of about 870 distinct scrolls. Written in varieties of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, 220 of these were biblical scrolls representing at least portions of every book of our Old Testament except Esther.”<sup>10</sup>

## The Book of Isaiah

- “For years, biblical conservatives have pointed happily to the Great Isaiah Scroll, which was among the original seven scrolls found in the first cave in 1947. With all 66 chapters completely preserved, this version of Isaiah, though copied down around 100 B.C. – matches the A.D. 1000 Masoretic Text upon which all modern OT translations are based 99 percent of the time. Nearly the same level of accuracy is found in the other biblical manuscripts found at Qumran. “This confirms to us that our Hebrew Bible was wonderfully preserved,” [Dr. Peter] Flint says.”<sup>11</sup>
- “When it comes to the 1 percent that does differ, Flint gives the discrepancies a positive, pastoral take. “I’m happy to say in a rather dramatic fashion that the scrolls often sort out problems that we’ve known about for ages. They give us in black and white a better reading of the biblical text.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “From the Dead Sea to Charlotte,” *The Charlotte Observer*, February 12, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Kevin D. Miller, “The War of the Scrolls,” *Christianity Today*; October 6, 1997, p. 40.

<sup>11</sup> Miller, p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> Miller, p. 42.

### The Messiah's Hands and Feet Pierced

- Psa 22:16-18 For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet – [17] I can count all my bones – they stare and gloat over me [Luke 23:35]; [18] they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots [Matt 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:24].
- “*they have pierced my hands and feet*” – “Some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Vulgate, Syriac” (ESV footnote)
- “*like a lion [they are at] my hands and feet*” – “Most Hebrew manuscripts” (ESV footnote)
- John 20:25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

### The Height of Goliath

- 1 Sam 17:4 (ESV) And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.
- “Hebrew, Septuagint, Dead Sea Scroll and Josephus *four*.” (ESV footnote)
- “Goliath’s height in a Hebrew manuscript of Samuel dated to the mid-third century B.C. (4QSam-b) is given as six foot, nine inches, not nine foot, nine inches as found in the Masoretic Text (4QSam-b designates the text as being the second—or *b*—Samuel manuscript found in Cave 4 at Qumran).”<sup>13</sup>

### The Number of Jacob's Family in Egypt

- Acts 7:14 And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all.
- "Although the Hebrew Bible uses the number 70 (Gen. 46:27; Ex. 1:5; Dt. 10:22), the Greek translation of the OT (the Septuagint) adds at Gen. 46:20 the names of two sons of Manasseh, two of Ephraim, and one grandson of the latter. This makes the number 75 and is the number that Stephen uses."<sup>14</sup>
- “The number of Jacob’s descendants who traveled with him to Egypt is 70 in the Masoretic Text but 75 in 4QExod-a. This corresponds to the number Stephen uses

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<sup>13</sup> Miller, p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> The NIV Study Bible, footnote on Acts 7:14.

in his sermon in Acts 7:14 as well as to the Septuagint, which Stephen may have been using."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Miller, p. 43.