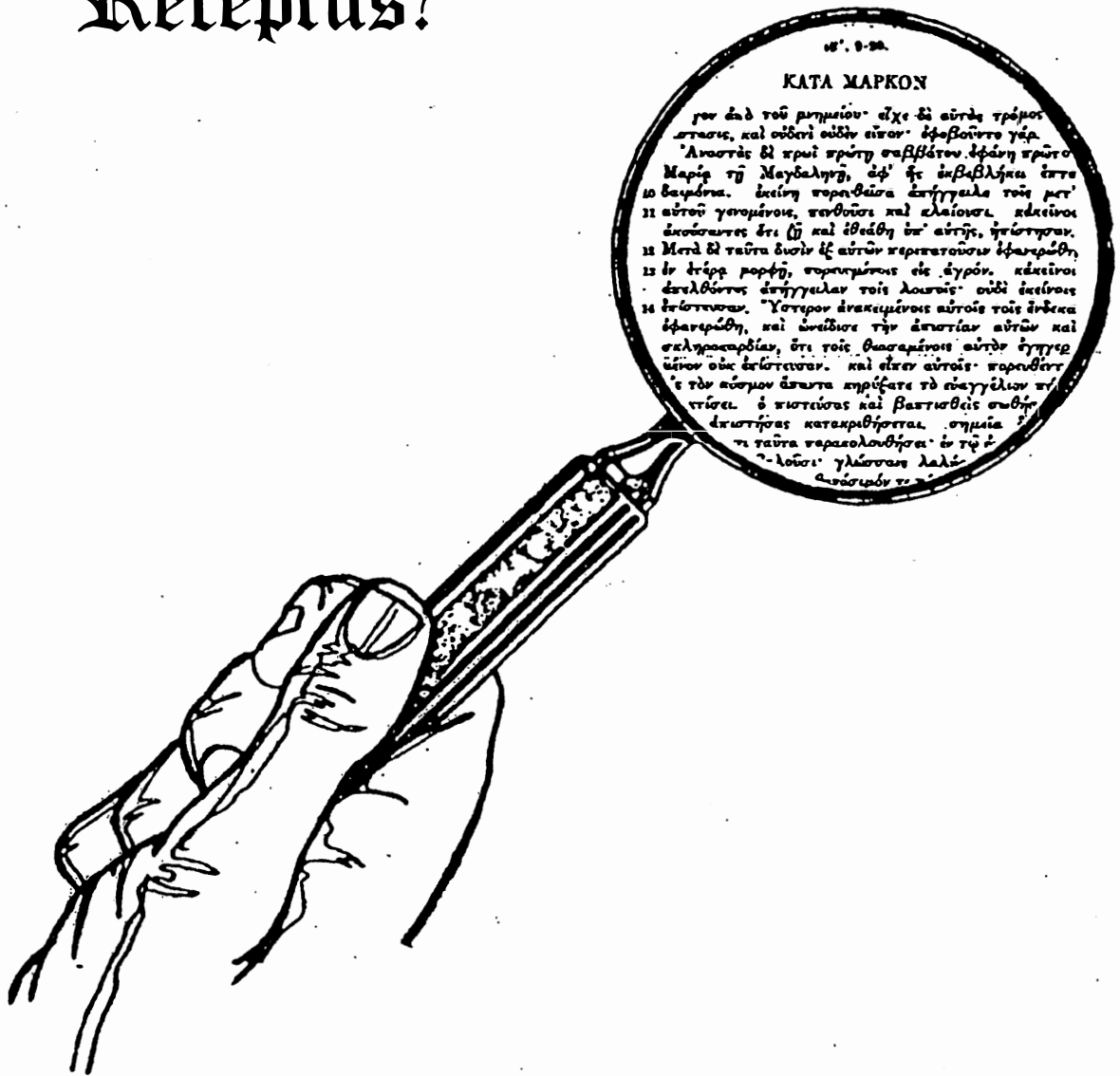


Why Should We Prefer the Textus Receptus?



Manfred E. Kober, Th.D.

A TIMELY RE-EVALUATION OF THE TEXTUS RECEPTUS

1A. THE PROBLEM OF THE TEXT

1b. The Modern Fad:

The average well-taught believer has often heard the King James Version (henceforth KJV) corrected on the basis of "better manuscripts" or "older authorities." He has been told from the pulpit and in print that the Greek text used by the translators of 1611 is inferior to that used for more recent translations. The science of textual criticism has supposedly led us to a more accurate knowledge of the original text of the Bible.

