

VII The Old Testament Text

A The Number and Reliability of OT Manuscripts

1 Scarcity of Manuscripts

Compared to the NT, there are relatively few manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible available to us today. The reasons are varied:

- Destruction of texts during the Babylonian captivity
- Destruction of texts at the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70
- Scribal practice of reverently destroying old or worn manuscripts

Though there are only a relatively few manuscripts to compare, it doesn't mean that the text is an unreliable witness to what the biblical authors actually wrote. We can confidently say this due to the careful practices of the Jewish scribes as is shown below with the Dead Sea scrolls.

2 The Situation Prior to the Discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls

Prior to the Dead Sea scrolls being discovered in 1940s and 50s, the oldest complete manuscript of the OT was dated around 1008 AD is *the Leningrad Codex*. *Codex Aleppo* is a bit older, dated 930 AD, but it is not the complete Old Testament.³⁶ This placed the gap between the original writings and these copies between 1,400 (Postexilic) and 2,500 (Moses) years.

- *Some would say that this gap gives us reason to doubt the accuracy of the OT manuscripts. What do you think?*

3 The Situation after the Discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls

Once the Dead Sea Scrolls were evaluated it confirmed for us that the scribal practices of the Masoretes were phenomenally accurate. ***A full or partial papyrus was found for every book of the OT except Esther.*** The two Isaiah Scrolls found in cave #1 were practically identical to the 10th century Leningrad Codex. These Isaiah scrolls were copied in the 2nd century BC. This brings us 1,200 years closer to the **autographs**. It establishes that the scribal practices of the Jews were meticulously accurate.

B Old Testament Text Types

There are three different types (families?) of manuscripts that support the OT tradition. They are the Masoretic text, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Septuagint (a.k.a. the LXX). Let's look at them one at a time.

1 The Samaritan Pentateuch

The Samaritan Pentateuch dates somewhere between the 2-4 century B.C. It was developed by the mixed breed race (Jewish/gentile) of the Samaritans to support their worship on Mt Gerizim. They only accepted the 5 books of Moses as authoritative. This text has unique readings in it that do not appear in the other two text types. For example in Deut 12:5 when God tells Israel that he will chose a

³⁶See page 91 of Ewert's Book for a list of the Hebrew manuscripts available prior to the DSS.

place of worship once they enter the Promised Land was specifically identified as Mt Gerizim in the Samaritan Pentateuch, whereas it is left unidentified in the Hebrew manuscripts.

2 The Septuagint

The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Old Testament dating back to around 250 - 150 B.C. The Letter of Aristeas informs us of the legend of the Torah (i.e., Pentateuch) being translated by 72 scholars in 72 days. Josephus has preserved the legend for us as though it were truth. Philo (25 BC - AD 40) “*makes the translation an act of divine inspiration, and the translators prophets: although they worked separately they produced a single text that was literally identical throughout*”.³⁷ Some church fathers extended this fable to not only the Law, but to the whole OT. In reality the Greek King of Egypt, Ptolemy Philadelphus, ordered the translation of the OT in order to help with the Hellenizing of the Jewish population of Egypt.³⁸ This proved to be quite popular among the Jews since they had lost their ability to speak/read Hebrew.

Great article on the LXX compared to the Masoretic text as used in the NT can be found at the following web site. <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2012/02/17/The-Role-of-the-Septuagint-in-the-Transmission-of-the-Scriptures.aspx>

3 The Masoretic Text.

The Masoretes were a dedicated group of Jewish scribes that preserved the Hebrew Bible for generations to follow. What is important to remember is that until the 5th century AD, Hebrew was written with consonants only. The Masoretes were meticulous in copying the Hebrew text, sometimes one letter at a time.

