

Source Text Controversy

THE BIBLE AND TEXTUAL CRITICISM

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Some Personal Observations

In a word for word translation, you depend on the source text for the original words, grammar, and syntax. The original may have been written in Aramaic, Hebrew, Latin, or Greek. Where those source texts vary, the translation varies. What we use today for our source text is a compilation of manuscripts. There are thousands of fragments, with overlapping portions of text, some matching, some with additions, and some missing text. Some have marginal notes. Some transcribers have copied those *marginal notes* from one manuscript into the *text* of their own; or they have “helped” us by copying parts of one letter into the content of another to “complete” it (the synoptic gospels); or they have “corrected” one by making it read the same as another. This is sometimes shocking to the layman, who thinks that God’s word is recorded in stone, like the tablets on Mount Sinai, and that the KJV was based on a single source document. It was not.

Comprised together, these sometimes conflicting manuscripts are used to translate what we know as the Bible. This composite document needs internal reconciliation because of the additions, subtractions, and ‘helpful corrections.’ We must critique what has come into our possession using some sort of consistent process and methodology. This process is called **textual criticism**. It is not evil; it is a necessary and unavoidable part of deriving the Bible. How are we to know whether a manuscript is a fraud, or whether the writer intended to re-write Scripture the way we are prone to re-write history? How are we to know whether it was intended as fact or fiction, witness or allegory? It goes to the larger issue of determining the canon itself, and then determining the content of each book within that canon. These are weighty matters.

For the Old Testament, the composite document we have is called the *Masoretic* text, or the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS). We have the **Syriac**, also called the **Peshitta**, an Aramaic bible dating in its current form to the 5th century. There is also the **LXX**, a 2nd century B.C. translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. In 405 A.D., Jerome penned the bible in Latin. He used the common or *vulgar* form of Latin, and so it is known as the **Vulgate**. For the New Testament, the compilation used for the King James Version (also called the **Authorized Version**) is named the **Textus Receptus** (TR – “Received Text”). There is an emended form of it called the **Majority Text** (MT) or **Byzantine** text. It is derived from the vast majority of the manuscripts, the ones most often in agreement. It adds the content of thousands of manuscript pieces that have been found over the centuries since the TR. The **Dead Sea Scrolls** contribute to these. And then there is the **Westcott-Hort** compilation (WH), which adds to the composite the oldest manuscripts dating to the 4th century; the **Codex Sinaiticus** and the **Codex Vaticanus**.

In addition to selecting, identifying, and annotating these compiled manuscripts, the custodians of the manuscripts apply something called **critical analysis** (slightly different than textual criticism). Basically, it means using grammar, style, vocabulary, and other indicators, to determine the consistency, authorship, and dating of a manuscript. It even claims it can predict the existence of a phantom manuscript, which the existing ones may have had in common. And so, the text, its addendums, notations, and suppositions, is sometimes called the **Critical Text**, or CT. The CT is codified in two well-known source documents: the **Nestle-Aland** and the **UBS** (United Bible Society). Together, these are nicknamed the **NU-text**. Most modern translations overwhelmingly

rely on these as their source document. Unless the translators express their preference for which portions of the NU-text they used for translating (by annotating the translation), we would not know if they preferred the *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus* codices over the TR. I believe that creates some problems for the reader. The NIV prefers the NU-text, the ESV prefers the TR, the KJV uses the TR exclusively. Some people would have us disregard all manuscripts found since the 17th century. That goes a bit overboard. Reasonable people weigh those of the TR against the newly discovered ones.