This explains, in part, the current avalanche of new versions, each one aiming to replace the KJV. A new version is said to belong into the pulpit the same way a partridge belongs in a pear tree. The KJV, we are told, needs to be replaced.

2b. The Textual Families:

1c. The number of manuscripts:

A very large number of Greek manuscripts (henceforth MSS) of the New Testament survive today. A recent list by Kurt Aland, a German scholar whose job it is to assign official numbers to Greek manuscripts as they are found, lists these figures: papyrus MSS, 81; majuscules (mss written in capital letters), 267; minuscules (mss written in smaller script), 2764. While many of these MSS are merely fragmentary, they nevertheless supply a massive accumulation of evidence for textual criticism. In addition, there are 2143 lectionaries, making for a total of 5255 MSS, as of 1967, according to Aland. The striking fact is that a large majority of this huge mass of MSS--somewhere between 80-90%--contains a Greek text which in most respects closely resembles the kind of text which was the basis for the KJV. This may come as a surprise to the ordinary believer who has gained the impression that the Authorized Version is supported chiefly by inferior manuscripts.

2c. The nature of the texts:

Since the 18th century the New Testament documents have been divided into families according to the type of text which they contain and the errors of transmission. There are three of these families, namely, the TRADITIONAL (Byzantine) family, the WESTERN family, and the ALEXANDRIAN family.

1d. The Traditional or Byzantine family:

The Traditional or Byzantine family (also the Majority Text, better known today as the Textus Receptus, i.e. the text commonly received as authoritative) includes all those New Testament documents which contain the traditional Byzantine text, including A (in the Gospels) and W (in Matthew and the last two-thirds of Luke). The Peshitta Syriac version and the Gothic version also belong to this family, along with the New Testament quotations from Chrysostom and the other Fathers of Antioch and Asia Minor. -141-

2A. THE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF TEXTUAL CRITICS

1b. The Background in Rationalism:

In a most recent study ("Rationalism and Contemporary New Testament Textual Criticism," Bibliotheca Sacra, January 1971), Professor Zane Hodges, from whom much of this material is taken, shows that Westcott and Hort's text was constructed on rationalistic foundations. They are unwilling to subscribe to the inerrancy of the original Scriptures. They assert that:

"Little is gained by speculating as to the precise point at which such corruptions came in. They may be due to the original writer [*italics added*], or to his amanuensis if he wrote from dictation, or they may be due to one of the earliest transcribers."

Their rationalistic premise is further seen in a more blatant assertion:

"For ourselves we dare not introduce into textual criticism considerations which could not reasonably be applied to other ancient texts, supposing them to have documentary attestation of equal amount, variety, and antiquity."

Evolutionary thought permeates their system. Westcott writes:

"No one now, I suppose, holds that the first three chapters of Genesis, for example, give a literal history--I could never understand how anyone reading them with open eyes could think they did."

Hort writes:

"I am inclined to think that no such state as "Eden" (I mean the popular notion) ever existed, and that Adam's fall in no degree differed from the fall of each of his descendants, as Coleridge justly argues."

It is just one short step from a belief in evolution in nature to a belief in evolution of the biblical documents. Westcott and Hort apparently took this step.

2b. The Belief in Recension:

Westcott and Hort who reject the Byzantine text in favor of the Alexandrian text explain the Majority Text on the basis of a recension. The reason why up to 90% of all Greek texts have a common reading is due to a revision which took place at Antioch in two stages between 250 and 350 A.D. Some scholarly Christians, with the presbyter Lucian (d. 312) as original leader, deliberately created an official text by combining the Western, Alexandrian, and Neutral (B-Aleph) texts. The purpose was to construct a text on which all could agree.

Today, the whole question of the derivation of "texttypes" through definite, historical recensions is open to debate. Indeed, E. C. Colwell, one of the leading contemporary critics, affirms dogmatically that the so-called "Syrian" recension (as Hort would have conceived it) never took place. Instead he insists that all texttypes are the result of "process" rather than definitive editorial activity. History is silent concerning such an official recension.

