## Textual Criticism

God gave His revelation to the biblical writers, who preserved it in written form. Nonetheless, in the course of time, the original documents, or “autographs,” produced by the biblical writers, have perished. All that remain are multiple copies of these originals.

This presents a dilemma for interpreters of the Bible, since the ancient copies of both Old and New Testaments differ from one another, at least in details. Which of these copies is the most accurate and reliable? Can we know for certain what God had at one time revealed? Are we able with the aid of these copies to restore the original biblical books? In order to resolve this dilemma, the discipline of “textual criticism” arose. We define textual criticism as the analysis of ancient Hebrew and Greek texts with the goal of rediscovering the originals, penned by the biblical authors.

On the one hand, the importance of this science is obvious. If we desire to accurately interpret a biblical passage, we must know what words the text actually contains. On the other hand, textual variants usually have little effect on doctrinal questions, since the variants do not usually concern important doctrinal points, but rather more minor details in the text. In addition, we never base a doctrine on a single (possibly errant) passage of Scripture, but compare multiple passages in its determination. So then, we can use nearly any ancient biblical text without seriously compromising the essentials of Christian faith.

How then, can we attempt restoring the original autographs? There are two components to this analysis. First, we must determine which copies of the originals are, in general, most reliable. The process of evaluating the quality of biblical manuscripts is called the “external criterion.” Second, we can often identify the correct textual variant by comparing the existing variants with one another. This is the “internal criterion.” Our plan in this chapter is to employ this two-stage approach toward the solution of the text-critical question.

### А. Textual Criticism of the Old Testament[[1]](#footnote-1)

**1. External Criterion**

In order to evaluate textual variants by means of the external criterion, one must first know which manuscripts are available for study. Then, one must evaluate the quality of these manuscripts according to certain principles.

**а. Existing Manuscripts of the Old Testament**

What kind of copies of the Old Testament are actually available to us for evaluation? There exists both manuscripts written in Hebrew, and ancient translations in various languages. In this section, instead of the conventional term “Old Testament,” we will employ the Jewish designation “Tanakh.” This term is an abbreviation for the three components of the Hebrew canon: Law (*Torah*), Prophets (*Nevi'im*), and Writings (*Ketuvim*).

**1) Ancient Hebrew Manuscripts**

Masoretic Text

The most well-known source for the restoration of the original autographs of the Tanakh is the Masoretic Text (henceforth abbreviated “MT”). It was written in Hebrew, although some passages are in a related Near Eastern tongue – Aramaic.[[2]](#footnote-2) Yet, even when the language is Hebrew, the text was written in Aramaic (square) script. This is due to the fact that during the Babylonian exile, the native tongue of the Jews changed from Hebrew to Aramaic, the latter being the conventional language of the other Near Eastern peoples.[[3]](#footnote-3) Eventually, the biblical text was correspondingly changed from the original “Paleo-Hebrew” script to the square, Aramaic figures, likely in the period from the fourth to the second centuries BC.[[4]](#footnote-4) The Hebrew spelling and grammar was preserved, only the script changed. Nonetheless, occasionally the personal name of God, Yahweh (יהוה), is still encountered in Paleo-Hebrew. So then, most of the MT is in the Hebrew language, yet written in Aramaic script.

Where did the designation “Masoretic” originate? The Masoretes were a group of Hebrew scribes, who labored from 500 BC to approximately 1000 AD.[[5]](#footnote-5) They are famous for their scrupulous attention to careful reproduction of the biblical text. They strictly refrained from altering the text. If they felt that the text they were coping was in error, they made no change in the text itself, but wrote corrections between the lines or in the margins. They employed a special system to indicate corrections to the text called “*qere-ketiv*.” *Ketiv*, which means “written,” indicates the literal reading of the text being copied. *Qere*, which means “read,” is the correction found in the margin. So then, in the places were the Masoretes made corrections, the reader should not read the *ketiv* variant, but the *qere* version.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Another method for introducing corrections was the use of elevated letters. If the scribe felt that a certain word was missing, he would insert the letter slightly elevated from the other letters. We note an interesting example in Judges 18:30, where an inserted, elevated “n” in the consonantal text for “Moses” (משׁה) changed the reading to “Manasseh” (מנשׁה).[[7]](#footnote-7) The “elevated letter” was used for other purposes as well. In Psalm 80:13, an elevated letter marks the median letter in the entire Psalter, and in Leviticus 11:42 – the median letter in the entire Torah.[[8]](#footnote-8) A special mark in Leviticus 10:16 indicates the median word in the Torah. Clearly, the Masoretes were highly concerned with minor details in the text.

The designation “Masoretic Text” refers to a large group of documents (about 6000), whose contents are nearly identical, and which have been endorsed by the Jewish community for many generations. The oldest complete copy of the Tanakh made by the Masoretes comes from the tenth century. It is thought that about that time, one text type was chosen as a standard, and the other variants were destroyed.[[9]](#footnote-9) This means that the nearly 6000 Masoretic manuscripts originate from a single, standard text type, chosen in the tenth century. This is why their contents are nearly identical, and why we can speak of the entire group as one “Masoretic Text.”

The most widely accepted representatives of the MT are the Aleppo Codex and the Leningrad Codex, both of which date from the tenth to the eleventh centuries AD.[[10]](#footnote-10) Both texts are part of the Ben-Asher tradition, named after the most respected of the Masoretes – Aaron ben Asher.[[11]](#footnote-11) For many years, rabbinic scholars used the Leningrad Codex as the standard, since the Aleppo Codex, which had been the standard in the Middle Ages, had been lost. In 1958, however, the manuscript was rediscovered, but the Torah and part of the Writings were missing.[[12]](#footnote-12) A project is now underway at the Jerusalem University to create a new standard Hebrew text, based on both the Aleppo and Leningrad Codices.[[13]](#footnote-13) Besides the Aleppo and Leningrad Codices, other Hebrew versions are employed for comparison, but carry less weight than the former two in deciding between textual variants.

Let us look further at the work of the Masoretes. They divided the text into words, inserting spaces between them.[[14]](#footnote-14) Before that time, the entire text was written without spaces, and the rabbis memorized the word divisions. The division of the text into verses preceded the work of the Masoretes (2nd-5th c. AD), and the numeration of verses and chapters followed (14th-16th c. AD).[[15]](#footnote-15) Furthermore, prior to the Masoretes, the text contained only consonants, and the rabbis memorized the pronunciation. In the eighth century, the Masoretes added vowels to the text in the form of dots and dashes below or above the consonants. The Masoretes also added indicators for division of the text into paragraphs, as well as accent marks for intonation. Finally, they created para-textual apparatuses, called *Massorah*, for cataloging other details in the text.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Dead Sea Scrolls

Another highly valuable resource for restoring the original Hebrew autographs is the Dead Sea Scrolls. Among this collection are documents written in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and even Paleo-Hebrew. The Dead Sea Scrolls are much more ancient than the Masoretic manuscripts, having been written about 200 years before Christ. They were prepared by a Jewish religious community at Qumran in the Wilderness of Judea. It is highly likely that this community belonged to the Jewish sect of “Essenes,” who separated themselves from other Jews, considering themselves more holy and spiritual than others.

The Qumran community faithfully preserved the text of the Tanakh. Unlike the writers of the Samaritan Pentateuch, which we will discuss later, the Qumran community did not introduce into the text their own unique doctrines. Upon discovering the Qumran texts, scholars were amazed that many of the documents were nearly identical to the MT, which speaks both to the quality of the Masoretes’ work, and to the reliability of the Hebrew text transmitted from antiquity.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The community at Qumran not only copied texts, but also gathered various texts from other parts of Palestine. Thus, the Qumran collections includes material from numerous books, both canonical and non-canonical. Two hundred documents contain biblical texts, but most are just fragments, except for one entire copy of the Book of Isaiah. Also interesting is that the Qumran collection contains all the books of the Tanakh, except Esther. The non-canonical books include apocalyptic, pseudepigraphical, and sectarian books, the latter devoted to the unique teachings of the Qumran community. Finally, we note some commentaries on biblical books, namely on Isaiah, Habakkuk, and Nahum.[[18]](#footnote-18)

The text types found at Qumran break down as follows. Forty percent correspond to the present MT and are called proto-Mastoretic manuscripts.[[19]](#footnote-19) The MT is a continuation of this line. The entire copy of Isaiah, found in cave 1, is a proto-Mastoretic document.[[20]](#footnote-20) Only five percent of the Qumran collection correspond to the Samaritan Pentateuch or the Septuagint.[[21]](#footnote-21) The remaining biblical manuscripts are unique to Qumran. It seems that Qumran produced its own text type, distinct from the more traditional textual traditions.

Let us recap the fascinating history of the Qumran discovery. The community is located about 30 kilometers from Jerusalem on the banks of the Dead Sea. Rising behind the Qumran settlement are high cliffs with many caves, in which the documents were found.

The first discovery, in cave 1, was made in 1947 by Muhammed edh-Dhib, his cousin Jum'a Muhammed, and Khalil Musa.[[22]](#footnote-22) While shepherding sheep, one of the above individuals tossed a rock into cave 1 and heard something breaking inside. Entering the cave, they discovered vessels containing seven documents, including the entire Isaiah scroll. The vessels in the caves resembled others found later in excavation of Qumran, which confirmed the origin of the manuscripts. The excavations also revealed a scriptorium at Qumran, where the documents were produced.

