



# Transmission: The Texts and Manuscripts of the Biblical Writings



# Strange Notes In My Bible

<sup>8</sup> Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field."<sup>a</sup> And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Genesis 4:8

<sup>a</sup> Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Vulgate and Syriac; Masoretic Text does not have "Let's go out to the field."

# Strange Notes In My Bible

[The earliest manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53-8:11.]

53 Then each went to his own home.



# Review

- Inspiration – God spoke through men in certain writings
- Canonization – the process of recognizing which books God had inspired and given to the Church





# Transmission

- The texts then had to be copied so they could be read by as many people as possible
- The texts were also copied since the originals would not survive for ever



# Key Questions

- ✓ How were copies of the Biblical writings made?
- ✓ How many copies of the Biblical writings do we have?
- ✓ How old are the copies we have of the Biblical writings?
- ✓ Are there differences between any of the copies?
- ✓ If there are differences, how do we decide which are the better copies (closer to what was actually written in the original document)?



A still life illustration of a scroll on a wooden table. The scroll is unrolled, showing text. A lit candle is on the table, casting a glow. A quill pen and an inkwell are also visible. The background is a draped golden fabric.

# Transmission

How the Text of the  
Biblical Books Was Copied  
and Preserved



# Common Errors Which Occurred During Copying Manuscripts

Confusing similar letters

ה ה

ר ד

ט ב

ח ת





# Common Errors Which Occurred During Copying Manuscripts

Wrong division of words

GODISNOWHERE

God is now here

God is no where

ΑΛΛΟΤΡΙΩΝ ΤΗΝ  
ΦΩΝΗΝ ΤΑΥΤΗΝ  
ΤΗΝ ΠΑΡΟΙΜΙΑΝ  
ΕΙΠΕΝ ΑΥΤΟΙΣ ΟΙΣ ΕΙΠΟΝ  
ΑΥΤΟΙΣ ΕΙΠΕΝ ΟΥΤΕ  
ΤΟΙΣ ΠΑΛΙΝ ΟΙΣ ΑΜΗΝ  
ΑΜΗΝ ΛΕΓΟΥΜΕΝ  
ΟΤΙ ΕΙΠΕ ΜΗΘΥ  
ΡΑΤΩΝ ΤΙ ΠΡΟΒΛΙΤΩ  
ΠΑΝΤΕΣ ΟΣΟΙ ΗΛΑ  
ΚΛΕΙΠΑΙΕΙΣ ΙΝΑ  
ΛΗΨΤΑΙ ΑΛΛΟΥ ΚΗ  
ΚΟΥΣ ΑΝ ΑΥΤΩΝ  
ΤΑ ΤΙ ΠΡΟΒΛΙΤΩ Η  
ΕΙ ΜΗΘΥΡΑ ΛΙΕΜ  
ΕΑΝ ΤΙΣ ΕΙΣΕΛΘΗ  
ΣΩΘΗΣ ΕΤΑΙ ΚΑΙ  
ΣΕΧΕΥΣ ΕΤΑΙ ΚΑΙ  
ΕΞΕΛΕΥΣ ΕΤΑΙ ΚΑΙ  
ΝΟΜΗΝ ΕΥΡΗΣΕ  
ΟΚΛΕΙΠΤΗ ΟΥΚ ΕΙ  
ΧΕΤΑΙ ΕΙ ΜΗ ΙΝΑ  
ΚΛΕΨΗ ΚΛΙΟΥΣ Η  
ΚΑΙ ΑΠΟΛΕΣ Η ΕΙ  
ΗΛΘΟΝ ΙΝΑ ΖΩΗ  
ΔΙΩΝ ΤΟΝ ΕΧΩΤΗ  
ΚΑΙ ΠΕΡΙΣΣΟΝ Ε  
ΧΩΣΙΝ ΕΓΩ ΕΙΜΙ  
ΠΟΙΜΗΝ ΟΚΛΛΟ  
ΟΠΟΙΜΗΝ ΟΚΛΑ  
ΤΗΝ ΨΥΧΗΝ ΑΥΤΟΥ  
ΔΙΔΩΣΙΝ ΥΠΕΡ ΤΩ  
ΠΡΟΒΛΙΤΩΝ ΟΛΕΜΙ  
ΣΩΤΟΣ ΚΛΙΟΥ ΚΕ  
ΠΟΙΜΗΝ ΟΥ ΟΥΚ Ε  
ΣΤΙΝ ΤΑ ΠΡΟΒΛΙΤΩ  
ΔΙΔΩΣΩΡΙ ΤΟΝ ΧΥ  
ΚΟΝ ΕΡΧΟΜΕΝΟΝ  
ΚΑΙ ΑΦΗΣΙΝ ΤΑ ΠΡ  
ΒΛΙΤΑ ΚΑΙ ΦΕΥΓΕΙ  
ΚΑΙ ΟΛΥΚΟΣ ΑΡΗΛ  
ΖΕΙ ΑΥΤΑ ΚΑΙ ΣΚΥ  
ΠΙΖΕΙ ΟΤΙ ΜΙΣΘΩ  
ΤΟΣ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΚΛΙΟΥ  
ΜΕΛΕΙ ΑΥΤΩ ΠΕΡΙ