2A. THE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF TEXTUAL CRITICS

3b. The Break with the Received Text:

Westcott and Hort rejected the Textus Receptus (TR) because of the discovery of older, supposedly better texts. The arguments against the TR usually follow this line:

1c. The oldest MSS do not support the Majority Text:

The three oldest complete (or nearly complete) uncial MSS are B (Codex Vaticanus); Aleph (Codex Sinaiticus); and A (Codex Alexandrinus).

1d. Be was written about the middle of the fourth century. It is the property of the Vatican Library in Rome. It has been in the Vatican since at least 1475, for in that year a catalog of the library was made and B is mentioned.

2d. Aleph was discovered by Tischendorf (1841-72) in 1859 on his third visit to the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mt. Sinai. It is believed to have been written in the second half of the fourth century and is currently in the British Museum which purchased it from Russia in 1933.

3d. Codex A was given to the King of England in 1627 by Cyril Lucar, patriarch of Constantinople and is now likewise in the British Museum. Scholars date it from the first half of the fifth century.

But the oldest MSS do not necessarily contain the best text. J. W. Burgon (1813-1888), Dean of Chichester, and a staunch defender of the TR, demonstrates that Aleph and B are very inferior documents. Their antiquity is a point against them, not something in their favor. It shows that the Church rejected them and did not read them. Otherwise they would have been worn out through use. Furthermore, most of our ancient documents derive basically from Egypt, where the clement climate aided the preservation of the texts. These texts are at best a local family and, as Aland suggests, a revised form of the old Egyptian text whose nearness to the original is open to debate. Kirsopp Lake, another textual critic, favored the idea that the scribes usually destroyed their exemplars when they had copied the sacred books.

The oldest manuscripts extant are P⁶⁶ and P⁷⁵ (c. 200) and combined with B (4th century) they frequently agree on errors, such as their reference to "Bethsaida" in John 5:2 when it should read "Bethesda." Even the most ancient MSS err, and err frequently.

2c. The Majority Text is a revised and hence secondary, form of the Greek text:

1d. The position:

Certain revisers in the 4th century are said to have created this text to present a smooth, acceptable text that combined elements from other, earlier texts. Therefore this eclectic production is only of secondary value. "Older manuscripts" are thus to 143-preferred.

2A. THE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF TEXTUAL CRITICS

3b. The Break with the Received Text:

2c. The Majority Text is a revised and hence secondary, form of the Greek text:

2d. The problem:

This view is now widely abandoned as no longer tenable. Yet it was this view of the Majority Text which was largely responsible for relegating it to a secondary status in the eyes of textual critics generally. Critics now wish to posit the idea of a "process" drawn out over a long period of time. However, this fails to explain the relative uniformity of the text, nor does it explain its rise and its dominance. Contemporary textual criticism has no explanation for the phenomena of the Majority Text.

3c. The readings of the Majority Text are repeatedly inferior to those of earlier manuscripts:

Hodges ably refutes this assertion by observing:

"Perhaps the greatest surprise to many Bible-believing Christians will be the discovery that textual critics seek to defend their preference for the older manuscripts by affirming that they are better because, in fact, they contain the better readings....In the last analysis, a manuscript is attested by its readings rather than the reverse."

Decisions whether a reading is inferior or superior are based on personal opinions and biases, as America's foremost textual critic, E. C. Colwell, points out. The two criteria used to decide a reading are purely subjective: "Choose the reading which fits the context" and "Choose the reading which explains the origin of the reading." These two standards can cancel each other.

3A. THE PRESERVATION OF THE TRUTH

1b. The Uniqueness of the Bible:

According to textual critics, the Bible is a book like any other book. It has no special claim to uniqueness. Colwell writes:

"It is often assumed by the ignorant and uninformed--even on a university campus--that textual criticism of the New Testament is supported by a superstitious faith in the Bible as a book dictated in a miraculous fashion by God. That is not true. Textual criticism has never existed for those whose New Testament is one of miracle, mystery, and authority. A New Testament created under those auspices would have been handed down under them and would have no need of textual criticism" (What is the Best New Testament?, p. 8).

3A. THE PRESERVATION OF THE TRUTH

1b. The Uniqueness of the Bible:

But the New Testament is unique! It is breathed out by a living God and so must be treated differently from any other book. For this very reason the Bible cannot have had a history wholly like that of secular writings. While the finest literary efforts of man can suffer irreparable corruption and can even perish forever, the eternal preservation of the Scriptures is inescapably implied in the very nature of the Word itself: "All flesh is as grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth forever" (I Pet. 1:24-25). The Psalmist wrote (Ps. 12:6-7): "The words of the Lord are pure words as silver. . . Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation forever."