The youths sold three scrolls to a merchant in Bethlehem, who, in turn, sold them to Eleazar Sukenik of the Jerusalem University: the so-called Second Isaiah Scroll, fragment of a hymnbook, and the War Scroll, which predicts a future war between the sons of light and darkness. The remaining four books they sold to a different merchant, who sold them, in turn, to a local Orthodox priest: the First Isaiah Scroll, Genesis Apocryphon, relating fictional stories of biblical heroes, the Community Rule, and a Commentary on Habakkuk. The priest advertised these documents in the Wall Street Journal, where Sukenik’s son noticed it, and these scrolls were subsequently obtained for the Jerusalem University as well. All seven scrolls from the original cave 1 discovery are now kept at the “Shrine of the Book” in Jerusalem.

After the initial discovery, archeologists continued the search for more manuscripts and were richly rewarded. In cave 4 alone, they found 15,000 fragments from more than 580 scrolls. Cave 11 yielded a scroll describing how to rebuild the Jerusalem temple. Other documents gave additional history to the narrative in 1 Samuel 11, instructions on finding treasure in Palestine, additional commandments and laws, and documents with references to a “pierced Messiah” and the “Son of God.”

Samaritan Pentateuch

The third classification of Hebrew manuscripts are those containing the Samaritan Pentateuch (henceforth abbreviated “SP”), done by the inhabitants of Samaria. Since the Samaritans recognize only the Torah as the Word of God, they preserved and coped only that section of the Tanakh. They created their version of the Torah in the second century BC, and the oldest copy still in existence comes from the 10th-12th century AD. The work is in Hebrew, and the text is consonantal, i.e., without vowels. Some copies are in the Paleo-Hebrew script. Translations exist in Arabic, Aramaic and Greek.[[23]](#footnote-23) The SP differs from the MT in many instances, but most of them concern only variations in spelling. More significant are those places where the SP and the Septuagint agree against the reading in the MT, but for the most part, these also concern mainly differences in spelling.[[24]](#footnote-24)

On the other hand, the SP does contain instances where the text was obviously altered in order to support the unique doctrinal views of the Samaritans. For example, the Samaritans believe that God visited Israel not on Mount Sinai, but on Mount Gerizim, and they consequently established the latter as the proper place of worship. Therefore, in Exodus chp. 20, Deuteronomy chp. 5, and Deuteronomy 27:4, “Gerizim” replaces the word “Sinai.”[[25]](#footnote-25) In addition, in the Book of Deuteronomy, the “place which He will choose” is identified as Mount Gerizim.

**2) Ancient Translations**

Before entering a discussion of various ancient translations of the Tanakh, we must note that the use of translations for reconstructing the original Hebrew text in complicated by the fact that we cannot precisely determine which words stood behind the translation in the Hebrew text. Even if the translations were made from a Hebrew text more accurate than the ones we possess today, we still face the issue of how to read the translation back into the original Hebrew.

Septuagint

The most well-known and significant ancient translation of the Tanakh is its primary Greek translation – the Septuagint (henceforth abbreviated LXX). Disagreements exist about how this translation came about. According to a legendary account found in the non-canonical book *The* *Letter of Aristeas*, the King of Egypt invited 72 Jewish translators to create a quality Greek translation of the Tanakh for his library. The 72 translators allegedly worked independently, but all produced the exact same translation. Against this legend is the fact that we observe in different parts of the LXX different literary styles, which indicates the involvement of several translators for a single text.[[26]](#footnote-26) Others postulate that the LXX is an amalgamation of several already existing translations. Still others are ready to accept that the LXX was produced at one time, but not according to the legend of Aristeas*.*

The LXX was produced in the third century BC, starting with the Torah. Fragments still exist from the second century BC (15 verses from Deuteronomy).[[27]](#footnote-27) The library of Chester Beatty (in Dublin, Ireland) is famous for ancient copies of the LXX on papyrus, including the only copy of the Book of Daniel that does not derive from the translation of Theodotion (see below). The oldest complete copies of the LXX date from the 4th-5th centuries AD: Codex Vaticanus, Codex Sinaiticus, and Codex Alexandrinus.

One important feature of the LXX, which we discussed in Chapter 2, is the presence of apocryphal books.[[28]](#footnote-28) Additionally, the order of books in the LXX differs from the Hebrew Bible, and most Bible translations, including the English, follow the LXX order.[[29]](#footnote-29)

In comparing the LXX with the MT, we note a close correspondence between them in the translation of the Torah. Some books, however, demonstrate a more freehand style: Job, Daniel, Proverbs, and Isaiah. Moreover, the LXX versions of Job and Jeremiah are much shorter than in the MT. In light of the findings at Qumran, we now understand that the LXX translators used a different Hebrew text than the Masoretes did.[[30]](#footnote-30)

In time, the Jews felt the need to revise the Greek Old Testament. There were two reasons for this. First was the desire to conform the Greek text more closely to the Hebrew. Second, the LXX was widely used by early Christians to convert Jews to Messiah Jesus. Unbelieving Jews blamed, in part, the poor quality of the LXX translation for this defection.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Attempts were made to improve the Greek translation in various ways. Some tried to revise the existing LXX, others created totally new translations (see below). One revision is found in Origen’s work the *Hexapla*. This work provided six options for viewing the Tanakh, organized into six columns:[[32]](#footnote-32)

1. Hebrew text of the Masoretic type,
2. transliteration of the Hebrew text,
3. translation of Aquila (see below),
4. translation of Symmachus (see below),
5. Septuagint according to Origen,
6. translation of Theodotion (see below).

The fifth column presents us with a version of the LXX that differs from all other existing copies and represents either a revision by Origen himself, or his reproduction of the work of another unknown scholar. Other revisions were the Kaige revision (1st c. AD) and one done by Hesychius of Alexandria (4th c. AD).[[33]](#footnote-33)

The revision of Lucian of Antioch (4th c. AD) is important in that part of the original LXX was lost, and subsequent copyists used the translation of Theodotion for the missing parts. Yet, Lucian’s revision differs in these places from other copies, which leaves the impression that the original LXX might be preserved in Lucian’s version.

The LXX itself was translated in different languages, namely: Old Latin, Coptic, Armenian, Arabian, and Ethiopian. Study of these ancient translations can shed light on the original contents of the LXX.

Other Greek Translations

Unlike those who attempted to revise the LXX, others sought to produce a new Greek version of the Tanakh directly from the Hebrew. We highlight here the work of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion.

Aquila lived and labored in the second century BC. He produced a new Greek translation of the Tanakh from the Hebrew in 130 AD. His goal was to provide an alternative to the supposed Christian-distorted LXX. Along with others, he felt the early success of Christianity among the Jews was due to inaccuracies in the LXX. In his translation, he strictly followed the Hebrew (proto-Masoretic) text. Origen included Aquila’s translation in his *Hexapla.*[[34]](#footnote-34)

Symmachus lived and labored in the second-third centuries AD and translated the Tanakh from Hebrew in 170 AD. His translation follows the MT for the most part, but with some variation. He wrote in an eloquent Greek style. His goal was not only accuracy in translation, but also ease in reading.[[35]](#footnote-35) Origen included Symmachus’ translation in his *Hexapla* as well*.*[[36]](#footnote-36)

Theodotion lived and labored in the first century BC. Some think his work is based on the work of an earlier scholar, whom they call “Kaige-Theodotion.” His is also a translation from the Hebrew and follows the MT for the most part, but with some variation. It was included in Origen’s *Hexapla*. As we noted earlier, later copyists of the LXX likely used Theodotion’s translation to fill in the missing sections of the original LXX. In particular, the Book of Daniel in the present LXX is likely from Theodotion.

Targums

A further source for reconstructing the original Tanakh is the Aramaic Targums, written, of course, in Aramaic – a language closely related to Hebrew. After their Babylonian captivity, Israel’s native tongue changed from Hebrew to Aramaic. In order to accommodate the Scriptures to the new language, the Targums were created. The word itself means “explanation.” We see this accommodation in action in Nehemiah 8:8, where the leaders of Israel “read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.”

For the most part, the Aramaic translation was made orally. Not until the first century BC was the Targum translation written. The oldest existing copy dates from the first century AD. Targums exists for all the canonical books except for Daniel and Ezra-Nehemiah.[[37]](#footnote-37) The Targums show a tendency to paraphrasing, interpretation and expansion of material. In addition, we see less instances of anthropomorphism.[[38]](#footnote-38)

The most celebrated of the Targums are the following. The Targum of Onkelos contains the Torah and was written after the Masoretic tradition with some paraphrasing. The Torah Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan was also used, but could not rival the Targum of Onkelos.[[39]](#footnote-39) Targum Jonathan contains the early and latter prophets. Several others Targums contain the Writings, but none of them have established themselves as standards.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Vulgate

The Vulgate is a Latin translation of the Tanakh. Jerome produced it in the fifth century. Its contents resemble the Masoretic Text, yet we do not know exactly which text type Jerome used for his translation.[[41]](#footnote-41) Augustine objected to Jerome preferring the Hebrew text to the LXX for his translation. Some Church Fathers, including Augustine, thought the LXX inspired.[[42]](#footnote-42) Brotzman claims that later copies of the Vulgate may not faithfully represent the work of Jerome, since the later copies contain insertions from the Old Latin translation.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Peshitta

The Peshitta is a transition of the Tanakh in Syriac. It was made in the first or second centuries AD from either a Hebrew or Aramaic original.[[44]](#footnote-44) The oldest copy available to us dates from the early sixth century. The Peshitta resembles the MT, but not as closely as the Targums or the Vulgate do. It is thought that the Peshitta translators sometimes altered the text to more closely approximate the New Testament quotations of passages taken from the LXX.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Arabic

The last translation we will comment on is the Arabic one, made in the ninth century. It closely resembles the MT. A different Arabic version also exists, based not on the Tanakh, but on the LXX and Peshitta.[[46]](#footnote-46)

**3) Conclusions**

Brotzman (along with others) suggests the following scheme for understanding the relationships between various versions of the Tanakh.[[47]](#footnote-47) Three lines of tradition derived from the original autographs: Babylonian, Palestinian, and Egyptian. The various texts and versions discussed above belong to one of these three traditions.

* The Babylonian text became the proto-Masoretic, then the Masoretic Text. From the proto-Masoretic were produced the Targums, the Vulgate, the Peshitta, the Arabic translation, and the translations of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion.
* The Palestinian text became the Samaritan Pentateuch.
* The Egyptian text became the basis for the Septuagint, from which translations were made into Old Latin, Coptic, Armenian, Arabic, and Ethiopic.

The goal, then, of analyzing the texts of the Babylonian tradition is to reconstruct the original text of that tradition. The goal of studying the texts of the other traditions is similarly to uncover their original texts. At the same time, we keep in mind that the Babylonian tradition, more than likely, is closer to the original Tanakh, than the Palestinian or Egyptian traditions are (see discussion below).

**b. Evaluation of the Manuscripts**

Now that we have some insight into which manuscripts are available for the restoration of the original text, what remains is to evaluate their quality. Catholics and Protestants feel that the text type closest to the autographs is the MT. The following reasons support this view. First, the MT is not a translation, but a Hebrew text. This means that we do not have to guess which Hebrew words stand behind the translations. Second, the Jews, to whom God “entrusted” His word (see Rom 3:2), endorse the MT. Third, the reliability of the MT is confirmed by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The contents of the proto-Masoretic text type found there is nearly identical to that of the MT produced a thousand years later. Finally, some scholars hold the view that the LXX, SP, and Targums were not made for scholarly study, but just for public reading.[[48]](#footnote-48)

The Eastern Orthodox hold to a different view. According the Orthodox tradition, the LXX provides us the purest version of the Tanakh. They believe that God inspired not only the authors of the Tanakh, but also the translators of the LXX, who actually improved the original text under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Augustine also defended this position:

But although the Jews acknowledge this very learned labor of (Jerome) to be faithful, while they contend that the Septuagint translators have erred in many places, still the churches of Christ judge that no one should be preferred to the authority of so many men (*City of God*, 18.43).

Assuming the divine inspiration of the LXX translators, Augustine explains the difference between the LXX and the Hebrew text as follows:

For the same Spirit who was in the prophets when they spoke these things was also in the seventy men when they translated them, so that assuredly they could also say something else, just as if the prophet himself had said both, because it would be the same Spirit who said both; and could say the same thing differently, so that, although the words were not the same, yet the same meaning should shine forth to those of good understanding; and could omit or add something, so that even by this it might be shown that there was in that work not human bondage, which the translator owed to the words, but rather divine power, which filled and ruled the mind of the translator (*City of God*, 18.43).

The Orthodox defend their view with the following arguments. First, the Early Church always used the Greek text, which indicates its supremacy. Second, the great majority of the New Testament citations of the Old come from the LXX. On the other hand, one must consider that the native tongue of the Early Church was, in general, Greek. Naturally, early Christians would use a text written in their native language, and New Testament authors would cite quotations from the Old Testament text, with which their audience was most familiar, that is, the LXX. We concur, therefore, with the Catholic-Protestant view of the superiority of the MT.

Ernst Würthwein, author of *The text of the Old Testament,* suggests the following progression of manuscripts in order of their value for reconstructing the original:[[49]](#footnote-49)

1. Masoretic Text
2. Samaritan Pentateuch
3. Dead Sea Scrolls
4. Septuagint
5. translation of Aquila
6. translation of Symmachus
7. translation of Theodotion
8. Peshitta
9. Targums
10. Vulgate
11. Old Latin translation
12. Coptic translation
13. Ethiopian translation
14. Arabic translation
15. Armenian translation

Although the MT provides us with the purest text type, there are cases when we must make corrections to it. We can consider an emendation when: (1) the variant in the MT is unacceptable because it creates a logical impossibility or fails to satisfy the “internal criterion” (see below), or (2) several other texts types agree against the MT variant. We will examine one example where it is necessary to correct the MT. In the MT of Judges 11:34, we read about the daughter of Jephthah:

וְרַק הִיא יְחִידָה אֵין־לוֹ מִמֶּנּוּ בֵּן אוֹ־בַת

Now she was his one {and} only child; besides him he had no son or daughter.

The error is obvious. For this passage, however, the LXX, the Peshitta, and the Targums have the correct variant – “besides her.”

**2. Internal Criterion**

Next, we must analyze textual variants in light of the so-called “internal criterion.” Before entering that discussion, though, we will briefly touch on how mistakes in copying might occur. First, the transition from the paleo-Hebrew to the square Aramaic script could have led to misreading one letter for another. Second, some Hebrew letters look very similar, which could have led to confusion as well. Third, a copyist’s handwriting may not always have been clear. Fourth, the copyist may have been working with a damaged document. In addition, before the introduction of vowels into the text, the copyist memorized the vowels, and memory slips could have resulted in errors. Finally, some texts lacked spaces between words, and even after their insertion, they may have been too small to notice.

We define the internal criterion as follows. When we encounter variations between biblical texts, we give preference to one or the other based on certain principles. First, we give preference to the shortest option. This is because, as a rule, a scribe will more likely add words to a text, rather than remove them. Second, we prefer the variant that is hardest to understand. Again, a scribe will more likely try to clarify a difficult passage than complicate a clear one. Third, we respect the biblical author’s style of writing and the context of the passage. Thus, we prefer the option that is consistent with both. Fourth, there are some well-known errors that copyist make that, when observed, make the option that contains them suspect. Some of the errors are unintentional, while others are intentional.[[50]](#footnote-50)

The following errors are considered unintentional. One such unintentional error is an omission due to homeoteleuton. When certain words are repeated later in the text, the copyist may unintentionally skip over the words in between the identical segments. For example, in Leviticus 4:25 the words מִזְבַּח הָעֹלה (“altar of burnt offering”) are repeated twice:

וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן מִדַּם הַחַטּאת בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ וְנָתַן עַל־קַרְנֹת מִזְבַּח הָעֹלה וְאת־דָּמוֹ יִשְׁפֹּךְ אֶל־יְסוֹר מִזְבַּח הָעֹלָה

Then the priest is to take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering; and {the rest of} its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering.

In one Hebrew manuscript (the “Cairo Codex”), the words וְאת־דָּמוֹ יִשְׁפֹּךְ אֶל־יְסוֹר (“and {the rest of} its blood he shall pour out at the base of the”) are missing, likely due to the repetition of the phrase “altar of burnt offering.” We discover another example in Isaiah 4:5-6:

עָנָן יוֹמָם (וְעָשָׁן וְנֹגַהּ אֵשׁ לֶהָבָה לָיְלָה כִּי עַל־כָּל־כָּבוֹד חֻפָּה׃ וְסֻכָּה תִּהְיֶה לְצַל־יוֹמָם)…וּבָרָא יהוה

מַחֹרֶב וּלְמַחְסֶה וּלְמִסְתּוֹר מִזֶּרֶם וּמִמָּטָר׃

Then the LORD will create… a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy. There will be a shelter to {give} shade from the heat by day, and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain.

One manuscript from Qumran (1QIsa) omits the phrase, “even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy. There will be a shelter to {give} shade from the heat,” due to the repetition of the word יוֹמָם (“by day”) before and after it.

“Dittography” refers to an instance where, for some reason, a copyist duplicates a letter, word, or phrase. In 2 Kings 15:16, we observe the unnecessary use of the definite article in the wordהֶהָרוֹתֶיהָ (“pregnant women”). It is very possible that the scribe simply duplicated the first letter of the word הָרוֹתֶיהָ. In Isaiah 30:30 of the Qumran document 1QIsa, the word הִשְׁמִיעַ (“cause His voice of authority to be heard”) appears twice, while in the MT – only once.

On the other hand, the opposite can also occur – reduction of an intended duplication. For example, in the MT of Numbers 14:34, we read, יוֹם לַשָּׁנָה יוֹם לַשָּׁנָה (“a day for a year, a day for a year”), while in other manuscripts, the expression is found only once: יוֹם לַשָּׁנָה (“a day for a year”). If the MT is correct here, we have an example of reduction.