The philosophical issue is this: is older better? The WH folks say yes. The TR folks say no. And the MT folks say maybe, sometimes. Here's the problem: one of the oldest manuscripts used by WH came from an apostate church in Alexandria. It was infamous for its false teachings. The other was altered (*Vaticanus*). By relying on them, we resurrect and perpetuate ancient heresies and errors. The *Sinaiticus* manuscripts are missing 1 John 5:7ff; and thus the NU-text excludes them as well. The NIV and NKJV include the text, but footnote the discrepancy as if to say, "We included it, but really, it's wrong." In the 2nd century, **Tertullian** used a Latin copy that contained those "missing" verses (200 years earlier than the *Sinaiticus*). In his Prologue to the Canonical Epistles, c. 400 A.D. (roughly the same time as the *Sinaiticus*), **Jerome** mentions a Greek manuscript that was missing those verses. "*Irresponsible translators left out this testimony.*" This technique of comparing valid copies against others to establish their veracity and completeness is one basis for relying on the TR instead of other, perhaps older, copies. Existing manuscripts were copied by dictating to a group of scribes from an existing, known, and verified manuscript. The scribes wrote down what was read to them. They swapped their recorded manuscripts and read them to each other to ensure their accuracy and completeness. Where they varied, notes were made in the margins. These copies were then sent to the churches as the "official" or "authorized version" of the Scriptures. What the churches received was thus called the "Received Text," passed on generation to generation, hand to hand.

We call this hand-to-hand validation of a manuscript its "historicity." The TR has *historicity* in its favor, while the WH has *antiquity* in its favor. The TR is equivalent to a registered letter, signed for by each recipient. The Waldenses preserved such copies from corruption and destruction by the Roman Church during the Middle Ages. Erasmus in turn later provided them to the translators of the King James Version. The WH has no such paper trail, or seal of authenticity. The MT has *quantity* in its favor, and there's something to be said for that. Whichever ones we use, we are relying on the "experts." We'd like to assume that there are no political undertones, no doctrinal biases, and everyone is pursuing objective, not subjective, truth. Unfortunately, it would be naïve to do so. Westcott and Hort detested church doctrine, called the TR "vile and villainous" and adored Darwin. That may have affected their selection of manuscripts, and their commenting of the composite. Also, their personal lives lacked the integrity we expect in Christian teachers (1Tim. 3:2; 2Tim. 2:24). The KJV was based on the TR. But even the TR has problems with historicity (Erasmus interfered with it).

There are various degrees of objection to the work of Westcott-Hort. On the left of the spectrum we have those with unswerving and unabashed loyalty to their work. They look at it as though scientific evidence. On the right we have the King-James-Only movement. They feel that the King's English is, well, the King's English; it is the only God-ordained lingua franca of biblical truth in the English Language. So, we have the hyper-liberals, and the hyper-conservatives. Most of us fall between the two extremes. The WH loyalists look only at the constructed source text, while the KJV protagonists look only at the translated text. James R. White's book, *The King*

James Only Controversy, is a helpful guide through this maze. However, I don't agree with all his arguments and conclusions. Therefore, I'm going to list a series of actual verses for you, so you can decide for yourself whether these translations do an adequate job. I might even throw in some logic, which is often lacking in the debate.

What is at stake here is whether our source for God's word, as we have it in physical form, is trustworthy. If all source texts are equally valid, and there is simply an issue of one having more or fewer verses, then there is no problem. Translations of those texts will simply be more or less complete as well. This is the approach of most commercial versions. Passages that the NU-text or MT consider doubtful are marked. The problem with some of the translations is that they actually mark them as doubtful. Phrases like "the oldest and best manuscripts do not contain" would be an example of this bias. In other words, the reader should ignore them. It is as if to say they have been included only as a courtesy, but they don't really belong there.

Let me say that a lot of the changes to the KJV were justified. It had a number of translation errors. So to get closer to the meaning of the original text, wholesale changes had to be made when re-translating those manuscripts. On the other hand, some changes found in various translations involved content, and not just the selection of an English word to represent the original. In general, I find a disparaging of miracles, a disdain for literal meanings, a rejection of Christ as God incarnate, a blatant advocacy for Arminianism, a denial of the virgin birth, and a willingness to alter fundamental concepts and **imagery** through the use of dynamic equivalence.