2b. The Preservation of the Bible:

While we speak frequently about the inspiration, canonicity, inerrancy and authority of the Scriptures, we generally fail to give to the doctrine of the preservation of the Scriptures the rightful place it deserves. Surely no corollary of inspiration is more logical than the preservation of God's Word which lives and abides forever.

When we subscribe to Westcott and Hort's view of the Critical Text we are really asserting that the true New Testament text has been lost for nearly fifteen centuries. As Burgon so incisively remarks:

"And thus it would appear that the Truth of Scripture has run a very narrow risk of being lost forever to mankind. Dr. Hort contends that it more than half lay 'perdu' on a forgotten shelf in the Vatican Library;--Dr. Tischendorf that it had been deposited in a wastepaper basket in the convent of St. Catherine at the foot of Mount Sinai;--from which he rescued it on the 4th of February, 1859;--neither, we venture to think, a very likely circumstance. We incline to believe that the Author of Scripture hath not by any means shown Himself so unmindful of the safety of the Deposit, as these distinguished gentlemen imagine" (The Revision Revised, p. 343).

The textual critics make no allowances for the fact that the unique origin, content and purpose of the Bible imply a unique preservation. God promised the preservation of His Word. Is the Majority Text corrupt? If it is, then 90% of the tradition is corrupt. And no one is quite sure how to use the remaining 10%! Those who read the modern critical editions are reading a consensus of scholars and have no guarantee that their text will not change in the future. By contrast, those who read the Textus Receptus are reading a text resting upon a consensus of manuscripts. These manuscripts do not perfectly agree one with another and are not without certain problems; however, with all the evidence available to textual critics, it would suggest that the TR is by far the better of the two texttypes. While it would be a judgment too severe to say that the TR is God's text and the critical text is Satan's text, as some have done, it still seems reasonable to suggest that God preserved His Word in a more general way other than a handful of manuscripts that were forgotten for centuries.

4A. THE PRIORITY OF THE TEXTUS RECEPTUS

The ordinary Christian may look upon the controversy surrounding the Textus Receptus as nothing more than an academic exercise of little practical value. The important consequences of the acceptance or rejection of the Majority Text can best be demonstrated on hand of some illustrations from the Greek text. Perhaps more than any other passage of Scripture, the last twelve verses of Mark are greatly affected by question of which of the two texts is best.

1b. The Last Twelve Verses of Mark:

1c. The situation:

Many sincere believers had their confidence shaken in the last twelve verses of Mark, since Aleph and B, which are considered to be the two best MSS of the Greek New Testament, omit this passage. But Dean Burgon has shown in his classic monograph, The Last Twelve Verses of Mark (1871, reprinted 1959) that the omission of the passage actually argues for its inclusion. In B a blank space is left for them in the MSS--the only blank space, indeed, which it contains. This proves that the verses were in the earlier manuscript from which Vaticanus was copied (see Appendix).

Sinaiticus reveals a still more startling fact. Two pages of the original have been taken out and two others inserted, apparently by the writer of the B MSS. These contain the close of Mark and the beginning of Luke. The pages were evidently re-written for the purpose of excluding the twelve verses. The writing on these pages is so spread out that they contain less matter than they ought. Even so, the last column is not completely filled out.

2c. The dilemma:

If we accept the Aleph and B omission, we are left with rather unenviable alternatives: either the Gospel ended on a note of utter despair--which is unthinkable for a Gospel penned especially to glorify Christ, or the ending is hopelessly lost--which in reality is a masked rejection of a belief in the providential preservation of inspired Scripture.

