

Systematic Theology: *The Doctrine of Scripture*

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Preservation & Transmission of the Scriptures

{ How Do We Know Our Bible Is The Same
As What The Original Authors Wrote?

Preservation & Transmission of the Scriptures

Since the 1800s, a significant religious idea birthed what's known as the Restorationist Movement. They believed that:

- ⌘ The original version of scripture was corrupted.
- ⌘ The true faith as taught by Jesus and the Apostles was lost.
- ⌘ All Christian Churches were apostate and teaching heresy.

Numerous cults arose from this movement, most notable include:

- ⌘ The Church of Ladder Day Saints (Mormons)
- ⌘ The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah's Witnesses)



Preservation & Transmission of the Scriptures

Even many within the true Church have come to believe that the Bible that we have today has been lost, corrupted, or changed, either intentionally or accidentally, and as a result, the certainty of its message is suspect.

Once Again, we hear the Tempter subtly ask,

“Indeed, has God said, . . . ?”



Preservation & Transmission of the Scriptures

BUT, if scripture is lost or corrupted, then there is no hope and certainly no future revelation of the faith. As Jude writes to believers,

“appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.”

The Faith was once for all given to us.



Preservation of the Scriptures

{ How Do We Know That Our Bible Contains
{ ALL of What God Inspired? Maybe There
Are Lost Books?

*“Forever, O Lord,
Your word is settled in heaven.”
- Ps 119:89*

Preservation of the Scriptures

Numerous extra-canonical texts exist and more continue to be discovered by archeologists, Including:

- OT Pseudepigrapha (2nd Temple Literature)
- NT Pseudepigrapha
- Nag Hammadi Library
- Gnostic Gospels

If these were part of scripture, then why were they lost?



Preservation of the Scriptures: The Promise

God Himself promised to preserve His Word:

*“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
And do not return there without watering the earth
And making it bear and sprout,
And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;
So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”*

– Isaiah 55:10–11.



Preservation of the Scriptures: The Promise

God Himself promised to preserve His Word:

“for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. . . . But the word of the Lord endures forever.”

1 Peter 1:23



Preservation of the OT Scriptures: Historical Verification

- The Masoretic Text (MT)
- The Septuagint (LXX)
- The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS)



Preservation of the OT Scriptures: Masoretic Text (MT)

- The Masoretic Text is the Jewish canon and its precise letter-text, including its vocalization (vowel pointing) and accentuation (a.k.a. the *mas'sora*).
- The MT is the Hebrew text from which most English translations of the OT is based.
- The *masorah* specifically refers to the diacritic markings of the text and the concise marginal notes in manuscripts, which note textual details, such as the precise spelling of words.
- It was primarily copied, edited, and distributed by a group of Jews known as the Masoretes between the 7th and 10th centuries of the Common Era (CE).
- The oldest known complete copy, the Leningrad Codex, dates from the early 11th century CE.



Preservation of the OT Scriptures: Masoretic Text (MT)

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת

הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

Genesis 1:1



Preservation of the OT Scriptures: The Septuagint (LXX)

The Translation of the Seventy

- The title comes from the *Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates*, which records a story that "the laws of the Jews" were translated into the Greek language at the request of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–247 BCE).
- Translation by seventy-two Hebrew translators—six from each of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.
- Translated from 3rd to 1st centuries BCE.



Preservation of the OT Scriptures: The Septuagint (LXX)

- There is not one single, unified corpus.
- It is a collection of translations of the OT as well as non-canonical Jewish texts known as the Apocrypha.
- Used by the church as the OT scripture until the time of the reformation, when the MT began to be used.



Preservation of the OT Scriptures: The Septuagint (LXX)

- Oldest fragments from the 3rd Century BCE.
- Relatively Complete manuscripts from the 4th century CE.



Preservation of the OT Scriptures: The Septuagint (LXX)

- Jews stopped using the LXX around the 2nd century CE.
- There are a few notable differences between the LXX and MT.
 - Deut 32:8–9 “**sons of God**” (LXX) vs. “**sons of Israel**” (MT). The LXX is better supported.
 - When the NT writers quoted the OT on a verse where the LXX and MT disagree, the NT always agrees with the LXX.



Preservation of the OT Scriptures: The Dead Sea Scrolls

Discovered in 1946/1947–1956, in a cave at Qumran.





Khirbet Qumran

(Israel occupied with)

Preservation of the OT Scriptures: The Dead Sea Scrolls

- Dating from 3rd century B.C. to 1st century A.D.
- Almost 15,000 scrolls and scroll fragments
- Associated with the Jewish Sect known as the Essenes.
- Many believe that John the Baptist was part of the group.