Imagery is a funny thing. If I change Matt. 12:40 from "whale" to "great fish" then I change the imagery (see NIV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV, LB, NC). The marine biologists tell us that a whale could not have swallowed Jonah. It had to have been a grouper fish. OK. But what has that got to do with the imagery, or the message? If I compare a grouper to a blue whale, I immediately see the difference in scale. Groupers are big, but whales are *huge*! When you play with the words that paint the image, you play with the imagery itself, and you play with its implied meaning. If we are not trying to distinguish ocean mammals from other fish (even though external writings reveal that these folks knew the difference quite well), then we could see how all whales might be "great fish," but all "great fish" cannot be whales. Yet, what kind of fish is tangential to the message. The point is that Jonah was sealed up. It is a metaphor. The size of the fish is essential to that metaphorical image. It describes the condition of Jonah, and his release to do God's purposes. So in that sense, either whale or great fish will do. We may regret that the KJV was not consistent between its OT and NT descriptions of Jonah, but we cannot say that the modern translators were wrong to change *whale* back to *great fish* as in the OT. Then again, I wonder why they would ignore the fact that for 400 years the image of Jonah and the whale dominated the imagination of the world. We shouldn't ignore tradition, especially when it doesn't really affect the meaning. I think the rule should be that, if it isn't clearly wrong (and it is *not*), then it probably should not be changed. Even so, perhaps the OT ought to be changed to match the NT for consistency. Indeed, the LXX, which was written long before the NT, translated the Hebrew word for *great fish* into the Greek word *ketos*. And *ketos* means... *whale*.

By contrast, what if I change the words in Matt. 6:7 from "add a cubit to his stature," to "add an hour to his life"? (see the NIV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, LB, NC). Some translations, like the ASV, compromise in a silly way. They say "add a cubit to his life," which makes no sense. Am I fundamentally altering the text by making such a change? Does it matter, even if these are comparable metaphors? *Yes*, it alters it, and *yes* that matters. Because the connotations of one are very different from the other. My stature (or height) is something I know I cannot change. But

adding an hour to my life seems like something I could very well change. I could stop smoking, take vitamins, exercise, eat healthier, see the doctor more often, get proper medication, reduce stress – remember, many of these are images and metaphors. The one phrase denotes a fixed condition, something I am born with as a God-ordained state of affairs. The other makes room for alternative outcomes depending on my actions. What is the bible’s message supposed to be here? I think the message is that these things are *controlled* by God – he is *sovereign*, so stop worrying. But if I could change the outcome, then worry is unavoidable, because the outcome is in my hands...

So what has this got to do with the NU-text and Westcott-Hort? There are changes very similar to these that have been made to the *source* text. They are just as subtle, but they are also just as likely to throw into doubt the meaning of a passage, and to conflict with other *portions* of Scripture. They create contradictions that did not exist before. This in turn throws into doubt the *entire* Scripture, at least in the minds of naïve believers. And if the Scripture falls, or our faith in Scripture waivers, then special revelation falls with it. At the point we begin to doubt the integrity and veracity of the Word of God, Satan has his foothold. The great strength of the church is the integrity of Scripture. And the great weakness of the church is the integrity of Scripture. God will preserve his word (Psa 12:6-7), but that will not stop men from perverting it, and publishing that perversion as truth. That was the problem with the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ rendition of Scripture called the New World Bible.

There are a number of influential passages of Scripture affected by the WH text that you should know about. And you should consider that the WH underlies the NU-text as well, despite their protestations that their manuscripts are “eclectic.” For example, the NIV translators say, “The Greek text used in translating the New Testament was an eclectic one... Where existing manuscripts differ, the translators made their choice of readings according to accepted principles of New Testament textual criticism... The best current printed texts of the Greek New Testament were used.” According to the translators, the best printed texts are the United Bible Societies Greek NT (**UBSGNT**) and the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft. Another is the Nestle-Aland Greek NT (**NA**). The preface to the UBSGNT first edition says, “The Committee carried out its work... on the basis of Westcott and Hort’s edition of the Greek New Testament.” The first two editions of the UBSGNT considered John 7:53-8:11 to be non-authentic based on the *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus*. The NA is exactly the same as the UBSGNT in its treatment of these two manuscripts. Nestle admits that his text is heavily influenced by Westcott-Hort.

So let’s have a look at some of these questionable passages so you get a feel for the debate.

Matt. 12:47 – This verse is dropped: “And someone said to him, Behold, your mother and your brothers stand outside, seeking to speak to you.” Without it, Jesus is responding in v. 48 to an announcement that has not been made. While he may have known of them (v. 46 tells us they are there), those around him did not. It is obvious that the sentence is needed. By omitting it, based on questionable manuscripts (questionable for this very reason), the NU-text creates in our mind some doubt as to the completeness of what we are reading. And when compared to other translations, doubt arises as to the completeness, consistency, and trustworthiness of the bible itself.