3c. The explanation:

On the other hand, it is relatively easy to determine the reasons which are responsible for the omission. The MSS were written at a bad time--that of the Arian lapse. They show a similarity of omissions in the Gospels relating to the deity of our Lord (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18, e.g., where "begotten" is omitted; Mark 1:1 omits "Son of God" etc.) as well as to everlasting punishment (e.g. Mark 9:44, 46 omitted in both MSS--fire not quenched, worm dieth not). Practical and doctrinal reasons can easily explain the omission of the verses; their preservation argues for their disuse through the years; their

9 Ἀνοστήσας δὲ πρῶτῃ σαββάτῳ ἐφάνη πρῶτον
Μαρίᾳ τῇ Μαγδαληνῇ, ἀφ' ἧς ἐκβεβλήκει ἕπτ
10 δαιμόνια. ἐκείνη πορευθεῖσα ἀπήγγειλε τοῖς μετ
11 αὐτοῦ γινόμενοις, πενθοῦσι καὶ κλαίουσι, καὶ κείν
12 ἀκούσαίτες ὅτι ἦ καὶ ἐθαύθη ὑπ' αὐτῆς, ἠρώτησαι
13 Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα δυοῖν ἐξ αὐτῶν περιπατοῦσιν ἐφανερῶθ
14 ἐν ἑτέρᾳ μορφῇ, πορευμένοις εἰς ἀγρὸν. καὶ κείν
15 ἀπελθόντες ἀπήγγειλαν τοῖς λοιποῖς· οὐδὲ ἐκείνοι
16 ἐπίστευσαν. Ὑστερον ἀνακειμένοις αὐτοῖς τοῖς ἐνδεκ
17 ἐφανερῶθη, καὶ ὠνείδισε τὴν ἀπιστίαν αὐτῶν κα
18 σκληροκαρδίαν, ὅτι τοῖς θιασαμένοις αὐτὸν ἐγγερ
19 μόνον οὐκ ἐπίστευσαν. καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· πορευθέντε
20 εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἅπαντα κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πᾶσι
21 τῇ κτίσει. ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται
22 ὁ δὲ ἀπιστήσας κατακριθήσεται. σημεῖα δὲ τοῖ
23 πιστεύσασιν ταῦτα παρακολουθήσονται· ἐν τῷ ὄνοματί μου
24 δαιμόνια ἐκβαλοῦσι· γλώσσαις λαλήσουσι καινὰς
25 ἰσχύας ἀρῶσι· κἄν θανάσιμὸν τι πίνωσιν, οὐ μὴ αὐτοῦ
26 βλάψῃ· ἐπὶ ἀρρώστους χεῖρας ἐπιθήσουσι, καὶ καλῶ
27 ἔξουσιν.
28 Ὁ μὲν οὖν Κύριος μετὰ τὸ λαλῆσαι αὐτοῖς ἀνε
29 λήθη εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ
30 Θεοῦ. ἐκείνοι δὲ ἐξελθόντες ἐκήρυξαν πανταχοῦ τοῖ
31 Κυρίου συνεργούντος καὶ τὸν λόγον βεβαιούντος δι
32 τῶν ἐπακολουθούντων σημείων. ἀμήν.

4A. THE PRIORITY OF THE TEXTUS RECEPTUS

1b. The Last Twelve Verses of Mark:

3c. The explanation:

place of discovery hardly argues for their divine preservation by God as the true text (Cf. Urquhart, New Biblical Guide, VII, 383ff; Bibliotheca Sacra, October 1966, p. 306ff).

2b. Other important omissions from Aleph and B which are in the Textus Receptus:

1c. John 3:13 "which is in heaven"

2c. Acts 8:37 "And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart..."

3c. Rev. 1:11 "I am Alpha and Omega..."

4c. Mat. 6:13 "For thine is the kingdom..."

5c. John 7:53-8:11 Pericope de Adultera (the woman taken in adultery)

3b. Reason for the favoring the Textus Receptus on which the KJV is based:

We retain the KJV because of its preparation by godly men, God's providence in the preservation of the true text, its perfection of literary beauty, its permanence in light of the many other versions.

ΜΙΝ ΤΟ ΠΑΙΘΟΝ ΕΚ ΤΗΣ
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 ΚΑΙ ΑΝΑΒΑΣΤΑΣΑΙ ΘΕΩ
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ΧΑΤΕ
 ΨΑΡΚΟΝ

This is a facsimile of the CODEX VATICANUS (B), showing space left for Mark 16:9-20.