The following example shows how a copyist can confuse similar letters in a text. In the MT, for example, Genesis 10:4 reads:

וּבְנֵי יָוָן אְֶלִישָׁה וְתַרְשִׁישׁ כִּתִּים וְדֹדָנִים

The sons of Javan {were} Elishah and Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim.

In the SP and LXX, however, we find:

וּבְנֵי יָוָן אְֶלִישָׁה וְתַרְשִׁישׁ כִּתִּים וְרֹדָנִים

The sons of Javan {were} Elishah and Tarshish, Kittim and Rodanim.

The variation is caused by confusion of the letters ד and ר.

Also, observe in the MT of Isaiah 28:21:

כְהַר־פְּרָצִים יָקוּם יהוה

For the LORD will rise up as Mount Perazim

While in the Qumran scroll 1QIsa we read:

בְהַר־פְּרָצִים יָקוּם יהוה

For the LORD will rise up on Mount Perazim

The variation is caused by confusion of the letters כ and ב.

It is assumed that copyists not only worked independently, but also sometimes copied from dictation. The following example shows that a copyist could confuse similar sounds, like לֹא (lo) and לוֹ (lo), in Psalm 100:3:

דְּעוּ כִּי־יהוה הוּא אְֶלֹהִים הוּא־עָשָׂנוּ וְלֹא אֲנַחְנוּ

Know that the LORD Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves.

דְּעוּ כִּי־יהוה הוּא אְֶלֹהִים הוּא־עָשָׂנוּ וְלוֹ אֲנַחְנוּ

Know that the LORD Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and we are His.

A scribe might also confuse the order of letters (metathesis). In various manuscripts of Numbers 15:35, we encounter different forms of the verb רגם (“to stone”), once in the infinitive רגום, and once in the imperative רגםו. We note another interesting example in Isaiah 32:19:

MT: וּבָרַד בְּרֶדֶת הַיָּעַר וּבַשִּׁפְלָה תִּשְׁפַּל הָעִיר

And it will hail when the forest comes down, and the city will be utterly laid low.

Qumran (1QIsa): וּבָרַד בְּרֶדֶת הַיָּעַר וּבַשִּׁפְלָה תִּשְׁפַּל הַיָּעַר

And it will hail when the forest comes down, and the forest will be utterly laid low

Next, we must consider mistakes caused by omission of a letter. In the MT of Isaiah 5:8, we see, בַיִת בְּבַיִת (“house to house”), but in 1QIsa – בַיִת בַיִת (“house house”).

We mentioned earlier the issue of spacing between words. Although the ancients may well have had word separation in their texts, there are still instances where the word division seems incorrect. Jeremiah 2:21 may be best translated not:

ואיך נה‬פכת לי סורי הגפן נכריה

How then have you turned yourself before Me into the degenerate shoots of a foreign vine?

but:

ואיך נה‬פכת לסוריה גפן נכריה,

How then have you turned yourself into the degenerate shoots of a foreign vine?

In Amos 6:12, we should probably read בבקר ים instead of בבקרים. The translation would then be, “Do horses run on rocks? Or does one plow the sea with oxen?” and not, “Do horses run on rocks? Or does one plow them with oxen?”

Next, we will mention changes in the text likely made intentionally. Sometimes scribes seek to correct what they perceive to be mistakes in the text. For example, in Habakkuk 1:12, we read, “Are You not from everlasting, O LORD, my God, my Holy One? We will not die.” Yet, evidence also exists in support of the variant “Are You not from everlasting, O LORD, my God, my Holy One? You will not die.” If the latter is correct, we may explain the discrepancy by assuming that the copyist could not conceive of God dying and therefore emended the text.

Another similar intentional emendation is the “euphemism.” Job 2:9 may be an example. Literally, the verse reads, “Then his wife said to him, ‘Do you still hold fast your integrity? Bless (ברך) God and die!’” It is very possible that the original text read, “Curse (קלל) God and die!” Yet, to avoid repeating such an offensive statement, the scribe may have changed the word קלל (“curse”) to the euphemism ברך (“bless”). Another possible instance of euphemism is Isaiah 13:16, where the *ketiv* reads תִּשָּׁגַלְנָה (“raped them”), but the *qere* reads תִּשָּׁכַבְנָה (“laid with them”).

Other types of intentional emendations include omission of material (17 instances can be cited), possible addition of material, and replacing a rare word with a more common one.

**3. Conclusions**

In light of the methodology discussed above, we arrive at the following recommendations for resolving variants in the Tanakh text. First, the MT is preferred as the best representative of the original autograph. At the same time, we may consider correcting the MT under the following conditions: (1) if the MT version is illogical or is ruled out by the internal criterion, or (2) when several other text types agree against the MT variant.

Würthwein also offers the following helpful guidelines:

1. even if the MT makes sense, it may not necessarily reflect the original,
2. we have to consider which variant best explains the appearance of the other(s),
3. if the MT is less acceptable logically or contextually than other texts, the other texts maybe just represent attempts to “fix” the MT,
4. if neither the MT, nor other texts appear acceptable, we may suggest an emendation.

We conclude this section by mentioning one more approach to resolving textual variants, suggested by the eminent textual critic Emanuel Tov. He believes the MT to be the most reliable text, followed by the LXX and the SP. Yet, unlike others, Tov places great weight on the intuitive acumen of the scholar. He expounds his position as follows: “The upshot of this analysis, then, is that to some extent textual evaluation cannot be bound by any fixed rules. It is an art in the full sense of the word, a faculty which can be developed, guided by intuition based on wide experience. It is the art of defining the problems and finding arguments for and against the originality of readings.”[[51]](#footnote-51)

### B. Textual Criticism of the New Testament[[52]](#footnote-52)

**1. External Criterion**

**а. Existing New Testament Manuscripts**

Before we can analyze the variants in New Testament manuscripts, we must first survey the manuscripts available for analysis and then determine their quality based on certain features. Happily, over 5400 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament exist, yet most of them are only fragments. Interestingly, they all differ from one another, at least in details.[[53]](#footnote-53) We do have access, though, to 50 complete Greek New Testament texts.

The most valuable text types are the papyri, written, as you might guess, on papyrus. In all, we possess 88 such documents, and all of them are fragments. They are designated by the letter:



Our oldest papyri date to the early second century, namely: (1) papyrus 52 (John Rylands fragment), which contains four verses from the 18th chapter of John’s Gospel; and (2) papyrus 66, which contains the entire Gospel of John. Two other notable collections are that of Chester Beatty and the Bodmer papyri. They contain nearly all of the New Testament books:[[54]](#footnote-54)

Chester Beatty:

* 45 (Gospels and Acts)
* 46 (Paul)
* 47 (Revelation)

Bodmer papyri:

* 66 (Gospel of John)
* 72 (Jude and Peter)
* 74 (Acts, fragments of the General Epistles)
* 75 (Gospel of Luke)

Some other Greek manuscripts fall into the classification of uncials. They are not as old as papyri, yet are nonetheless very valuable for textual criticism. They are distinguished by type of paper (parchment) and style of writing (all capital letter). We have access to 260 such documents. They are designated by capital letters in Latin, Greek, Hebrew (in one case), or numbers beginning with zero. Leading manuscripts in this group include the fourth century Codex Sinaiticus (א), and Codex Vaticanus (B), and the fifth century Codex Alexandrinus (A), Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (C), Codex Bezae (D), and Codex Washingtonianus (W).

Minuscules are a third text type, still younger than uncials and therefore not as highly valued for reconstruction of the original New Testament. They are also written on parchment, but unlike uncials, contain only small letters. They are designated by numbers not beginning with zero.[[55]](#footnote-55) Among minuscules, number 33 is highly valued. Certain groups of minuscules have a single designation, like *f* 1 and *f* 13. One groups consists of thousands of nearly identical later manuscripts under the designation the “Majority Text.” It is indicated by the abbreviation *Byz* (i.e., Byzantine text) or by the letter:

In our attempt to restore the New Testament original, one may also consider the testimony of lectionaries, i.e., books used in the churches for conducting the liturgy. They sometimes contain quotations from the New Testament. Yet, their testimony is not as weighty due to their late date (fragments from the 6th century, entire versions from the 8th).[[56]](#footnote-56) They all fall into the Byzantine family of texts (see below). Many copies exist – over 2000. They are designated by the letter *l* or the abbreviation *Lect*.

The Church Fathers also quote verses from the New Testament. This source is valuable in the sense that the works of some date back to the late first-early second centuries. In addition, we known the location of their ministry and, consequently, to which textual family their writings belong (see below).[[57]](#footnote-57) On the other hand, since in many cases the Fathers likely quoted from memory, one cannot take their testimony as determinative of the correct variant.