It was during the 7th-10th century that the Masoretes developed the vowel system that is common in our Hebrew manuscripts. Prior to this, the written Hebrew language only had consonants, there were not any written vowels. Since during this time, Hebrew was primarily a scholarly language of religious leaders (much like Latin today), the proper pronunciation of words were being lost. So, to preserve the pronunciation, the Masoretes developed a system of dots and dashes they added to the text so pronunciation could be preserved. See the example below from Genesis 1:1 (you read Hebrew from right to left

בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: Gen. 1:1

Interesting fact about the name Yahweh (יהוה).

³⁷Ernst Wurthwein, The Text of the Old Testament. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) :50

³⁸Wurthwein, 51.

VIII The New Testament Text

A The Manuscript Situation

The situation of New Testament manuscripts is quite different from that of the Old. There are well over 5,800 Greek Manuscripts that date from the early 2nd century up until the 17th century. This number increases every year due to the work of Daniel Wallace and his team at *The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts* (<http://www.csntm.org>). In the 15th century when the printing press was invented there was a great reduction of hand-copied manuscripts.

I want us to take a moment to define a few terms

Textual Criticism: The science and art of determining the original text of the NT from the available manuscript evidence. The word “criticism” should not be taken to mean something negative. It refers to the process of analyzing something, in this case the Greek manuscripts.

Variant: The term used to describe differences in the particular word(s) in 2 or more manuscripts

B The Primary Witnesses to the Greek NT

Of the approximate 5,800 manuscripts that we possess, there are four different types of manuscript that are important for the student to know about: *papyri, uncials (aka majuscules), minuscules, and lectionaries*. Let us look at these one at a time. As of 2003, the number of each type is as follows:

Papyri	116 (127 now)
Majuscules	310
Minuscules	2877
Lectionaries	<u>2432</u>
	5735

This information was taken from *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, by Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, page 50. The number in parenthesis is an updated number from Daniel Wallace of the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts ([csntm.org](http://www.csntm.org)). You can check out this site for many pictures of these manuscripts.

1 Papyri

Papyri date between the 2nd and 8th century with the majority coming from the 3rd and 4th century; the oldest dating to 100-125 AD.⁴⁰ They mostly come from middle and upper Egypt where the desert climate allowed their preservation. We have 127 papyri catalogued for the purposes of textual criticism, and every book of the NT has at least a portion preserved in papyri.⁴¹ Since I am

⁴⁰This is a portion of the Gospel of John called the John Rylands Fragment and given the siglum *p*⁵².

⁴¹David Allen Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994) : 19.

going to demonstrate next week how textual critics make their decisions, I will provide the minimum necessary information you will need to understand their methods. In the textual apparatus these manuscripts are designated by a “p” with a superscript number following it (e.g. *p*⁵²)

2 *Uncials or Majuscules*

The word uncial refers to a style of writing. Uncials refer to the letters being written in **capital letters** instead of lower case. There are 310 uncial manuscripts that range from the 3rd to the 11th century. These manuscripts are designated in two ways in the textual apparatus, first by capital letters taken from Latin, Hebrew, and Greek (e.g. *A*, *α*, *γ*); and second by Arabic numerals with a zero prefixed to it (e.g. *02* or *046*). The most significant uncial manuscripts are:

- **Codex Sinaiticus** (designated by *א* or 01; 4th century; it has the distinction of being the only complete NT uncial)
- **Codex Alexandrinus** (designated by *A* or 02; 5th century; All of NT except portions of Matt. John and 2 Cor. are missing)
- **Codex Vaticanus** (*B* or 03; 4th century; Contains all NT except portions of Hebrews, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Revelation).
- **Codex Bezae** (*D* or 05; 5th century; This manuscript only contains the Gospels and Acts)

These and many others early uncials that are given great weight in determining variant readings.

3 *Miniscules*

Miniscules are manuscripts that use a cursive or “running” style of handwriting and are written in **lower case letters**. By the 10th century this form of writing replaced uncials. There are well over 2,800 miniscules which makes them the majority of Greek manuscripts. The Byzantine family of manuscripts are mostly miniscules. These are designated in the apparatus by Arabic numerals that do not start with zero (e.g. *1*, *2*, *3*, etc.)