ΚΑΙ ΑΝΑΒΑΣΤΑΣΑΙ ΘΕΩ
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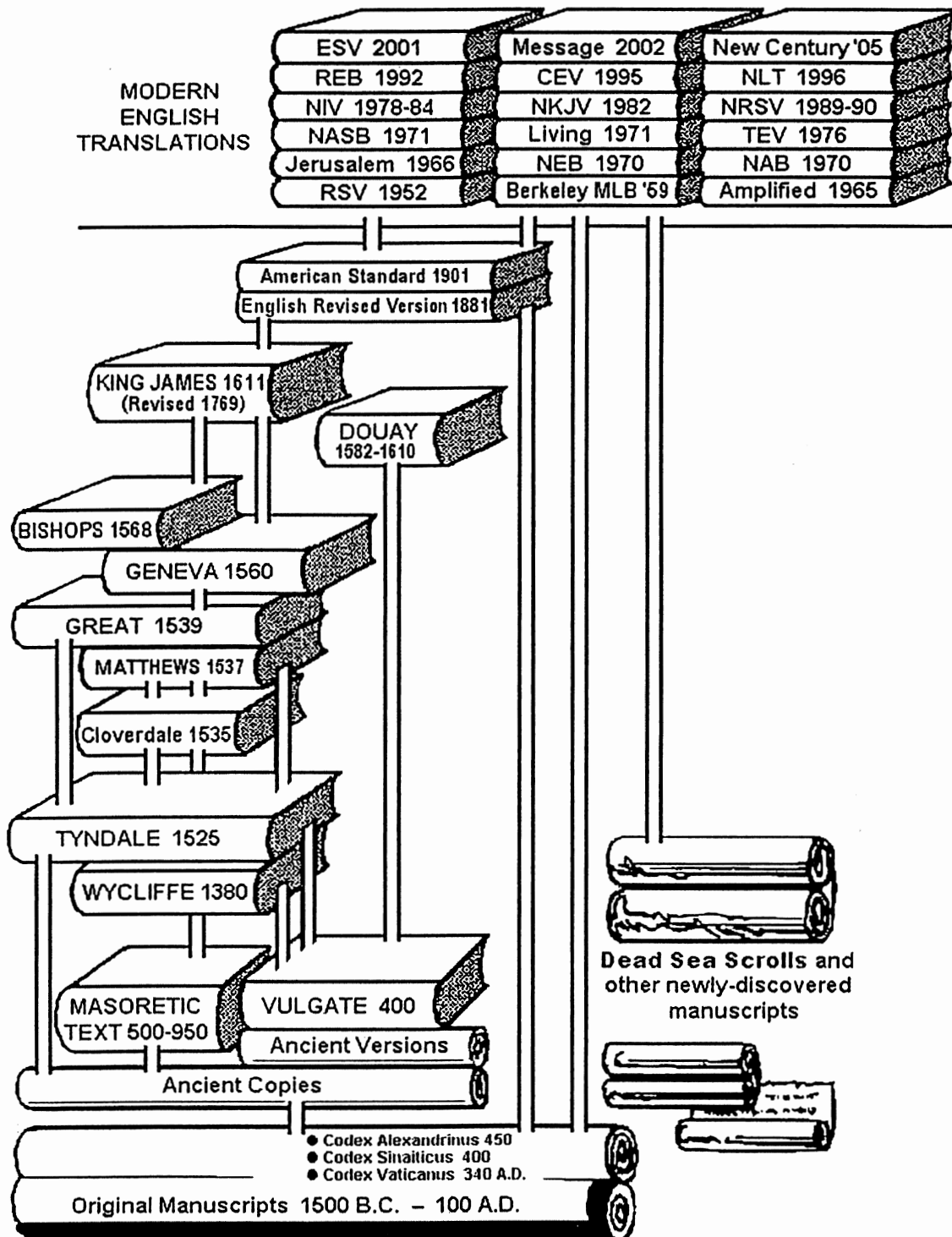


Chart adapted and updated from Thompson Chain Reference Study Bible by David Ahl. Nov. 2010, www.BibleStudyMen.com

Friedrich Constantin von Tischendorf [1815-1874]



His name was Friedrich Constantin von Tischendorf, a world leading biblical scholar who rejected higher criticism, which led to noteworthy success in defending the authenticity of Bible text.

Tischendorf was born in Lengenfeld, Saxony, northern Europe, the son of a physician, in the year 1815 and educated in Greek at the University of Leipzig. During his university studies, he was troubled by higher criticism of the Bible, offered by famous German theologians, who sought to prove that the Greek New Testament was not authentic. Tischendorf became committed, however, that a thorough research of the early manuscripts would prove the trustworthiness of the Bible text.