Scholars also take into consideration the variants located in ancient translations of the New Testament. We have access to thousands such copies. The process of translation from the Greek began at the end of the second century. The following are considered:

* Old Latin (lat)
* Vulgate (vg)
* Coptic (sa, bo or co)
* Syriaс (syr)
* Armenian (arm)
* Ethiopian (eth)
* Gothic (goth)
* Georgian (geo)
* Old Slavonic (slav)

All of the above translations were done from a Greek text, except for Armenian (from Syriaс), Georgian (from Armenian), Ethiopian (from Syriaс), and Vulgate (from Old Latin).[[58]](#footnote-58) Outstanding among the Old Latin are documents k, b, a, c, ff, and i.[[59]](#footnote-59) The Vulgate is the official version of the Roman Catholic Church, which edited the Latin text in 1979 for greater conformity to the Greek.[[60]](#footnote-60)

**b. Evaluation of manuscripts**

Knowing which manuscripts we have to work with in reconstructing the New Testament original, it is important to determine which are most reliable. This discussion can be simplified by defining two approaches: the supremacy of the *Textus Receptus*, or of the Nestle-Aland version.

**1) History of *Textus Receptus***

In the 16th century, the scholar Erasmus took several manuscripts from the Majority Text in order to unite them into a standard Greek New Testament text. His goal at that time was to improve the quality of the accepted Catholic version of his day – the Vulgate.

However, the quality of Erasmus’ work is questionable in light of the manuscripts he employed. They were late manuscripts of the Byzantine textual family, which is considered by many to be the lowest quality texts. Specifically, he used the following manuscripts:[[61]](#footnote-61)

* minuscule 2а: Gospels, XII c., Byzantine
* minuscule 2ар: Acts and all Epistles, XII c., Byzantine
* minuscule 1: NT without Revelation, XII c., Byzantine-Alexandrian (yet, he used this one sparingly)[[62]](#footnote-62)
* minuscule 2816: Acts and all Epistles, XV c., Byzantine
* minuscule 2817: Epistles of Paul, XI c., Byzantine
* minuscule 817: Gospels, XII c., Byzantine
* minuscule 2814: Revelation up to 22:16, XII c., Byzantine
* a Latin text for the end of Revelation

In addition to the above-named resources, Eramus borrowed several verses from the Vulgate, which were absent in his Greek texts, namely Acts 8:37, Acts 9:6a, and 1 John 5:7.

After Erasmus, other scholars continued and further developed his work. In that line stood the brothers Elzevir, who named the product *Textus* *Receptus*, that is, the “Received Text.” It became the source for the King James Version of the New Testament, and served as the standard Greek text for many years.

**2) History of the Nestle-Aland Version**

Toward the end of the 19th century, a new approach to reconstruction of the New Testament original arose in connection with the discovery and use of more ancient Greek texts found over the last 150 years, namely papyri and uncials. The new Greek standard based on these documents is known as the Nestle-Aland version, now in its 28th edition.

This new approach involves the classification of ancient New Testament documents into four groups or “families”: Alexandrian, Western, Caesarean, and Byzantine.[[63]](#footnote-63) The groups are determined by the presence of similar textual variants in all texts of that group. Additionally, if the variants found in the Church Fathers overlap with one group or another, one can determine where that group of manuscripts originated. For example, manuscripts that correspond to quotations by Alexandrian Fathers go into the Alexandrian textual family.[[64]](#footnote-64)

What characterizes the Alexandrian textual family? Adherents to this approach to textual criticism consider it to be the purist and most accurate group of texts. The designation “Alexandrian” comes from the fact that most of these documents were found in Egypt in the course of the last 200 years. The most valued documents in this family are Codex Vaticanus (B) and Codex Sinaiticus (א). Many quotations from Church Fathers enter this group, as well as nearly all the papyri.

The Western textual family received its designation from the fact that this was the text used by the Western Church in North Africa and Western Europe. The most prized representative of this group is Codex Bezae (D). This group is unique in that the text is often expanded and paraphrased. We will highlight the following examples:[[65]](#footnote-65)

**Acts 6:10**

Usual translation: But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.

Version in Codex Bezae: …who were unable to cope with the wisdom, which was in him, and the Spirit with which he was speaking, because they were being refuted by him with great boldness. Therefore, being unable to oppose the truth…

**Luke 6:4**

Usual translation: …how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone, and gave it to his companions?

Version in Codex Bezae: …how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone, and gave it to his companions? The same day, observing someone working on the Sabbath, He said to him, “Friend, if you know what you are doing, you are blessed. But if you do not know, you are cursed and are a transgressor of the Law.”[[66]](#footnote-66)

Since the Western scribes tended to add material to the text, if the Western variant is shorter than texts from other textual families, that may have great significance. It may (but not necessary) represent the original reading. Let us look at the following examples:[[67]](#footnote-67)

**Luke 23:39**

Usual translation: One of the criminals who were hanged {there} was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!”

Version in Codex Bezae: One of the criminals was hurling abuse at Him.

**Luke 24:6-7**

Usual translation: He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.

Version in Codex Bezae: Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.

The third textual family is the Caesarean, so named because of its use in the churches of Palestine. Yet, at the present time, textual critics hesitate to employ this classification, but assign manuscripts once considered Caesarean to other groups.[[68]](#footnote-68)

The fourth and final textual classification is the Byzantine family of texts. Eighty percent of all Greek New Testament manuscripts are in this group. The designation “Byzantine” derives from discovery of these texts in Byzantine churches and monasteries, which means that the Greek speaking church used them. Some feel this text type originated in Antioch, where there existed a center for ministerial training.[[69]](#footnote-69) Some also assume that after the reign of Constantine the Great, the Eastern Church sensed the need for standardizing the Greek text. This process is thought to have occurred from the fourth to the eighth centuries. From that time on, the Byzantine text type became dominant. The Majority Text (and, consequently, *Textus* *Receptus*) are major contributors to this group.

The supporters of the Nestle-Aland text characterize the Byzantine family as follows. First, the Byzantine text frequently contains merging of material found in the Alexandrian and Western families. This may well indicate the earlier existence of those families, since later Byzantine copyists apparently combined them in their versions. It is also claimed that Byzantine scribes simplified and adapted material.[[70]](#footnote-70) Additionally, Byzantine texts sometime exhibit harmonization of parallel passages. For example:

**Luke 6:48**

The best Alexandrian manuscripts:

διὰ τὸ καλῶς οἰκοδομῆσθαι αὐτήν.

because it had been well built

The Majority Text:

τεθεμελίωτο γὰρ ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν.

for it had been founded on the rock (likely borrowed from Matt 7:25)

**Mark 4:15**

The best Alexandrian manuscripts:

τὸν ἐσπαρμένον εἰς αὐτούς.

which has been sown in them

The Majority Text:

τὸ ἐσπαρμένον ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ.

what has been sown in his heart (likely borrowed from Matt 13:19)

Scholars continue to discuss exactly when the Byzantine family of texts first appeared. Most feel that this took place in the mid-fourth century. This is because we find no Greek texts of that type before that time.[[71]](#footnote-71) In addition, there are no quotations that correspond to that group in the works of the early Fathers.

How did the Nestle-Aland text arise? Johann Bengel (1687-1752), whom Aland considers the father of textual criticism, first proposed the idea of dividing texts by textual families: African and Asian texts.[[72]](#footnote-72) After him, Selmer proposed the groups: Alexandrian, Western, and Eastern. Then, Johann Griesbach suggested: Alexandrian, Western, and Byzantine.[[73]](#footnote-73) The first to produce a Greek text differing from *Textus* *Receptus* was Karl Lachmann in 1831.[[74]](#footnote-74)

Modern textual criticism came into its own, however, due to the contributions of Constantine Tischendorf (1815-1874) along with Brooke Westcott and Fenton Hort, who gathered ancient New Testament documents and advanced the principles by which modern textual criticism operates.[[75]](#footnote-75) Tischendorf released eight editions of a critical edition of the Greek New Testament text, [[76]](#footnote-76) from 1841 to 1882, while Wescott and Hort released their version in 1881-1882.[[77]](#footnote-77) Among all the ancient manuscripts, Tischendorf gave preference to Codex Sinaiticus, and Westcott and Hort – Codex Vaticanus.[[78]](#footnote-78) Westcott and Hort created four textual families: Alexandrian, Natural (i.e., Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus), Western, and Syrian.[[79]](#footnote-79)

The Nestle edition began with the scholar Eberhard Nestle (1851–1913). He created his critical text in 1898 by comparing the work of Tischendorf with that of Westcott-Hort and Weiss.[[80]](#footnote-80) Over the subsequent 80 years, his text, in general, was not altered.[[81]](#footnote-81) The 13th edition of 1927 by Nestle’s son included an expanded critical apparatus with more discussion of significant textual variants.[[82]](#footnote-82)

In 1979, Kurt Aland became the editor of Nestle’s text. In conjunction with other textual scholars, including Bruce Metzger and his wife Barbara Aland, he composed a new critical Greek text by comparing ancient textual witnesses of the autographs. They also added more detail to the critical apparatus. The new text was released as the 26th edition of the now “Nestle-Aland” text by the United Bible Society.

**3) *Textus* *Receptus* or Nestle-Aland: which is better?**

There exist essentially two opinions for evaluating the quality of New Testament manuscripts: the traditional approach, which champions the Byzantine text family and *Textus* *Receptus*, and the modern approach supporting the Nestle-Aland text, based mostly on Alexandrian and Western witnesses.