Matt. 18:11 – This verse is dropped: “For the Son of Man came to save what was lost.” There is a comparable passage in Luke 9:56, but this one is the transitional sentence between two seemingly unrelated thoughts. It sets up the parable of the lost sheep which begins in the next verse. We simply have his command not to prevent the children from coming to him, followed by the parable. The NU-text omission makes the passage disjointed.

Luke 2:33. The Greek TR, “Joseph and his mother;” the NU-text, “his father and his mother...” The NU-text, Luke speaking, says that Joseph is Jesus’ father. This is not a statement by Joseph or Mary, made in public for appearance’ sake, as in v. 48. Luke records Jesus’ reply to his mother in v. 49, saying that God is his father. The intent of the passage is not to tell a cute story of Jesus getting lost in Jerusalem, but to convey the fact that Jesus is the Son of God, aware of it as a child. The NU-text alteration competes with the doctrine of the Trinity, which is clearly and repeatedly taught throughout Scripture, and the alteration competes with the context of the passage itself.

Acts 8:37– This verse is dropped: “And Philip said, ‘If you believe from *your* whole heart, *then* it may be;’ and answering he said, ‘I believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God;’” Without this verse, we move directly from Philip’s gospel presentation to the Ethiopian’s baptism. It is not hearing or even understanding the word that saves us, but an act of belief, and that act is not baptism. Baptism does not save. It is a commitment of the heart, an expressed and public demonstration of belief in Christ, that leads to salvation. Even those passages, like Acts 2:38, which speak of repentance and baptism require it be done “in the name of Jesus Christ,” which expresses that required belief. By dropping this verse, the NU-text unnecessarily confuses the process of our salvation.

Gal. 3:17 – Omits the words “in Christ” in the phrase, “the covenant confirmed by God *in Christ...*” The effect of this omission is to make a contraction, so that the promise points to the covenant with Abraham, not the promises of the redemptive covenant between the Father and the Son, of which the Abrahamic covenant is only a manifestation.

Col. 1:14 – drops the words “through his blood” in the phrase “we have redemption *through his blood.*” This advocates universal redemption rather than particular redemption. The “blood” clearly points to his sacrifice as an oblation, an offering for sin, which in the OT is specifically made for an individual, and not generally for the nation. It is what an Arminian would use as proof of universal atonement, and to undermine the penal nature of atonement.

1Pet. 2:2 – omits the words “of the word” in the phrase “sincere milk *of the word.*” This leaves us wondering what the milk might be. Is it the milk of salvation, as in 1Cor. 3:2, or the first principles of Heb. 5:12? Knowing that it is speaking of the milk *of the word* produces a contrast with the previous verse, which speaks of obedience. We know from the following verse that whatever it is, it will produce growth. And so, without these words, we are left to think that we will grow through obedience, and not the word. Again, this favors the Arminian school.

Bad Translations which undermine established passages

Psalm 12:6-7 is God’s promise to preserve his word intact for us. John Owen, one of the Westminster divines, calls this passage, “the great charter of the church’s preservation of truth.”

“The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You will keep them, O LORD, you will preserve them from this generation forever”

In the NIV, this passage is changed to read, “you will keep *us* safe and protect *us* from *such people* forever.” That’s quite a difference. The NIV is representative of translations which employ dynamic equivalence, and which rely on the NU-text. The word “them” should refer to “the words of the Lord,” but the NIV has chosen to refer to verse 5, and so the translators altered “them” to “us.” Verse 5 reads in the NIV, “Because of the oppression of the weak, and the groaning of the need, I will now arise, says the Lord. I will protect them from those who malign them.” Thus, the *Great Charter* is erased, and inferentially, we may now play with the text. At least, that is the accusation made by KJV-only advocate D. A. Waite (see below). To be honest, I don’t really care

about his motives, because only God knows what they are. I want to know whether the Hebrew supports the NIV translation. Clearly, it does not. Here is the reason: in the Hebrew, the first word is *tishmerem*. The *-em* suffix means “them” not “us.” He will keep “them” is correct. The second word is *titzrennu*. The *-ennu* suffix (with an energetic *nun*) is third singular “him”, not first person plural “us”. The energetic *nun* is emphatic (“every one of them”). So it should be translated, “preserve *them*” (“every single one of His words”) not “us” (people).