4 *Lectionaries*

Lectionaries are different from the rest of the manuscripts in that they do not go verse by verse through books of the Bible. They are set up for the calendar year of Bible readings in the Church. For example: there would be a Gospel reading from Matthew 10; then a reading from the Epistles, e.g. Romans 5. There are over 2,400 lectionaries available to us for Textual Criticism. Lectionaries are designated in the apparatus by a lower case, italicized *ℓ* with a superscript number (e.g. *ℓ*¹⁰).

C Other Witnesses to the Greek NT

1 *Versions*

The Greek New Testament was translated into several other languages quite early in its history (i.e. 2nd century).

- a** **Old Latin** (4th century and up) designated as “**it**” with superscript letters

(it^a)

- b** **The Latin Vulgate** (4th century and up) designated as **vg**
- c** **Syriac** (4th - 7th century) designated as **syr**
- d** **Coptic** (3rd and 4th century) designated as **cop**
- e** **Gothic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Georgian, Nubian, etc**

2 *Church Fathers*

From the Church fathers we could reproduce the entire NT due to the fact that they quoted it so extensively (over 1,000,000 times). In the apparatus you will find dozens of names that range from the 2nd to the 5th centuries.

D **Geographical Text Families**

The 5,800+ Greek manuscripts, not to mention the versions and Fathers, can be separated into geographical categories. We call these “geographical families.” These different families came from the fact that as the church was copying the NT, errors entered into the manuscripts. These errors were passed on in many occasions to the succeeding manuscripts. Since travel and communication were not highly advanced, these errors *tended* to represent the texts of a geographical area. Texts of a certain area also tended to take on certain characteristics that were not very prominent in another geographical area (e.g., harmonization in the Gospels). There are 3 basic families of manuscripts, ***Alexandrian***, ***Western***, and ***Byzantine***. Please remember that these types or families are not hard and fast. There is disagreement sometimes about which family a manuscript is placed. But overall textual critics agree on these categories.

1 *Alexandrian*

It is called by this name because many of its manuscripts were found in Egypt, where Alexandria was the intellectual center (though in reality none were found in Alexandria but in middle and upper Egypt. Alexandria’s sand was wet due to the flooding of the Nile. This family represents the majority of papyri, early Uncials (e.g. **α**, B, & C), the Coptic versions, and some important church fathers (e.g., Clement and Origen). It has the distinction of being the oldest manuscript family. One of its characteristics is that it tends to have ***shorter readings***.

2 *Western*

Quoting Metzger, the western text type . . .

is usually considered to be the result of an undisciplined and ‘wild’ growth of manuscript tradition and translational activity. The western type can be traced back to a very early date, for it was used by Marcion, . . . Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Cyprian.⁴³

⁴³Bruce M. Metzger, The Text Of The New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) : 213.

Codex Bezae (D, 05) is its most prominent Uncial.

This text type is characterized by longer readings that border on paraphrases. The Book of Acts in the Western text is 8% longer than the Alexandrian text of Acts. Most would agree that when a variant *only* has support from the Western family, it is not the best representative of the original.

3 *Byzantine*

“The Byzantine Text is represented by the vast majority of Greek manuscripts [mostly miniscule] and most of the Later Church Fathers. This text is largely preserved in the area of the old Byzantine Empire, which is now Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, and the former Yugoslavia. . . Its readings are described as smooth and unobjectionable, and difficult readings appear to have been alleviated.”⁴⁴

This text family is well known for conflating two variants into one. If one manuscript used the phrase “Jesus” and another manuscript uses “Christ”, then the Byzantine text would combine them to say “Jesus Christ.” The Byzantine text has some early readings, but for the majority of variants, these manuscripts are quite late. (The KJV comes primarily from this family; more on that later)

Q: Can anyone venture a guess as to why this family covers the majority of Greek manuscripts?

⁴⁴Black, 33