Supporters of the traditional approach insist that the Majority Text always provides the correct textual variant. Adherents of the traditional approach defend their positions with the following arguments. First, they claim that no Byzantine manuscript dates earlier than the fourth century because all the early copies disappeared due to overuse. They also note that we can ascribe some early witnesses, such as quotations in the Fathers and parts of some papyri, to the Byzantine text type.[[83]](#footnote-83)

On the other hand, supporters of the modern approach object that similarities between the Early Fathers/papyri and Byzantine variants are rare. The presence of some overlap between them does not prove the antiquity of the Byzantine family in its entirety. Furthermore, as Fee observes, if the churches in Northern Africa, Western Europe and Palestine used Alexandrian, Western and Caesarean texts respectively, then who “overused” the Byzantine texts types supposedly present there from the beginning?[[84]](#footnote-84)

Also in support of their view, “traditionalists” note that the great majority of our ancient Greek texts belong to the Byzantine textual family. Therefore, it is assumed that the Church preserved these manuscripts because it knew them to be superior. The abundance of these manuscripts also shows God’s endorsement of them. In addition, the large quantity of Byzantine manuscripts demonstrates that this group was copied over a longer period of time, which indicates that they trace back to the original New Testament documents.

However, adherents of the modern approach offer an alternative explanation for the abundance of documents of the Byzantine text type. First, the Eastern Church copied, distributed and preserved the Byzantine texts in abundance because the native tongue of Eastern Europe was Greek. In other parts of the Church, for example in Rome, congregations used the Latin translation and had little use for the Greek text. This explains the relative paucity of the Western text type. Along with that, Palestine and North Africa, where the Caesarean and Alexandrian texts dominated, came under the control of Muslims. As a result, Christianity and the Christian Scriptures decreased. This explains the paucity of the Caesarean and Alexandrian texts.

In response to the claim that the Church preserved the Byzantine text because of its superiority, one must keep in mind that the Church preserved all the text types, which is why we have copies of them today. The “Church” in its entirety did not preserve the Byzantine group, but only the Eastern Church, because they spoke and read Greek. In distinction, the Western Church preferred the Vulgate, which is based on the Western text type. Therefore, it is improper to claim that the “Church” preferred or preserved the Byzantine text. When one claims that the abundance of Byzantine manuscripts proves God’s endorsement of them, this fails to notice that God preserved the other text types as well and has greatly blessed modern translations based on them.

The suggestion that the larger number of Byzantine manuscripts shows that they were copied for a longer period time also fails, in that this would be the case only if nothing prevented the copying and distribution of the other text types. Yet, we have earlier demonstrated that this was not the case.

Moreover, Gordon Fee advances other convincing rebuttals of the traditional view.[[85]](#footnote-85) First, if the largest number of manuscripts indicates the most reliable text, then we should so esteem the Vulgate, which boasts nearly eight thousand ancient copies – far more than the Majority Text – and has been in circulation longer as well. Second, if the Majority Text is always correct, then how can one justify the *Textus* *Receptus’* inclusion of Acts 8:37 and 1 John 5:7, which are not supported by the Byzantine family of texts?

Another argument in favor of the traditional view goes as follows – the closer harmony between texts in the Byzantine family confirms their greater reliability. Fee makes the following response. First, in the early years of Christianity, the Church was not as concerned about precise copying of manuscripts, as it was later.[[86]](#footnote-86) Correspondingly, we observe more variants in the earlier (non-Byzantine) text types. Second, from the fourth century on, copying was done on a more professional level by trained scribes, which reduced the number of copying errors. Third, instead of dispatching newly copied manuscripts to far off locations, they were used more locally, which allowed for errors to be discovered and corrected by comparing documents.

Some “traditionalists” also make this objection to the Nestle-Aland version. They claim that Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus were prepared by heretics in Alexandria in order to undermine the teaching of Christ’s deity. In support, they point to the tendency to write “Jesus” instead of “Jesus Christ.”

However, the combination “Jesus Christ” or “Christ Jesus” appears 174 times in the Nestle-Aland version. If heretics in Alexandria had plotted to deny Christ’s Deity, they did a very poor job of it. In addition, all the New Testament passages that Christian apologists used in defense of Christ’s Deity have the same thrust in Nestle-Aland. Consider the following examples:

**Jn 1:1-3**

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. 2 οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν. 3 πάντα διʼ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἕν. ὃ γέγονεν

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*

**Col 1:15-19**

15 ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως, 16 ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τὰ ὁρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα, εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι· τὰ πάντα διʼ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται· 17 καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν, 18 καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας· ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων, 19 ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι

*15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, {both} in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the {Father's} good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him.*

**Col 2:9**

ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς,

*For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.*

**Phil 2:6-7**

6 ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ, 7 ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβών, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος· καὶ σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος.

*Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, {and} being made in the likeness of men.*

**Heb 1:3**

ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ.

*And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature.*

**Tit 2:13**

προσδεχόμενοι τὴν μακαρίαν ἐλπίδα καὶ ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς δόξης τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

*looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus*

**Rom 9:5**

ὧν οἱ πατέρες καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα, ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.

*whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.*

It is interesting to note that in the following instances, the Nestle-Aland version (and the Alexandrian manuscripts it is based on) actually reinforces Christ’s Deity more than the *Textus* *Receptus*.

**1 Pet 3:15**

Nestle-Aland: κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἁγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν.

*but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts*

Textus Receptus: κυριον δε τον θεον αγιασατε εν ταις καρδιαις υμων.

*but sanctify God as Lord in your hearts*

**Jn 1:18**

Nestle-Aland: Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε· μονογενὴς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.

*No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained {Him.}*

Textus Receptus: θεον ουδεις εωρακεν πωποτε ο μονογενης υιος ο ων εις τον κολπον του πατρος εκεινος εξηγησατο.

*No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained {Him.}*

We conclude that the Nestle-Aland text, based on older manuscripts with less evidence of adaptation, more closely reflects the original autographs and is the preferred text. Those places where the *Textus* *Receptus* may seem to emphasize Christ’s Deity more are attempts by later scribes to add to the biblical witness more instances of that teaching.[[87]](#footnote-87)

**4) Resolving textual variants**

In spite of our positive assessment of the Nestle-Aland text, we must refrain from passively accepting its resolution of the textual variants without critical evaluation on our part. The serious student of the Bible will, with the help of the critical apparatus supplied in the Nestle-Aland version, examine which texts support which variants and, in line with principles of modern textual criticism, determine for himself/herself the most appropriate reading. Let us review those principles.

In evaluating the quality of manuscripts, first we look at their date of composition. As a rule, the older the document, the closer it is to the autograph. Second, the geographic distributions is important. If one variant has support from manuscripts belonging to two or three textual families, it is preferred to variants with only one-family support, since the text was used by a greater segment of the Church. Third, we note the quality of the textual families that support one variant or another. The most reliable texts, in general, are the Alexandrian ones, then Western, then Caesarean, then Byzantine.

A listing of ancient New Testament manuscripts with information about their date of composition and textual type (textual family) is available through the following resources: Aland K., Aland B. *The text of the New Testament*; Greenlee J. H. *Introduction to New Testament criticism*; Holmes M. W. *New Testament textual criticism* in McKnight S. *Introducing New Testament interpretation*; Geisler N. L., Nix W. E. *A general introduction to the Bible*. Another very useful resource is Bruce Metzger’s *A textual commentary on the Greek New Testament*, where the Nestle-Aland committee explains the rationale of their choices of textual variants.

**2. Internal Criterion**

Along with determining the quality of the manuscripts containing textual variants, we must also examine the variants themselves according the “internal criterion.” As mentioned in our discussion of Old Testament textual criticism, this analysis consists of the following steps.

First, we give preference to the shortest option. This is because, as a rule, a scribe will add words to a text, not remove them. Second, we prefer the variant that is hardest to understand. Again, a scribe will more likely try to clarify a difficult passage than complicate a clear one. Third, we respect the biblical author’s style of writing and the context of the passage. Thus, we prefer the option that is consistent with both. Fourth, there are some well-known errors that copyist make that, when observed, make that option suspect. Some of the errors are unintentional, while others are intentional.[[88]](#footnote-88)

We will examine examples of unintentional errors commonly encountered in the text. One such phenomenon is an omission due to homeoteleuton. When certain words are repeated later in the text, the copyist may unintentionally skip over the words in between the identical segments. For example, in some copies of Luke 14:27-27, verse 27 is omitted.

26 Εἴ τις ἔρχεται πρός με καὶ οὐ μισεῖ τὸν πατέρα ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τὴν μητέρα καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ τὰ τέκνα καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τὰς ἀδελφὰς ἔτι τε καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἑαυτοῦ, οὐ δύναται εἶναί μου μαθητής. 27 ὅστις οὐ βαστάζει τὸν σταυρὸν ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἔρχεται ὀπίσω μου, οὐ δύναται εἶναί μου μαθητής.

*26 If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. 27 "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.*

The copyist omitted verse 27 because he overlooked the repetition of “cannot be My disciple.”

The last part of 1 John 2:23 was omitted likely for the same reason:

πᾶς ὁ ἀρνούμενος τὸν υἱὸν οὐδὲ τὸν πατέρα ἔχει, ὁ ὁμολογῶν τὸν υἱὸν καὶ τὸν πατέρα ἔχει.

*Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.*

Several manuscripts omit parts of Matthew 5:19-20 due to homeoteleuton:

19 ὃς ἐὰν οὖν λύσῃ μίαν τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων καὶ διδάξῃ οὕτως τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἐλάχιστος κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν· ὃς δʼ ἂν ποιήσῃ καὶ διδάξῃ, οὗτος μέγας κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν. 20 Λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐὰν μὴ περισσεύσῃ ὑμῶν ἡ δικαιοσύνη πλεῖον τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν.

*19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others {to do} the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches {them,} he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses {that} of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Dittography occurs when a copyist mistakenly repeats a letter, word, or phrase. Possibly, this occurred in Acts 19:34, where Codex Vaticanus repeats the expression “great is Artemis of the Ephesians” twice. This may also explain the variation in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, where the final letter ν is repeated at the beginning of the next word. Instead of ἐγενήθημεν ἤπιοι, “proved to be gentle,” some documents (which are actually superior from the vantage point of the external criterion) have ἐγενήθημεν νήπιοι, “proved to be children.” Some feel that this is instead a case of haplography, where a duplicate was reduced to a single instance.[[89]](#footnote-89)

The next example shows that a copyist can confuse similar letters in the text (Acts 15:40).

ΠΑΥΛΟΣ ΔΕ ΕΠΙΛΕΞΑΜΕΝΟΣ ΣΙΛΑΝ

*But Paul chose Silas*

ΠΑΥΛΟΣ ΔΕ ΕΠΙΔΕΞΑΜΕΝΟΣ ΣΙΛΑΝ

*But Paul received Silas*

In this instance the letters Λ (*lambda*) and Δ (*delta*) look nearly the same, yet they produce words with very different meanings.

Also consider 1 Tim 3:16:

ΟΣ ΕΦΑΝΕΡΩΘΗ ΕΝ ΣΑΡΚΙ

*He who was revealed in the flesh*

ΘΣ ΕΦΑΝΕΡΩΘΗ ΕΝ ΣΑΡΚΙ

*God was revealed in the flesh (ΘΣ is an abbreviation for θεός, i.e., “God”).*

In the following examples, we observe mistakes in word division. In antiquity, the Greek text was written without spaces between words. Therefore, copyists at times failed to divide the words properly. Here are some examples:

**1 Tim 3:16**

ὁμολογοῦμεν ὡς μέγα ἐστὶν τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον

*As we confess, great is the mystery of godliness*

or

ὁμολογουμένως μέγα ἐστὶν τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον

*Indisputably, great is the mystery of godliness*

**Mk 10:40**

ἀλλʼ οἷς ἡτοίμασται

*but those for whom it has been prepared*

or

ἄλλοις ἡτοίμασται

*it has been prepared for others*

It is assumed that copyists not only worked independently, but also sometimes copied from dictation. The following examples show that a copyist could confuse similar sounds. The vowel omicron (ο) sounds similar to the vowel omega (ω). A different word meaning, though, can results from their confusion, as in Rom 5:1:

Δικαιωθέντες οὖν ἐκ πίστεως εἰρήνην ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*

Δικαιωθέντες οὖν ἐκ πίστεως εἰρήνην ἔχωεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

*Therefore, having been justified by faith, let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

Additionally, in some manuscripts Rev 1:5 reads:

τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λούσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν.

*To Him who loves us and washed us from our sins*

While others copyists wrote not the diphthong ου, but the similar sounding υ:

τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν.

*To Him who loves us and released us from our sins*

1 John 1:4 also presents us with two variants:

καὶ ταῦτα γράφομεν ἡμεῖς, ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν ᾖ πεπληρωμένη

*so that our joy may be made complete*

καὶ ταῦτα γράφομεν ἡμεῖς, ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ὑμῶν ᾖ πεπληρωμένη

*so that your joy may be made complete.*

Again, two words sound very similar: ἡμῶν (*hemon*, i.е. “our”) and ὑμῶν (*humon*, i.е. “your”).

Our final example is Mark 14:31, which is actually quite humorous:

ἐὰν δέῃ με συναποθανεῖν σοι, οὐ μή σε ἀπαρνήσομαι.

*{Even} if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!*

In document D, though, we read not με, but μή:

ἐὰν δέῃ μή συναποθανεῖν σοι, οὐ μή σε ἀπαρνήσομαι.

*If {I} do not have to die with You, I will not deny You!"*

A scribe might also confuse the order of letters or words (metathesis). In Mark 1:5, we encounter manuscripts with three different options for word order in the phrase “and all were being baptized”:

πάντες και ἐβαπτίζοντο

και ἐβαπτίζοντο πάντε

και πάντες ἐβαπτίζοντο

Mark 14:65 occasioned an inversion of letters β and λ:

καὶ οἱ ὑπηρέται ῥαπίσμασιν αὐτὸν ἔλαβον

*And the officers received Him with slaps.*

καὶ οἱ ὑπηρέται ῥαπίσμασιν αὐτὸν ἔβαλον

*And the officers threw Him with slaps.*

In Acts 13:23, if the letters ρ and ι are transposed in the word σωτηρίαν (“salvation”), we get σωτῆρα ιν, which means “Savior Jesus” (ιν is an abbreviation for Jesus).

A common error is for a copyist to unconsciously insert into the verse being copied words from a parallel passage that came to mind. This occurred in Col 1:14, where the Majority Text contains words taken from Eph 1:7:

Eph 1:7: ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτου, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν παραπτωμάτων

*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses*

Col 1:14 ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν

*in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*

Col 1:14 (Majority Text) ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτου, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν.

*in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*

We may also mention the addition to Acts 7:37 from Deut 18:15:

Acts 7:37 (Nestle-Aland text): God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren.

Deut 18:15: The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.

Acts 7:37 (*Textus Receptus*): God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren, you shall listen to him.

Next, we may examine intentional changes made to the text by copyists. Sometime a copyist may attempt to correct what he perceives to be a grammatical mistake in the text. In Revelation 1:4, we see the following grammatical mistake:

χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος

*Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come.*

The problem here is that the preposition ἀπο (*аpо*) must take the genitive case. Yet, here the nominative case (ὢν) follows the preposition. In other manuscripts, likely written later, we see attempts to correct this “error” and place the relative pronoun after the preposition in the genitive:

χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ τοῦ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος;

χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος;

In the following example (Rom 4:11), we assume that the scribe considered the accusative case (περιτομήν) more appropriate than the genitive (περιτομῆς):

καὶ σημεῖον ἔλαβεν περιτομῆς

*and he received the sign of circumcision*

καὶ σημεῖον ἔλαβεν περιτομήν

*and he received circumcision as a sign*

In Romans 8:2, a copyist may have thought that, in light of the previous verses, Paul was talking about himself and therefore employed the word με (me) instead of σε (you):

ὁ γὰρ νόμος τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς ζωῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἠλευθέρωσέν σε ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ τοῦ θανάτου.

*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.*

ὁ γὰρ νόμος τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς ζωῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἠλευθέρωσέν με ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ τοῦ θανάτου.

*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and of death.*

In some cases, the scribe attempted to correct an apparent historical error. Mark 1:2 reads, “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet.” After that introduction, though, Mark quotes a verse not from Isaiah, but from Malachi. Therefore, in an attempt to introduce a correction, a later copyist wrote, “As it is written in the prophets.”

In John 19:14, we read that it was the “sixth hour” when Pilate turned Jesus over to crucifixion. In another manuscript, however, it was the “third hour.” This latter scribe was apparently influenced by the statement in Mark 15:25: “It was the third hour when they crucified Him.”

Harmonization is the attempt to approximate one passage with its parallel. A classic example is when certain scribes wrote out the entire Lord’s Prayer, as recorded in Matthew 6, in the Gospel of Luke as well. Yet, the earliest manuscripts give us an abbreviated form of the prayer in Luke.

In addition, in the best manuscripts of Matthew 19:17 we read, “And He said to him, ‘Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is {only} One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.’” Other copyists, though, harmonized this verse with Mark 10:18 and wrote, “And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.’”

Another instance of harmonization is Hebrews 12:20, where we read, “For they could not bear the command, ‘If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned.’” In the Majority Text, we encounter the additional words “or shot through,” taken from the source of the quotation in Exodus 19:13.

Sometime we see evidence that a scribe added material to the text. The Majority Text of Matthew 6:4-6 adds the word “openly.” Galatians 6:17 exists in several expanded forms:

τὰ στίγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ

*the brand-marks of Jesus.*

τὰ στίγματα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ

*the brand-marks of the Lord Jesus.*

τὰ στίγματα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

*the brand-marks of Lord Jesus Christ.*

τὰ στίγματα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

*the brand-marks of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Most likely, the original version read simply, “The brand-marks of Jesus.”