And so, what we have here is a bad translation. But as I said earlier, when you have enough bad translations, it undermines the whole of Scripture. Let me add that the NIV has no footnote explaining its divergence from the traditional text. That is interesting in light of John Owen’s characterization of its importance. Is this just an exception in the NIV, or is it characteristic of the whole? Let’s just say that there are enough of them that it may be best to do your own word studies, and not rely on the translation alone. But that’s always helpful. It’s why commentaries are written, and study aids like *Robertson’s Word Pictures*, D.A. Carson’s *Exegetical Fallacies*, *Vine’s Word Study*, etc.

Doctrinal Difficulties resulting from the NU-text

The 4th century Athanasian and Nicene Creeds state that Jesus is both Son and God “only-begotten, . . . of the Father before all the ages.” The Westminster Confession of Faith (1648) likewise followed the ancient creeds in describing the relationship that exists within the Godhead:

In the unity of the Godhead, there are three persons, of one substance, power and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son (II:3).

All three ancient creeds describe Christ as only begotten, or eternally begotten.

Let’s look at the phrase **only begotten** in the Scripture. It is found in John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; and 1 John 4:9. The NIV does not use the phrase at all. Instead, it renders the Greek “one and only.” Again, the question is not what is used, but what is correct. The Greek word is *monogenês*. It comes from 2 words: *monos* meaning “only” or “alone”, and *gennaô* meaning “to beget” or “to generate.” The KJV translates it literally as “only begotten.” The NIV does not, but in choosing an alternative phrase, it would seem to run afoul of reformed theology concerning the Trinity. The doctrinal issue is not Jesus’ *existence* as the son of God (NIV), but his *generation* as the son of God (KJV). Dogma says that the Son is not a creature of the Father. He does not have a birthdate. He is *eternally* generated. That is based on John 1:1 which tells us that he was with the Father in the beginning. If he pre-exists, then how can he be generated? I would suggest that the phrase causing us problems is not “one and only,” which makes such awkwardness go away, but the traditional “only-begotten.” Yet, only-begotten is what the Greek clearly says; *monogenês*. It’s a question of how best to render it in another language. In Greek it refers to an only-child in an earthly family. So “one and only” or “one of a kind” or “uniquely of” would be just fine. His generation, *gennaô*, refers to his “coming from” the Father (John 16:28). The Son is the same “substance” as the Father, even though he is a separate “person.” Will *any* single word suffice to convey that truth? Probably not. It took a debate at the *Council of Nicea* to determine the true meaning of the Greek word, 1300 years before the King James folks translated it into English.

The 3 primary passages in contention in the NU-text are these:

1. The **pericope de adultera** (John 7:53-8:11).
2. the **last 12 verses of Mark** (Mark 16:9-20).
3. the **Johannine Comma** (1John 5:7-8)

The following observations are from chapter 8 in the book, *A Theology for Every Christian*, by Timothy Tow and Jeffrey Khoo of the Far Eastern Bible College, Singapore. Please refer to their text for the source of the quotations you see here. They make extensive use of the writings of D.A. Waite, a proponent of the King James Only movement; and so their arguments have a bias to them. Please keep that caution in mind. Their points are nonetheless worth considering.

THE PERICOPE DE ADULTERA (JOHN 7:53–8:11)

The story of the woman taken in adultery in John 7:53–8:11 is called the *pericope de adultera*. According to Westcott, “This account of a most characteristic incident in the Lord’s life *is certainly not a part* of John’s narrative.” Not only has it been said that the *pericope de adultera* was not a part of John’s Gospel, both Westcott and Hort insisted that the story “has no right to a place in the text of the four Gospels.”

The Westcott-Hort based NIV has this misleading statement concerning the authenticity of John 7:53–8:11: “[The earliest and most reliable manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53–8:11].” What are these so-called “earliest” and “most reliable” manuscripts which do not have the *pericope de adultera*? They are the Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, both 4th century manuscripts. Those who reject the *pericope de adultera* do so on a presuppositional bias that these two codices which omit it are superior manuscripts.