ΕΓΩ ΕΙΜΙ ΟΠΟΙΜΙ  
ΟΚΛΛΟΚΛΙΤΕΙ  
ΝΩΣ ΚΩ ΤΑ ΕΜ ΚΑ  
ΓΕΙΝ ΩΣ ΚΟΥΣ Μ  
ΤΑ ΕΜ ΑΚΛΩΣ ΕΙ  
ΝΩΣ ΚΙ ΜΕ Ο ΠΑΡΗ  
ΚΑΓΩ ΤΙΝΩΣ ΚΩ  
ΤΟΝ ΠΑΤΕΡΑ ΚΑΙ Η  
ΨΥΧΗΝ ΜΟΥ ΔΙΔ  
ΜΙ ΥΠΕΡ ΤΩΝ ΠΡ  
ΒΛΙΤΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΑΛΛΑ  
ΠΡΟΒΛΙΤΑ ΕΧΩ Α  
ΟΥΚ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΕΚ ΤΗ  
ΧΥΛΗ ΣΤΑΥΤΗ ΚΑ  
ΚΕΙΝΑ ΔΕΙΜΕΛΑ  
ΓΙΝΚΑΙ ΤΗΣ ΦΩ  
ΝΗΣ ΜΟΥ ΑΚΟΥΣ  
ΣΙΝ ΚΑΙ ΓΕΝΗΣ  
ΤΑΙ ΜΙΑ ΠΟΙΜΗΝ  
ΕΙΣ ΠΟΙΜΗΝ ΔΙΑ  
ΤΟΥΤ Ο ΜΕ Ο ΠΑΡΗ  
ΑΓΑΠΧΟΤΙ ΕΓΩ ΤΙ  
ΟΙ ΜΙ ΤΗΝ ΨΥΧΗΝ  
ΜΟΥ ΤΗΝ ΑΠΑΛΙΝ  
ΛΑΒΩ ΑΥΤΗΝ ΟΥ  
ΛΙΣ ΜΕΡΗ ΑΥΤΗΝ  
ΑΠΕΜΟΥ ΑΛΛΕΓ  
ΤΗ Ο ΜΙΑ ΑΥΤΗΝ Α  
ΠΕΜΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΕΣ ΟΙ  
ΣΙΑΝ ΕΧΩΘΕΙΝ ΝΑ  
ΑΥΤΗΝ ΚΑΙ ΕΣ ΟΤΙ  
ΑΝ ΕΧΩ ΠΑΛΙΝ Α  
ΒΙΝ ΑΥΤΗΝ ΤΑΥΤΗ  
ΤΗΝ ΕΝ ΤΟΛΗΝ ΕΜ  
ΚΟΝ ΠΑΡΑ ΤΟΥ ΠΑ  
ΤΡΟΣ ΜΟΥ ΕΧΙΣΜΑ  
ΤΙ ΑΛΙΝ ΕΓΕΝΕΤΟ  
ΕΝ ΤΟΙΣ ΟΥΔΑΙΟΙΣ  
ΔΙΑ ΤΟΥΣ ΛΟΓΟΥΣ  
ΤΟΥΣ ΕΛΕΓΑΝ ΟΥΝ  
ΠΟΛΛΟΙ ΕΖΑΥΤΩ  
ΔΑΙΜΟΝΙΟΝ ΕΧΕΙ  
ΚΑΙ ΜΑΙΝΕΤΑΙ ΤΙ  
ΑΥΤΟΥ ΑΚΟΥΕΤΑΙ  
ΑΛΛΟΙ ΔΕ ΕΛΕΓΟΝ  
ΤΑΥΤΑ ΤΑ ΡΗΜΑΤΑ  
ΚΕΣΤΙΝ ΔΑΙΜΟΝΙ





