

How We Got the Bible (9) – Textual Variants in the NT

History of the N.T. Greek Text:

1. AD 55-300 = Period of free, unrestrained copying by various people
2. AD 300-800 = Standardization of text in various geographical locations – several discernable text types emerge (Caesarean, Western, early Byzantine, Alexandrian)
3. AD 800-1500 = Byzantine texts standardized by trained scribes
4. AD 1500-1650 = Development of popular printed Greek text, or “Textus Receptus” based on late Byzantine manuscripts
5. AD 1650-1880 = Discovery of many more ancient manuscripts.
6. AD 1880-Present = Further discoveries and reconstruction of text based on vast manuscript evidence from all of Christian history.

Purity of the modern NT Greek Text

1. Norman Geisler, noted scholar, estimates that at present, the text of the New Testament is 99.5% pure, and that the .5% of the text about which there is any question is of a trivial nature in that it does not affect our understanding of the teachings of God’s Word.
2. As time progresses and more manuscripts are discovered, the assured demonstrable accuracy of the NT can only become greater.

Reasons why some textual variants exist:

1. Attempt to avoid ambiguity by making what is implicit explicit.
Example: Matt. 16:20 – “he was the Christ” vs. “Jesus was the Christ”
2. Attempt to erase seeming contradictions by making texts read alike.
3. If two prominent variants existed, they were both included in the text.
4. In a few cases, margin comments of scribes were added to the text.

Significant textual variants

1. Acts 8:37 – included in KJV, not included in ASV, ESV, NASB, RSV
2. John 7:53-8:11 – known as a “floating text” – scholars not in agreement as to where it originally belonged
3. Mark 16:9-20 – some early manuscripts do not include this ending
4. 1 John 5:7 – included in KJV, not found in earliest manuscripts