

LESSON 4: RELIABILITY AND TRANSMISSION

REVIEW:

Week #1: Inspiration and Inerrancy

- What does it mean that the Bible is inspired?
- What does it mean that the Bible is inerrant?

Week #2: Preservation and Canonization

- Dead Sea Scrolls
- The Apocrypha

Week #3: How do we really know the Bible is from God

- The Bible has a self-authenticating glory that cries out to our hearts in a way nothing else can because we were created to see, savor, and enjoy this kind of glory.
- We see that glory in our redemption, in the majesty and meekness of the Father, in the fulfillment of prophecies, and in his miraculous power.

EARLY CIRCULATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT:

To begin with, people would make copies as they passed through town. This turned into institutionalized practices which included “group” copying.

Translations were being made very quickly (but not always accurately)

Textual Criticism: The science of discerning what was written in the original manuscripts.

There are over 5,000 Greek Manuscripts available from 100 AD-1500 AD but no two manuscripts are identical.

KINDS OF VARIATIONS:

Accidental Mistakes:

1. They heard the wrong word.
2. Their eyes played tricks on them.

3. Their memory betrayed them.
4. Their judgment was in error.

“Occasionally, honest errors of judgment have led to the introduction of an error. For example, if a scribe accidentally left out a line or a few words, the corrector might put them in the margin. The next scribe who came along and copied this manuscript might reinsert the words into the text at the wrong place. Alternatively, the marginal note may have been a scribe’s comment rather than an integral part of the text; but the scribe who copied that manuscript might well have inserted the note into the new copy he was writing, thus adding something to the text of Scripture that should not be there. No malice was involved, no intentional corruption of the text— just an error of judgment.” (D.A. Carson)

Intentional Revisions

1. Correcting previous mistakes
2. Thoughtless, mindless copying

Do not let the challenges of textual criticism discourage you and make you wonder about the accuracy of our Bibles. The vast majority of issues have to do with word order. There is no major theological issue at stake and the variants that do occur can be sorted out easily by comparing manuscript with manuscript. The result is a sure and certain Word of the Lord.

TEXT TYPES:

Scholars over the centuries and millennia have tried to simplify some of the issues that we have to deal with. They’ve taken these 5,000 manuscripts and tried to put them into three major categories called text-types. To classify them into a category, scholars looked at variations in passages, pattern of development, location of transmission, scribal profession, and other factors to determine what ‘text type’ each manuscript belonged to.

1. Majority/Byzantine Text
 - a. This text type contains 4,000 out of the 5,000 manuscripts we have.
 - b. The seven manuscripts used to create the Textus Receptus (where the KJV comes from) are all from the majority text.
 - c. All of these texts date from the 4th century and later. Most of these texts are from after the 10th century.
2. Western Text

- a. Some manuscripts are from as early as 200 AD.
 - b. Most of the manuscripts are seen as being inferior due to the amount of scribal errors.
3. Alexandrian Text
- a. Some manuscripts from as early as 110 AD.
 - b. Most of these manuscripts seem to be copied by trained scribes.
 - c. These are widely accepted as the most accurate and reliable texts.

GREEK TEXTS:

After the invention of the printing press there was a concerted effort to come up with a cohesive Greek text (Matthew-Revelation) that best gets back to the original. There are three major kinds of Greek compilations (what I've called Greek Texts).

1. The Eclectic Text
 - a. Every modern version (except NKJV) is based off of the eclectic text.
 - b. The eclectic text weighs all of the manuscripts, finds what they believe to be the best and most reliable Greek readings and it puts together what is considered by the vast majority of scholars to be the most accurate and reliable Greek NT that gets us closest to the original (typically including footnotes where there are other variants).
2. The Majority Text
 - a. No translation is based off this text (but it is used for footnotes in the NKJV).
3. The Textus Receptus
 - a. The KJV and NKJV have been translated from this text type.
 - b. "The Textus Receptus is the title given to the 1633 version of the Greek text edited and first published by Erasmus in 1516. Erasmus was a Roman Catholic priest and humanist who came to Basel (Switzerland) in 1514 to publish his notes on the NT with the text of the Latin Vulgate (the Latin translation of the Bible in wide use in that day)." (Bauder)
 - c. The Textus Receptus was based off of seven Greek manuscripts:

- i. None of them contained the whole New Testament (one had all the books except Revelation)
 - ii. None of the manuscripts contained the last six verses of Revelation
 - iii. There are at least twenty places that the Textus Receptus adds words and verses that are not found in any Greek Manuscript in the world.
- d. Conclusions regarding the Textus Receptus:
- i. It was the first major work of this kind ever completed. From 1516 until 1881, it was the only major Greek compilation that the majority of the English-speaking world had access to.
 - ii. We cannot say that the Textus Receptus is perfectly accurate. It clearly contains errors, words, and phrases that were not in the original manuscripts. It is not the inspired, inerrant word of God.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The number one goal of any translation team must be to try to get back to the originals and translate faithfully.
2. To say that a particular Bible translation or line of manuscripts is inspired and inerrant is completely outside the line of historical or theological reasoning.
3. We must be thankful for those figures, in history, who laid the groundwork for what we have today.

NEXT WEEK:

- We will begin evaluating versions.
- We will discuss some broad issues in translation philosophy.
- We will take a detailed look at “gender-neutral” translations and their merits and detractions.