Are the above codices really reliable? One will do well to remember that these are the same two codices which attacked the doctrine of the Trinity by removing the Johannine *Comma* (1 John 5:7f). According to Dean Burgon, a godly and renowned Bible defender of the nineteenth century, the codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus are among “the *most corrupt* copies in existence.” Burgon wrote, “I am able to demonstrate that every one of them singly is in a high degree corrupt, and is condemned upon evidence older than itself.” Although the above two codices may be “earliest” they are by no means “most reliable.”

There is abundant evidence in support of the authenticity of the *pericope de adultera*. John 7:53–8:11 is found, (1) in the majority of Greek uncials and minuscules, (2) in the ancient versions or translations: Old Latin, Vulgate, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, and Ethiopic, and (3) in the writings of the Church Fathers: Didascalia, Ambrosiaster, Apostolic Constitutions, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine.

Jerome (AD 340–420), the translator of the Latin Bible called the Vulgate, said this about the *pericope de adultera*: “. . . in the Gospel according to John in many manuscripts, both Greek and Latin, is found the story of the adulterous woman who was accused before the Lord.”

Jerome considered the *pericope* genuine, and included it in his Vulgate. Self-styled textual critics who arrogantly say: “This text has no place in Scripture; I will never preach from it!” should rather heed these wise words of Calvin:

“It has always been received by the Latin Churches, and is found in many old Greek manuscripts, and contains nothing unworthy of an Apostolic Spirit, *there is no reason why we should refuse to apply it to our advantage.*”

It must be noted that if John 7:53–8:11 is removed from the Gospel, it leaves a vacuum between the words “*out of Galilee arises no prophet*” (7:52), and “*Then spoke Jesus again to them*” (8:12). In 7:40–52, we find the private dialogue and debate among the Jewish populace, and between the temple servants and Pharisees over Jesus’ identity; whether He was the Moses-like Prophet (Deut 18:15) or not. Jesus was out of the picture at that time. It is thus quite awkward to introduce Jesus so abruptly in 8:12 where it is recorded that He spoke to them “*again.*” Jesus in verses 12–16 was teaching what is righteous judgment.

The *pericope de adultera* provides the link between the two episodes. Jesus taught them “again” because He had already begun teaching the people before he was interrupted by the scribes and Pharisees (8:2–

3). Jesus' "light of the world" discourse clearly fits the context of the *pericope de adultera*. The Jewish religious leaders had failed to exercise righteous judgment because in condemning the adulteress, they failed to judge themselves for they were equally sinful (8:7–9). Jesus' judicial and yet merciful treatment of the adulteress clearly demonstrates that He alone as the Light of the world is the true and perfect Judge (8:12). The divinely inspired account of the woman taken in adultery rightfully belongs to the Gospel of John. Let us not hesitate to use it for our encouragement and comfort.

THE LAST 12 VERSES OF MARK (MARK 16:9–20)

Are the last twelve verses of Mark really Mark's? According to the NIV, "The most reliable early manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9–20." Its Study Bible goes on to say,

"Serious doubt exists as to whether these verses belong to the Gospel of Mark. They are absent from important early manuscripts and display certain peculiarities of vocabulary, style and theological content that are unlike the rest of Mark. His Gospel probably ended at 16:8."

Here is another NIV attempt at scission. Practically every modern English version would insert this doubt over the authenticity of Mark 16:9–20. It is only the KJV which accepts it without question.

We affirm the authenticity of the last 12 verses of Mark together with Dean J W Burgon who wrote a scholarly 350-page defence of those celebrated verses. Burgon argued that the codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus which are said by many to be "most reliable" are actually "most corrupt." Burgon wrote,

"Recent Editors of the New Testament insist that these "last Twelve Verses" are not genuine... I am as convinced as I am of my life, that the reverse is the truth... I insist, on the contrary, that the Evidence relied on is untrustworthy — untrustworthy in every particular... I am able to prove that this portion of the Gospel has been declared to be spurious on wholly mistaken grounds."