Preservation of the OT Scriptures: The Dead Sea Scrolls



Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a) contains almost the entire book of Isaiah



Preservation of the OT Scriptures: The Dead Sea Scrolls

- Includes the oldest surviving manuscripts of the OT canonical & deuterocanonical books.
- 40% are copies of the Hebrew OT
- 30% are Second Temple writings
- 30% are sectarian texts (Community Rule, War Scroll, The Rule of Blessing, Peshar on Habakkuk)



Preservation of the OT Scriptures: The Dead Sea Scrolls

“The Dead Sea Scrolls did not, as some early dreamers speculated, answer the age-old question: Where is the original Bible? Not, as it turns out, in the caves of Qumran. Nor do the scrolls include long lost books of the Bible. Furthermore, the scrolls did not utterly transform our image of the original Hebrew Bible text. **Indeed, one of the most important contributions of the scrolls is that they have demonstrated the relative stability of the Masoretic text.**”

- *Biblical Archaeology Society*

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-artifacts/dead-sea-scrolls/the-masoretic-text-and-the-dead-sea-scrolls/>



Preservation of the OT Scriptures: The Dead Sea Scrolls

Importance: The DSS demonstrate the preservation of the OT text of scripture to the time of Jesus Christ. That means, the OT we have today is virtually the same as what Jesus read.



Preservation of the Scriptures: The Promise

Jesus Affirms that Nothing Will Pass From
the Law & Prophets (Matt 5:18)

And that He will build His Church (Matt
16:18); Therefore, if one cannot enter His
Church without being born by the Word of
God, then the Word of God cannot pass
away.



Transmission of the Scriptures

{ How do we know that the Scriptures we have today match what the authors wrote, and haven't been corrupted?
- Historical Verification

Textual Criticism

Definition: Textual Criticism is the study of the original text of the New Testament (Black, 11).

Purpose: “To recover the original text of the New Testament from the available evidence” (Black, 12).

Two Reasons Textual Criticism is Necessary:

1. None of the original autographs are in existence.
2. There are numerous mistakes in the existing (extant) copies of the New Testament.



Important Points

1. The vast majority of the variants, i.e., the differences in wording, are minor (spelling, word order, all of which do not affect the translation).
2. There are approximately 2,000 significant variants.

Example: For John 3:13, some manuscripts (MSS) read, “the Son of Man who is in heaven,” which teaches that Jesus was in heaven when talking with Nicodemus. Other MSS exclude the statement, “who is in heaven.” Such a variant has implications for Christology.



Important Points

3. These “variants should not overshadow the overwhelming degree of agreement that exists among the ancient manuscripts” (Black 13).
4. The most important differences in today’s English translations are not due to variants, but to translators and their respective methodology (paraphrase versus literal translation. More on this later).



Types of Errors

{ Accidental & Intentional

Accidental Errors

1. Scribes who were copying manuscripts mishearing the text being read aloud.

Ex. Romans 5:1 – Difference between long and short vowels produce a different meaning:

“we have peace with God”

- Versus -

“let us have peace with God”

2. Misunderstanding or Forgetfulness resulting in:
 - Changes in word order
 - Substitution of synonyms
 - Unintentional harmonization of similar passages



Intentional Errors

It should be noted that these were surely made in good faith because the copyist believed a linguistic or theological error had occurred.

Trying to correct:

1. An error of fact
2. Harmonization of parallel passages
3. Doctrinal statements
4. Grammar, spelling, and style

Other Changes:

1. Scribes took a notation in the margin to be part of the text
2. OT quotations were changed to agree with the OT form
3. Changes to round off the meaning of a passage

Note: Once the NT canon was official, scribes had less ability to change the text; therefore, most variants are likely no later than the end of the third century (Black, 28).



Sources of Evidence

- { Greek Manuscripts
- { Ancient Version (Latin, Syriac, Coptic)
- { Citations by Church Fathers

Textual Criticism: Sources of Evidence

There are three sources used to determine the original text:

1. Greek Manuscripts
2. Ancient versions (Latin, Syriac, Coptic)
3. Citations by early church fathers



Sources of Evidence: Existing Manuscripts (MSS)

- The available evidence for the NT far outweighs other ancient manuscripts.
- Almost 5,000 MSS of part or all of the Greek New Testament.
- 8,000 in Latin
- 1,000 in other languages
- Extensive copying of the NT within 3 centuries of the original texts
- There are even 300 MSS of the least copied book, the Revelation



Sources of Evidence: Citations By Early Church Fathers

Black writes,

“These writers quoted extensively from the NT, using forms of the text known to them. In fact, it has been said that if all the NT manuscripts were destroyed, the text of the NT could still be restored from the quotations made by the church fathers.”

“The sheer number of witnesses to the text of the NT makes it virtually certain that the original text has been preserved somewhere among the extant witnesses” (Black, 24).



Textual Criticism: Key Takeaway

Alan Black states,

“No biblical doctrine would go unsupported if a favorite reading was abandoned in favor of a more valid variant. This does not mean, as is sometimes said, that no doctrine of Scripture is affected by textual variation. Rather, a doctrine that is affected by textual variation will always be adequately supported by other passages”
(Black, 25).



Restoration of the NT

{ Method for Establishing the Original
Reading

Method for Establishing the Original

Principles of External Evidence (Black 32–35):

1. Prefer the reading attested by the oldest manuscripts (MSS).
2. Prefer the reading supported in widely separated geographical areas.
3. Prefer the reading supported by the greatest number of text types.



Method for Establishing the Original

Principles of Internal Evidence (Black, 35–36):

Basic Idea: *“The Reading that Best explains the origin of the other readings is probably original”*

1. Prefer the Shorter Reading.
2. Prefer the More Difficult Reading.
3. Prefer the reading that accords best with the author’s style and vocabulary.
4. Prefer the reading that best fits with the context and/or the author’s theology.
5. Prefer the less harmonious reading in parallel passages



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