# Common Errors Which Occurred During Copying Manuscripts

Assume wrong vowels

דַּבֵּר = to speak

דְּבַר = word, speech



# Common Errors Which Occurred During Copying Manuscripts

Missed or doubled letters or words

Skipping a letter, word or line or repeating a letter, word or line, usually due to similar beginning or ending letters in the word or line.





# Common Errors Which Occurred During Copying Manuscripts

Copying from memory rather than the manuscript

This was especially prevalent if the verse being copied had a parallel in another passage of Scripture.




# Common Errors Which Occurred During Copying Manuscripts

Intentional changes by scribes

- ✓ To correct grammar or spelling
- ✓ To harmonize with a parallel passage
- ✓ To make the text easier to understand
- ✓ To “correct” perceived theological difficulties





# The Difficulty of Reading the Manuscripts

The oldest manuscripts are often quite deteriorated, fragmentary, faded, and difficult to read. Furthermore, to save precious parchment, words often had little or no space between them.

A still life illustration of a study desk. On the left, a wooden desk holds several rolled-up scrolls on wooden spindles. A lit candle in a brass holder casts a warm glow. A quill pen rests on a small inkwell. The background is a draped golden fabric. The right side of the image is a solid dark purple color.

# Textual Criticism





# Textual Criticism

The process of evaluating the various manuscripts presently available in order to determine the reading which is closest to the original text.



## A Key Point....

Remember that although there are many variations in the text of the OT and NT, they are mainly relatively minor, and NO major doctrine is affected by these variations.



# The Manuscripts of the Old Testament





# The Masoretic Text

- ✓ Generally considered the most important Old Testament manuscripts we have available
- ✓ The Masoretes were Jewish scribes who copied the Hebrew text from approximately 500AD to 1100AD
- ✓ The Masoretes added vowels to the Hebrew text – until this time vowels had been pronounced but never written





# Masoretes Added Vowels to the Written Text

1 בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ:

1 בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

Genesis 1:1



# The Masoretic Text

- ✓ The Leningrad Codex (circa 1000 AD) is the basis of the BHS – the most popular Hebrew text today
- ✓ These texts were meticulously maintained, even to the point of copying what was actually written (the kethiv – what is written) even if it was not what the Masoretes actually thought was correct and read in synagogue (qere – what is read).
- ✓ However, the texts are over 1500 years distant from the original manuscripts.



# The Dead Sea Scrolls

- ✓ Discovered at Wadi Qumran in the 1940's and 1950's
- ✓ Contained both Biblical and extra-biblical writings, and were made between 250 BC and 70 AD
- ✓ Comprised of hundreds of thousands of fragments from over 800 manuscripts



# The Dead Sea Scrolls

Some Fragments of Exodus 6-7





# The Dead Sea Scrolls

- ✓ Contain fragments of every OT book except for Esther, along with a lot of other religious books, and community rules
- ✓ The biblical books most often found in the fragments are (in order) Psalms, Deuteronomy, Genesis, and Isaiah



# The Dead Sea Scrolls

- ✓ The Isaiah scroll contains the entire book of Isaiah, and was made around 100 BC
- ✓ This gives a look at the Hebrew text 1000 years prior to the Masoretic texts presently in use
- ✓ The text is amazingly similar to the Masoretic text







# The Septuagint (LXX)

- ✓ A Greek translation of the OT and the Apocrypha that was probably made circa 250-200 BC.
- ✓ Tradition said it was made by 70 translators, hence the name Septuagint (LXX).
- ✓ The type of translation varies from book to book – some are quite literal, while others are much more loose.