Furthermore, there is abundant manuscript evidence supporting the authenticity of Mark 16:9–20. E. F. Hills wrote,

"They [Mark 16:9–20] are found in all the Greek manuscripts except *Aleph* [*i.e.*, *Sinaiticus*], and *B* [*i.e.*, *Vaticanus*]. . . . And, even more important, they were quoted as Scripture by early Church Fathers who lived one hundred and fifty years before *B* and *Aleph* were written, namely, Justin Martyr (c. 150), Tatian (c. 175), Irenaeus (c. 180), Hyppolytus (c. 200). Thus the earliest extant testimony is on the side of these last twelve verses."

How about the allegation that the last twelve verses are non-Markan because of the difference in literary style? Metzger, for instance, argues against the last twelve verses because there are therein 17 words new to the Gospel of Mark. Such an argument is often fallacious because it wrongly assumes that an author has only one uniform style of writing. In any case, Burgon, after a careful comparison of Mark's first twelve verses with his last twelve verses, concluded,

"It has been proved . . . on the contrary, the style of S. Mark 16:9-20 is exceedingly like the style of S. Mark 1:9-20; and therefore, that *it is rendered probable by the Style* that the Author of the beginning of this Gospel was also the Author of the end of it... *these verses must needs be the work of S. Mark.*"

THE JOHANNINE COMMA (1 JOHN 5:7–8)

Is there a clear biblical proof text for the doctrine of the Trinity? 1 John 5:7–8 in the KJV reads,

"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**" (*bold-face added*).

The words in bold constitute the Johannine *Comma* (Greek: *koptein*, "to cut off"). The *Comma* proves the doctrine of the Holy Trinity — that "There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power, and glory" (WSC Question 6).

Why is this verse so seldom used to teach the doctrine of the Holy Trinity? The oft-quoted NT texts for the Trinity are Matthew 3:16–17; 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; and Revelation 4:8; but why not 1 John 5:7f? One will reply, "How can I when my Bible does not have it?" Therein lies the problem; with 1 John 5:7f

missing in so many of the modern Bible versions like the NIV, RSV, and NASB, it is no wonder that many Christians are ignorant of this verse. And even if they do know that this verse exists, they hesitate to use it because they have been deceived into thinking that it is not part of God's Word. *The NIV Study Bible*, for instance, says that 1 John 5:7f "is not found in any Greek manuscript or NT translation prior to the 16th century." On account of this they argue that 1 John 5:7f is spurious.

It is **not true** that 1 John 5:7f is absent in all pre-sixteenth century Greek manuscripts and NT translations. The text is found in eight extant Greek manuscripts, and five of them are dated before the sixteenth century. Furthermore, there is abundant support for 1 John 5:7f from the Latin translations. There are at least 8,000 extant Latin manuscripts, and many of them contain 1 John 5:7f; the really important ones being the Old Latin which Church Fathers like Tertullian (AD 155–220), and Cyprian (AD 200–258) used. Now, out of the very few Old Latin manuscripts with the fifth chapter of 1 John, at least four of them contain the *Comma*. Since these Latin versions were derived from the Greek NT, there is reason to believe that 1 John 5:7f has very early Greek attestation, hitherto lost. There is also reason to believe that Jerome's Latin Vulgate (AD 340–420), which has the Johannine *Comma*, was translated from an untampered Greek text he had in his possession, and that he regarded the *Comma* to be a genuine part of 1 John. Jerome in his *Prologue to the Canonical Epistles* wrote, "irresponsible translators left out this testimony [i.e., 1 John 5:7f] in the Greek codices." Edward F. Hills concluded, ". . . it was not trickery which was responsible for the inclusion of the Johannine *Comma* in the *Textus Receptus*, but the usage of the Latin-speaking Church."

CONCLUSION

So what are laymen to conclude from all this? It would be easy enough to think that this entire debate is a battle of the "experts." Each side has its array of well-credentialed scholars. So it largely depends on who you trust more. But it also depends on whether you believe the textual criticisms which they put forth are grounded in fact rather than personal opinion. *Is it prudent to judge the judges?* You may be exasperated, because you don't know enough to determine who actually knows what they're talking about. And you may begin to doubt the entire "science" of textual criticism itself.