We are indebted to Tischendorf for dedicating his life and abilities to searching through Europe's finest libraries and the monasteries of the Middle East for ancient Bible manuscripts and especially for rescuing the great Codex Sinaiticus from being destroyed. However, our highest thanks go to our heavenly Father, who has used hundreds of men since the days of Desiderius Erasmus, who published the first printed Greek New Testament in 1516, so that the Word of God has been accurately preserved for us today. We can be grateful for the women of the twentieth and now the

John William Burgon

From Textus Receptus

John William Burgon^[1] (August 21, 1813 - August 4, 1888) (also known as Dean Burgon), was an English Anglican divine who became the Dean of Chichester Cathedral in 1876. He is remembered for his passionate defense of the historicity and Mosaic authorship of Genesis and of Biblical inerrancy in general.



John William Burgon
called "Dean" Burgon

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Biography

Burgon was born at Smyrna, the son of an English merchant trading in Turkey who was also a skilled numismatist and afterwards became an assistant in the antiquities department of the British Museum. His mother is often said to have been Greek but was in fact the daughter of the Austrian consul at Smyrna and his English wife.^[2]

During his first year the family moved to London, where he was sent to school. After a few years of business life, working in his father's counting-house^[3], Burgon went to Worcester College, Oxford, in 1841, and took his degree in 1845. The same year he took the Newdigate Prize for his poem *Petra*, referring to Petra, the inaccessible city in the present Jordan, which he had heard described but had never seen:

It seems no work of Man's creative hand,
by labour wrought as wavering fancy planned;
But from the rock as if by magic grown,
eternal, silent, beautiful, alone!
Not virgin-white like that old Doric shrine,
where erst Athena held her rites divine;
Not saintly-grey, like many a minster fane,
that crowns the hill and consecrates the plain;
But rose-red as if the blush of dawn,
that first beheld them were not yet withdrawn;
The hues of youth upon a brow of woe,
which Man deemed old two thousand years ago,
match me such marvel save in Eastern clime,
a rose-red city half as old as time.

The poem is now chiefly remembered for the famous final line which quotes the phrase "half as old as time" from Samuel Rogers.^[4] (This fourteen-line excerpt is often referred to as a "sonnet," but the poem is well over 350 lines long, in rhymed couplets. Burgon published it, apparently in a small pamphlet, around 1845. A "Second Edition" "To Which a Few Short Poems Are Now Added," was published in 1846;^[5] the text above follows it. It contained some revisions: "sanctifies" had been "consecrates"; "call'd" had been "deemed"; "But rosy-red,—as if the blush of dawn" had been "But rose-red as if the blush of dawn", and so on. There was also an 1885 book containing the poem.)

Burgon was elected to an Oriel fellowship in 1846. He was much influenced by his brother-in-law, the scholar and theologian Henry John Rose (1800-1873), a conservative Anglican churchman with whom he used to spend his long vacations. Burgon made Oxford his headquarters, while holding a living at some distance. In 1863 he was made vicar of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, having attracted attention by his vehement sermons against *Essays and Reviews*, a series of messages on biblical inspiration in which he defended against the findings of textual criticism and higher criticism the historicity and Mosaic authorship of Genesis, and Biblical inerrancy in general: "Either, with the best and wisest of all ages, you must believe the whole of Holy Scripture; or, with the narrow-minded infidel, you must disbelieve the whole. There is no middle course open to you."

In 1867 he was appointed Gresham Professor of Divinity. In 1871 he published a defence of the genuineness of the twelve last verses of the Gospel of Mark. He then began an attack on the proposal for a new lectionary for the Church of England, based largely upon his objections to the principles for determining the authority of manuscript readings in the Greek New Testament adopted by Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort. Westcott and Hort led the team producing the Revised Version of the Bible. Burgon assailed Westcott & Hort in a memorable 1881 article in the *Quarterly Review*, and collected his Quarterly Review articles and pamphlets into books, such as "The Revision Revised", in which he denounced Westcott and Hort for elevating "one particular manuscript,—(namely the Vatican Codex (B), which, for some unexplained reason, it is just now the fashion to regard with superstitious deference". He found their primary manuscript to be "the reverse of trustworthy."

Burgon criticised all five oldest Greek manuscripts on which the Revisers relied. Burgon writes that they:

are among the most corrupt documents extant. Each of these codices (Aleph B D) clearly exhibits a fabricated text - is the result of arbitrary and reckless recension."^[6]