Finally, according to the best textual witnesses, the following clause of the Lord’s Prayer is likely an addition: “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”

Some additions were obviously made to promote certain doctrines. A clear example is Romans 14:17, where the original read, “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Minuscule № 4, however, reads, “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and asceticism and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Other examples include:

addition to 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”

addition to Mark 9:29: “and fasting”

addition to Rom 8:1: “who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”

addition to 1 Cor 6:20: “and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

A scribe may not only attempt to advance a certain teaching, but also to “correct” a theological error perceived by him. An interesting example is Luke 2:14, which conventionally reads, “Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.” A certain scribe, though, wished to defend the doctrine of Christ’s virgin birth and so wrote, “Now Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.”

Romans 4:19 was possibly altered for theological reasons as well: “Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb,” became, “Without becoming weak in faith he did not contemplate his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb.”

Moreover, we observe instances where a copyist combines two varying texts to create a “hybrid.” In Acts 20:28, some versions read τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ (“the church of God”), while others read τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ κυρίου (“the church of the Lord”). A later copyist combined the variants to give τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ κυρίου καί τοῦ θεοῦ (“the church of the Lord and God”).

Another example of combination is found in Luke 24:53, where we encounter the following variants:

καὶ ἦσαν διὰ παντὸς ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ εὐλογοῦντες τὸν θεόν.

*and were continually in the temple thanking God*

καὶ ἦσαν διὰ παντὸς ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ αἰούντες τὸν θεόν.

*and were continually in the temple praising God*

Again, a later scribe combined the two:

καὶ ἦσαν διὰ παντὸς ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ αἰούντες καί εὐλογοῦντες τὸν θεόν.

*and were continually in the temple praising and thanking God*

**3. Conclusions**

When deciding between textual variants in the New Testament, we employ the methodology described in our discussion of external and internal criteria. At the same time, we recognize that a single factor alone, whether taken from the examination of external or internal criteria, does not decide the question for us. We look at all the factors that make up these criteria, weigh the evidence for and against the existing variants, and then reach a conclusion as to which variant most likely reflects the original autograph.

So then, to resolve textual variation in the New Testament text, our methodology is as follows. Concerning the external criterion, one must determine:

1. the variant supported by the oldest manuscripts
2. the variant supported by manuscripts having the widest geographical range
3. the variant supported by the most reliable textual families, i.e., Alexandrian and Western

Concerning the internal criterion, one must determine:

1. the shortest variant
2. the variant most difficult to understand
3. the variant that does not violate the author’s style or context
4. the presence of common copyist mistakes

We emphasize that one must not only gather this information, but also weigh the evidences, determining which factors are more convincing in defense of one variant or another. Then on the basis of both quantity and quality of evidences, one decides between the variants.

In conclusion, we take into consideration the following counsel from Kurt Aland about evaluating textual variants:

1. It is difficult to decide a textual question purely on the basis of the internal criterion, if manuscript evidence is not also convincing.
2. Greek texts carry more weight than translations.
3. The quality of manuscripts supporting a given variant is more important than their quantity.
4. Preference for the variant most difficult to understand may conflict with other criteria.[[90]](#footnote-90)
5. If a variant yields a reading more similar to a quotation from the Septuagint or a reading from a parallel New Testament text, the scholar must be suspect that the copyist may have been trying to harmonize the text he received to these other sources.[[91]](#footnote-91)

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1. A valuable resource in composing this chapter was Emanuel Tov’s *Textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. – Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Jer 10:11; Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26; Dan 2:4b-7:28 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. According to an unlikely rabbinic legend, God gave the square figures to Moses on Sinai, but Israel changed them, and these figures were restored during the time of Ezra (see Würthwein E. The text of the Old Testament – 2nd ed. / Trans. Rhodes E. F. – Grand Rapids, MI : Eerdmans, 1995. – P. 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Würthwein, p. 3. When Jesus spoke in Matthew 5:18 of the letter *yod*, this demonstrates the use of the square, Aramaic figures in the first century AD (Brotzman E. R. Old Testament textual criticism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994. – P. 38). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Brotzman, p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Würthwein, p. 16-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Lenningrad Codex is located in St. Petersburg, Russia. It is designated by the letter L. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Würthwein, p. 36-37. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Brotzman, с. 60; Würthwein, с. 36; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleppo\_Codex [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew\_University\_Bible\_Project [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. At the same time, Brotzman claims that in some Qumran documents, spaces between words are present, which challenges the idea that there were no such cases before the Masoretes (Brotzman, p. 40-41). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Brotzman, p. 45; Würthwein, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Tov, p. 72ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Gleason Archer claims that the two Isaiah scrolls found at Qumran correspond to the Masoretic Text by ninety-five percent. The remaining differences are generally matters of variant spellings and miscopying (Archer G. A survey of Old Testament introduction, p. 19, from Henry, C. F. H. God, revelation, and authority. – Waco, TХ: Word Books, 1976-1983; Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999. – V. 4. – P. 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Brotzman, p. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Brotzman says 60% (Ibid, p. 94). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Würthwein, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Brotzman, p. 94 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Dead Sea Scrolls - Wikipedia. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Brotzman, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid, p. 67 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid, p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Würthwein, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid, p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. It is very possible that the Early Church introduced them into the LXX. See the discussion of this point in our discussion of the canon of Scripture. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. It is thought that the LXX divides the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles in two because these books in Greek could not fit on a single scroll (Brotzman, p. 39-40). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Würthwein, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. For example, in Isaiah 7:14, the LXX translates the Hebrew word עלמה (*alma*, i.e. “young woman”) with the Greek term παρθενος (*parthenos*, i.е. “virgin”), which supports the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid, p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Brotzman, p. 77; Würthwein, p. 54. Aland notes the different geographic locations for the different LXX revisions: Lucian in Antioch, Origen in Palestine, and Hesychius in Alexandria. See Aland K., Aland B. The text of the New Testament. – 2nd ed. / Trans. by Erroll F. Rhodes. - Eerdmans, 1981. – P. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Würthwein, p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid, p. 56-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Würthwein, p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Brotzman, p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid, p. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid, p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid, p. 72-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Würthwein, p. 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid, p. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Brotzman, p. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Würthwein, p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Brotzman, p. 45, 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Würthwein, p. 66; Brotzman, p. 68, 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Würthwein, p. 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Examples from Brotzman, p. 112-115; Würthwein, p. 109-112. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Tov, p. 309-310. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. A valuable resource in composing this chapter was Bruce Metzger's The text of the New Testament: its transmission, corruption, and restoration. – 3rd ed. – New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Fee G. D. Modern textual criticism аnd the revival of the Textus Receptus // Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 1978. Vol. 21. P. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Greenlee J. Harold. Introduction to New Testament criticism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964. – P. 34-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ibid, p. 54-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Aland, p. 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Ibid, p. 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ibid, p. 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. See Brandt Pierre-Yves. Manuscripts grecs utilise’s par Erasme pour son e’dition du Novum Instrumentum de 1516. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Greenlee, p. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Aland, however, relates that not all manuscripts (in particular, minuscules) have been classified (Aland, p. 24). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Greenlee, p. 60-61. At the same time, Aland admits that strict criteria for separating manuscripts by textual families are not established (Aland, p. 332). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Greenlee, p. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Metzger B. M. A textual commentary on the Greek New Testament. – 2nd ed. – London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994. – P. 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Greenlee, p. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Aland, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Ibid, p. 65. Gordon Fee proposes that the Byzantine text was the text of John Chrysostom, and that when he moved from Antioch to Constantinople, he introduced this text to the church there (Fee, p. 30). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Ibid, p. 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. The oldest manuscripts that testify to the existence of this text type are part of uncials A and W along with some quotations from Church Fathers. The first “complete representatives” of this textual family appear in the eighth-ninth centuries, namely in codices E, F, G, H, M and Ω (Fee, p. 25, 28). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Aland, p. 9-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Greenlee, p. 73-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Ibid, p. 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Ibid, p. 78. One example of Tischendorf’s work is when, while visiting a monastery on Mount Sinai, he noticed how the nuns were feeding the stove with pages from an ancient text. He discovered it to be a fourth century uncial that is now one of the primary sources for the restoration of the original New Testament and the Old Testament Septuagint – Codex Sinaiticus. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. The “critical edition of the New Testament” is a combination of all ancient copies of the New Testament, using those variants in the “critical text” which have the best support from external and internal criteria. The goal of producing a critical edition is the reconstruction of the original New Testament. The “critical text,” therefore, is not any certain copy of the New Testament passed down from antiquity, but a combination of the best variants from various existing manuscripts that are felt to trace back to the original. Moreover, the “critical edition” contains an apparatus, which shows variants for disputed passages that differ from the ones chosen for the “critical text” and the textual support for those other variants. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Greenlee, p. 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Aland, p. 13-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Greenlee, p. 79-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Ibid, p. 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Aland, p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Ibid, p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. An example is papyrus 66 (Fee, p. 27). [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Ibid, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Ibid, p. 23-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. As we stated in Chapter 3, in the early years, the Church operated substantially on oral tradition from the apostles. Only later, when the written text became the standard, did the Church apply greater care to manuscript copying. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Fee, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Examples from Greenlee, p. 63-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Metzger, A textual commentary, p. 562. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. One must consider that the variant most difficult to understand may also be the one that disrupts the context, and for that reason it is difficult to understand. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Aland, p. 280-281. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)