It seems clear, however, that these debates tend to return to the issue of whether the two oldest manuscripts we have should over-ride the newer manuscripts that were copied and re-copied for two thousand years. In other words, should the *Alexandrian* and *Sinai* manuscripts outweigh the later, but better-received texts? The old scholars of the Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene periods, and those of the Reformation, read Latin, Greek, and Hebrew from their childhood, or as their native tongue. Should we prefer them over our modern scholars who began to study these languages in their adult years? The old scholars were well-read in literature *outside* the text of Scripture; and so they had a better feel for how the words were used in everyday speech, and not just how they were used in Scripture. Do our modern scholars have, perhaps, more information, but not better understanding? Frankly, I don't know.

At the start of the Reformation there was a great debate in England and Germany over translating the Bible into the vernacular of each nation. The Roman Catholic Church demanded that they translate only from the Jerome Bible, the Latin Vulgate. Obviously that was *not* an original manuscript, even though it was very old. It would mean translating from a translation, which is *never* a good idea. William Tyndale was a scholar of the original languages. His translations from those original manuscripts which he had in his possession, became the core of the King James Bible. Tyndale had this to say about translating:

"The sermons which you read in the Acts of the Apostles, and all that the apostles preached, were no doubt *preached* in the native tongue. Why then might they not be *written* in the native tongue? Just as, if one of us preaches a good sermon, why may it not be written down? Saint Jerome translated the Bible

into his native tongue: why may we not also translate it? They will say it cannot be translated into our tongue, because the tongue is too rude. It is not so rude as them being liars. For the Greek tongue agrees more with the English tongue than with the Latin. And the properties of the Hebrew tongue agree a thousand times more with the English tongue than with Latin. The manner of speaking is the same; so that in a thousand places you need only translate it into English, word for word. But you must seek a work-around in the Latin, and yet still have much work to translate it favorably, so that it has the same grace and sweetness, the same sense and pure understanding, as it has in the Hebrew. It may be translated into the English a thousand times better than into the Latin.”¹

As you can see, the debate hasn’t changed all that much – and Tyndale predates the KJV. What has always impressed me about the old commentators – e.g. Calvin, Owen, Matthew Henry, Gill – is the ease with which they examined alternate translations, alternate manuscripts, alternate literature, Jewish commentators, etc. in an attempt to get at the meaning of the text – never wondering which one was “right.” They never considered a translation as definitive, nor even a particular manuscript as the final source of God’s word. They understood that what we have in our hands is not the original, no matter how good or how old it may be. And so they were always willing to re-examine their understanding, and adjust their thinking, to ensure that our perfect God was allowed to speak, and not the voices of fallible men. They were careful to ensure consistency between the OT and the NT – to determine whether a particular text or interpretation of a text was accurate and consistent with existing texts. They used the same criteria we use to determine the canon, to determine the validity of a manuscript. That’s textual criticism at its finest.

So it isn’t just a matter of how old a manuscript is. That’s good to know, but it shouldn’t control or be dispositive of the issues at hand. Even our oldest manuscripts for the NT were written hundreds of years after the events. Since the Scientific Revolution of the 19th century, there has been an arrogance afoot in the world, *and* in the Church, that everyone preceding us was uninformed, ignorant, prejudiced, or provincial. "If only they knew what we know. If only they had the scientific method at their disposal that we have." We forget sometimes that we stand on the shoulders of giants, of men and women who put their lives on the line to preserve what we hold in our hands today.² I don’t think we should lightly dismiss their efforts, or their understanding, or their intellect – especially in a postmodern world where truth exists only in the eyes of the beholder, and every opinion is equally valid.

And it is only in *that* sense, that I think older is better...

¹ William Tyndale, *Obedience of a Christian Man*, “To the Reader” (1528) - Text taken from the 1831 edition of *The Works of the English Reformers* Vol. I Ed. Thomas Russell, A.M. London, *modernized*.

² Timothy and Maura had been married only three weeks when the persecution of Emperor Diocletian reached Mauritania in Northern Africa. In A.D. 303, Diocletian had ordered that all Scripture be destroyed. Some Christians complied with the emperor’s order and as a result, a new word entered into the vocabulary – traitors (*traditores*: those who delivered). As a deacon, one of Timothy’s jobs was to keep the Scriptures; and knowing this, the authorities had him arrested. When Timothy refused to turn over the Scriptures, he was blinded with red hot irons so that, "The books shall at least be useless to you." When, after further torture, Timothy continued his refusal to surrender the scriptures, he and his new bride were crucified. (*Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*)