# The Septuagint (LXX)

- ✓ Sometimes the Septuagint is missing portions of text, and sometimes it has portions not found in the Masoretic Text.
- ✓ The Septuagint was used by much of the early Church, since they could not read Hebrew but could read Greek.
- ✓ Many of the OT quotations in the NT are clearly from the Septuagint.





# The Samaritan Pentateuch

- ✓ Samaritans separated from the larger Jewish community sometime after the exile but before the time of Christ (between 586 BC and 0 BC).
- ✓ The Samaritans only accepted the Pentateuch as canonical, and they preserved their own version.
- ✓ This version has many differences from the Masoretic text, some of which can be traced to changes made by the Samaritans due to their own doctrinal distinctives, but in some cases the Samaritan Pentateuch is closer to the LXX or the Dead Sea Scrolls than the Masoretic Text.





# Other Important Versions

- ✓ Aramaic targums
- ✓ Syriac Peshitta
- ✓ Quotes by Church Fathers



# Textual Criticism of the Old Testament Manuscripts



# Textual Criticism of the OT Manuscripts

- ✓ In general, the Masoretic text is the default text
- ✓ The other texts are consulted, but only followed against the Masoretic Text in unusual circumstances
- ✓ Note: The Eastern Orthodox Church only uses the Septuagint; they consider it the true version of the OT text



# The Manuscripts of the New Testament



# Our Rich Deposit of NT Manuscripts

- ✓ We have over 6000 manuscripts, codices, or portions of the NT writings – Homer's Iliad only has 650 manuscripts or portions!
- ✓ The typical time lapse between the writing and the oldest known manuscript for most works of Greek literature is around 800 years, yet we have manuscripts of most of the NT within approximately 100 years of the original writing
- ✓ These NT manuscripts and codices can contain anywhere from a few verses, to entire books or collections of books, to even the entire NT



# Some Important Early NT Manuscripts

- ✓ P52 – John 18:31-34, 37-38 – circa 110-125
- ✓ P46 (Chester Beatty Papyrus II) – all of Paul epistles except the pastoral epistles – circa 150-200
- ✓ Codex Sinaiticus – also known as א or aleph – whole NT – circa 350
- ✓ Codex Vaticanus – also known as B – Matthew through Hebrews 9:15 – circa 325



# Major Groups of New Testament Manuscripts

- ❖ The Byzantine text family
- ❖ The Alexandrian text family





# The Byzantine Text Family

- ✓ Text maintained by Byzantine (Eastern) church
- ✓ Basis of Textus Receptus and all early Greek texts of the Renaissance
- ✓ Greatest number of manuscripts by far



# The Alexandrian Text Family

- ✓ Produced by Alexandrian scribes
- ✓ Not widely known until 19th century
- ✓ Most scholars think these texts are the oldest we have, but fewer of these texts were made and survived (Codex Sinaiticus and Vaticanus are the two main Alexandrian texts)



# Textual Criticism of the New Testament Manuscripts



# Textual Criticism of the NT Manuscripts

- ✓ Most text critics consider the older Alexandrian text family to be the most reliable. It is the basis of most modern Greek texts and English translations
- ✓ Some scholars disagree and prefer the Byzantine/Majority text and use this for their translations (mainly the King James and New King James versions)
- ✓ Virtually all modern translations consult both text families and note any major differences in footnotes



# Concluding Thoughts

- ✓ We have an incredible number of manuscripts available today
- ✓ We also have a great number of early translations and quotes that help us know the text that the early church used
- ✓ The manuscripts we have are very early for ancient texts
- ✓ Even where there are differences, they do not affect any major doctrine

# Our Confidence in God's Word

Finally, it must be said that, although there are certainly differences in many of the New Testament manuscripts, not one fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading.

Philip Comfort  
*The Origin of the Bible, 189*



# Our Confidence in God's Word

The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries.

Frederick Kenyon  
(renowned paleographer and textual critic)  
quoted in *The Origin of the Bible*, 189

