

How to Study the Bible – Textual Criticism & Translations

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TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Although the issues are complex, the net result is that 99 percent of the autographic text is well established. And of the remainder, although the interpretation of hundreds of passages is at stake, no cardinal doctrine depends on textually dubious texts. Daniel B. Wallace

Recommended Resources

“Writing, Copying, and Transmitting the New Testament Text” – Daniel B. Wallace

“A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament” – Bruce M. Metzger

Question: Why is the subject of textual criticism important?

1. Authority and Sufficiency depend on Inspiration – i.e. God’s Word is authoritative and sufficient. Scribes’ words are not.
2. While physical evidence does not negate the work of the Holy Spirit in leading us into all truth, there is no doubt that the means God uses today to communicate that truth is the written word – not visions; not dreams; not word of mouth.
3. As you study textual criticism, your faith should be strengthened – not weakened. More manuscript evidence exists for the Bible than any other literary work – and no doctrine is jeopardized by contradiction in any of the evidence.

Histories	Oldest Manuscripts	Number Surviving
Livy 59 B.C.–A.D. 17	4th century	27
Tacitus A.D. 56–120	9th century	3
Suetonius A.D. 69–140	9th century	200+
Thucydides 460–400 B.C.	1st century A.D.	20
Herodotus 484–425 B.C.	1st century A.D.	75
New Testament	c. 100–150	c. 5,700 (counting only Greek manuscripts) (plus more than 10,000 in Latin, more than a million quotations from the church fathers, etc.)

Why so many manuscripts?

The spread of the Gospel resulted in the spread of God’s Word in both a) number of copies and b) number of languages.

Copying to some extent became “localized”

1. Alexandrian – originated in Alexandria, Egypt
2. Western – Spain, Italy, North Africa
3. Byzantine – largely based on Alexandrian and Western – became the dominant form in the East
 - a. By 9th century, it became the dominant text form in Greek
 - i. Muslim conquest of Egypt reduced Alexandrian influence
 - ii. The West moving to Latin reduced Western influence

Two Types of Evidence: External and Internal

External: Manuscript Evidence (MSS)

1. Greek (papyri, majuscules, minuscules, lectionaries)
 - a. Papyri (124 sources): P⁴⁵ and P⁷⁵ (third century) P⁴⁶ and P⁶⁶ (approx. 200AD)
 - b. Majuscules (318 sources)
 - i. Codex Sinaiticus (earliest complete NT – by 4th century)
 - ii. Codex Vaticanus (same timeframe – nearly complete)
 - iii. Both belong to Alexandrian text form, but even though they are from close time periods, there are several differences
 - c. Minuscules (2,895 sources)
 - d. Lectionaries (2,436 sources)
2. Ancient translations
 - a. Value depends on date, translation technique, and quality of source text
 - b. Once a version was completed it did not interact with the Greek MSS again
 - c. Latin, Coptic, and Syrian are most important
 - d. Almost twice as many Latin MSS as Greek (10,000 vs 5,700) and date from 3rd to 16th centuries – largely representative of the Western text.
3. Quotations in the writings of the church fathers
 - a. Commentaries, homilies, and other writings

Weighting given to external evidence:

1. Date and character of evidence: in general, earlier manuscripts are more likely to be free from errors that occur from frequent copying.
2. Geographical distribution – in general, wide-spread is better than centralized
3. Reliability in previous tests (“witnesses are to be weighed rather than counted” Metzger)

Internal: Examines the wording of the variants to determine which reading most likely gave rise to the others.

1. Transcriptional probability – what a scribe would be likely to do
 - a. Haplography – to write once what should have been written twice: example – the whole verse at Luke 10:32 is missing from Codex Sinaiticus because the sentence ends with the same verb as the previous sentence.
 - b. Dittography – to write twice what should have been written once: example – Acts 19:34 “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians” is written twice in Codex Vaticanus.
 - c. In general, the more difficult reading is to be preferred.
 - d. In general, the shorter reading is to be preferred
2. Intrinsic probability – examines what the biblical author was likely to have written
 - a. What variant best fits the context?
 - b. Which variant better fits the author’s style?

Variant examples:

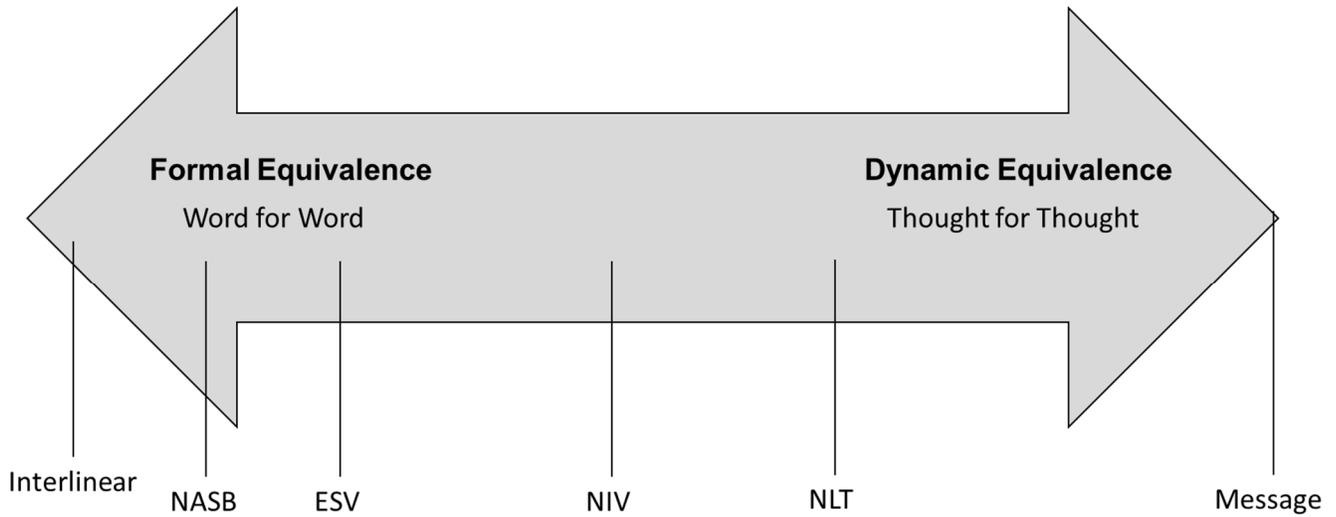
	KJV	ESV	NIV
1 Timothy 3:16	And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. (1 Tim. 3:16 KJV)	Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. (1 Tim. 3:16 ESV)	Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory. (1 Tim. 3:16 NIV)
Revelation 22:19	And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book (Latin - libro vs tree-ligno) of life , and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.	and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.	And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away fr And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.
1 John 5:7-8 (Comma Johanneum)	For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.	For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.	For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

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TRANSLATIONS

Why so many translations?

1. Discovery of older manuscripts
2. Modernize the language
3. Philosophical influences (formal vs dynamic equivalence)



	NASB	NIV	NLT	The Message
Romans 3:25	whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;	God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood-- to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished--	For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past,	God sacrificed Jesus on the altar of the world to clear that world of sin. Having faith in him sets us in the clear. God decided on this course of action in full view of the public - to set the world in the clear with himself through the sacrifice of Jesus, finally taking care of the sins he had so patiently endured.
Romans 8:35	Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?	Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?	Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?	Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture: