

Chapter Twelve

(From *The Holy Bible In Its Original Order*
A New English Translation
A Faithful Version with Commentary)

Overview

Which Texts Comprise the Pure Words of God?

The question of which texts comprise the pure words of God is generating more controversy and argument today than at any time since this “great debate” began in earnest in the late nineteenth century. In best-selling books, leading theological journals and especially on the Internet, every aspect of biblical textual criticism is being intensely debated. The mass of textual data collected by researchers over the centuries presents many “facts” about the history, form and readings of the manuscripts that testify to the original writings of the biblical authors. However, the opposing interpretations of these facts, and even the misinformation created by vocal members of this debate, have often left Bible believers confused and frustrated.

It is understandable why the question about the purity of the biblical texts attracts so much attention. The Bible has affected our society, at least Western civilization, more than any other book. No other book has done more to shape our view of ourselves and how we interact with the world. The Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, respectively, undergird two of the world’s most influential religious faiths: Judaism and Christianity.

Origins of the Current Debate

The current debate over the biblical texts stems largely from the 1881 revision of the *Authorized or King James Version (KJV)* of the New Testament. History records that the English monarchy and segments of the Church of England refused to be associated with the revision of this venerable translation, itself a product of the English Reformation. In fact, numerous scholars, even those on the actual revision committee, differed widely in their beliefs on how to proceed with improving the *KJV* for purposes of public worship.

In short, committee members were initially commissioned to correct only “plain and clear errors” in the Greek text underlying the *KJV*. According to the committee’s second chairman, Dr. Charles John Ellicott, the revisers agreed to “**make the current Textus Receptus the standard**; departing from it only when critical or grammatical considerations show that it is clearly necessary” (Ellicott, *Considerations on Revision*, p. 30, quoted by Burgon, *The Revision Revised*, pp. 39, 414 and bold added).

(The “current” *Textus Receptus* was the 1550 *Stephens Text*, one of the Reformation printed editions of the Greek New Testament. The term *Textus Receptus* was first assigned to the 1633 Elzevir Greek text because this Latin phrase (meaning Received Text) appeared in its preface. This expression was later used to refer collectively to the editions of Erasmus (1516), Stephens (1550), Beza (1598) and Elzevir (1633). Professor George Ricker Berry noted that “In the main they [in particular the Stephens and Elzevir texts] are one and the same; and either [i.e., any] of them may be referred to as the *Textus Receptus*” (Berry, *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, p. ii). The text of these early editions reflects a near-identical agreement with the common text of the Byzantine manuscript family, which consists of the vast majority of Greek scribal copies of the New Testament. Even though many of these copies date later than the fifth century AD, most of their readings circulated in Byzantium, Greece, Asia Minor and elsewhere and are confirmed by the early papyri, ancient versions and writings of the early “Christian” scholars and theologians. Other types of Greek texts include the Alexandrian, Western and Caesarean, generally reflecting the geographical areas from which their manuscripts originated.)

Instead of holding to their agreed upon standard text, a majority of the revisers established

a radically different Greek text as the basis for the New Testament translation and produced the 1881 *English Revised Version (ERV)*. This different text was largely founded on the Greek New Testament of two Anglican scholars, Drs. B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort. In building their own text, Westcott and Hort showed undeserved partiality to two previously unused Greek manuscripts from the Sinai desert and Vatican library. Most scholars consider these two manuscripts, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, to be the chief representatives of what is known as the Alexandrian (Egyptian) text.

What might have been an excellent opportunity to correct the *KJV* and its underlying Greek text was lost amidst inner-committee clashes over the comparative value of the manuscript evidence.

The late John William Burgon (1813-1888), an Anglican theologian and textual scholar, was one of the most vocal opponents of the committee and its work. In *The Revision Revised*, published in 1883, Burgon released a barrage of evidence from the manuscripts, ancient versions and early church scholars that highlighted the deficiencies of the Westcott-Hort Greek text, the theory behind that text and the 1881 New Testament translation based largely upon it.

The *ERV* was not the first attempt to emend the Greek text and revise the *KJV*. In the eighteenth century, several men produced English versions using supposedly “better” manuscripts to correct critically the readings and language of the *KJV*. Probably the most famous endeavor was undertaken by William Whiston, the translator of the Jewish historian Josephus. Whiston published his *Primitive New Testament* in 1745. Many other scholars labored in the 1700s and 1800s to correct the *Textus Receptus* via marginal footnotes or by actually producing new Greek editions based on differing principles and manuscripts.

The 1881 revision caused a violent shift to occur in New Testament textual criticism, which entailed a wholesale rejection of the *Textus Receptus* and the vast majority of manuscripts for establishing the Greek text and translating the New Testament into English. Modern eclectic or critical Greek texts differ significantly in many places from the accepted text (*Textus Receptus*) used for almost all Protestant translations of the New Testament into English from the Reformation down to the late nineteenth century. These modern Greek editions are over 97 percent identical to the 1881 Westcott-Hort text that underlies the *ERV* (Fowler, *Evaluating Versions of the New Testament*, p. 66).

An objective listing of the most significant translatable differences between the modern eclectic or critical Greek texts and the *Textus Receptus* texts is available in a book titled *Evaluating Versions of the New Testament* by Everett W. Fowler. This publication records whole verses, significant portions of verses and divine names that have been omitted by the Westcott-Hort, Nestle and the latest United Bible Societies (Nestle-Aland) editions, all of which depend heavily on an Alexandrian type of text. It also highlights the differences between the various modern and early Protestant translations, which stem from the opposing Greek texts. More than 40 of these differences directly involve Christian doctrine and over 480 substantially affect the meaning of Scripture (Fowler, p. 21). Many have been adopted by translators of contemporary English versions, including the popular *New International Version (NIV)*. More specific information on each variant reading is available by consulting the respective printed editions of the Greek New Testament.

Why Study the Biblical Texts?

Since the 1880s, advocates and antagonists of the various Greek texts have traded barbs and directed charges of “conspiracy” at one another. At one extreme, some American fundamentalist ministers and scholars have labeled modern Greek texts as “satanic” and filled with heresy. Conversely, some textual critics and theologians have blamed evangelicalism and a so-called “dumbing down” of Christianity as the real culprit behind the rise of conspiracy theories about the biblical texts (cf. Wallace, “The Conspiracy Behind the New Bible Translations,” www.bible.org).

No doubt there are elements of truth in all positions assumed in this debate. The difficult task for most people is sorting out the valuable kernels of truth from the often highly prejudiced chaff.

The debate has escalated in recent decades to include the various modern English versions. One major point of contention is the glaring differences in wording between the various

modern translations and those of the Protestant Reformers, including the 1611 *KJV*. In some modern versions, words, phrases and even whole verses have been relegated to the margins or sometimes omitted without notice (e.g., the account of the woman taken in adultery in John 7:53-8:11 and Mark 16:9-20).

These omissions, especially evident in the *NIV* published in the late 1970s, have drawn considerable attention. According to one fundamentalist pundit, the *NIV* contains 64,000 fewer words than the *KJV* (Riplinger, *New Age Bible Versions*, p. 28). If this is true, can it with confidence be labeled as an accurate translation?

In addition, in the last decade, Bible versions trafficking a more gender-neutral language have begun to appear. A recent example is *The New Testament and Psalms*, an adaptation of the liberally-translated *New Revised Standard Version*. The editors of this inclusive version state that their goal was to replace all “pejorative references to race, color or religion, and all identifications of persons by their physical disability alone, by means of paraphrase, alternative renderings and other acceptable means of conforming language to the work of an inclusive idea” (*The New Testament and Psalms*, pp. viii and ix). Zondervan Publishing House and the International Bible Society are planning to release a complete gender-inclusive revision of the *NIV*. The language of these versions is in line with the anti-patriarchal agendas of modern feminists and the ideologies of other groups who want to use the English Bible as a forum for activism—the eradication of social, economic and political inequities in society. Publishers of such inclusive versions bank on sales in the market-driven Bible industry, soaring due to these compromises with the Sacred Text.

Even more scandalous is the release of the scholars’ version of the Gospels produced by the Jesus Seminar and Westar Institute of Santa Rosa, Calif. Notoriously known for their radical redaction (editing) of the Gospel narratives, the fellows of the Jesus Seminar have tried to salvage the integrity of the New Testament (as they see it) by systematically going through the four Gospels and voting on which passages to accept as authentic and which to reject as myth. Through majority vote, 82-84 percent of the Gospel records have been categorized as partial or complete fiction, while only 16 percent of the events and 18 percent of the sayings of Jesus as recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John have been accepted as authentic, or nearly authentic. They have also added the Coptic Gnostic gospel of Thomas to their leaner canon of the authentic Gospels.

This bold move heralds future plans by the Jesus Seminar to reduce (by eliminating the book of Revelation) and expand the current biblical canon (collection of books) of the New Testament. A “Canon Seminar” has been convened to consider which ancient “Christian” documents to include in its forthcoming version of *The Complete New Testament*. This proposed canon will probably contain many documents that were never a part of the Bible, including the Gnostic writings found in the area of Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt (cf. Funk, “The Once and Future New Testament,” *The Canon Debate*, pp. 541ff). Such a venture, if published, will undoubtedly cause greater division among the ranks of larger Protestant denominations and other non-denominational Christian organizations.

Christians who desire the truth about God’s Word need to possess a basic understanding of how their English Bibles relate to the original texts and some knowledge of the theories scholars use to translate those texts into English.

Type of Text: The process of establishing the most reliable or pure text of the Bible belongs to the realm of textual criticism. The key is whether the original God-breathed letters, syllables and words of the biblical authors have been accurately preserved in the surviving documents. The type of text ultimately produced for translation is dependent on its editor’s view of the history and canon of the Bible and the value he or she places on the comparative textual data. If text editors believe the original text of the books of the Bible has been lost through the centuries, they will choose methods and manuscripts to produce a text different from those editors who are otherwise-minded. The methods and manuscripts employed can significantly alter the accuracy of the readings. The result can greatly affect exegesis (technical interpretation of the text) and preaching.

Translation Theory: Different theories and practices of translation can affect the purity of the original words when rendered into English. According to English professor and biblical literary stylist Leland Ryken, “In some translation processes this care to preserve the original text is repeatedly and casually disregarded when translators turn the original into English. Words are changed, added, and deleted with apparent ease and frequency. Surely there should be some

carry-over of principle between the scrupulousness of attention to the actual words of the Bible in the original languages and the way in which that text is transcribed into English” (Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, pp. 29-30).

The *NIV* and *TNIV* demonstrate how translators can begin with the same Greek base, yet produce vastly different versions that in many instances only loosely resemble the original wording. “The basic distinction between the Renaissance [a time period marked by increased artistic and scientific activity that laid the foundation for the Reformation and translation of the Bible into English] and the modern translators is one of fidelity to their original [text],” writes University of Manchester Professor of English Language and Literature Gerald Hammond. “Partly the loss of faith in the Hebrew and Greek as the definitive word of God has led to the translators’ loss of contact with it, but more responsibility lies in the belief that a modern Bible should aim not to tax its readers’ linguistic or interpretative abilities one bit. If this aim is to be achieved then it seems clear that a new Bible will have to be produced for every generation—each one probably moving us further away from the original text, now that the initial break has been made” (Hammond, *The Making of the English Bible*, pp. 12-13).

What will the next decade of English translations bring? Many conservative scholars predict the trend will probably lead to a universally accepted Bible and a one-world religion under the authority of Babylon the Great (cf. Revelation 17-18).

Christian Concerns

While the present debate originated with the 1881 revision of the *KJV* in the nineteenth century, its seeds were actually sown in the Protestant Reformation. The question for Bible believers today, to a large extent, is the same as that for Reformers: “Have the original texts of the Old and New Testaments come down to us pure and uncorrupted?”

This was the question raised by Francis Turretin (1623-1687), a Reformed scholar of the Academy of Geneva, in his *Institutio Theologicae Elencticae*. It served as a prelude to his discussion about the purity of the Hebrew Masoretic and Greek Byzantine manuscripts upon which the Reformation texts were based. Turretin’s query concisely captured the essence of the divisive debate in his day between the Roman church and Protestants over the use of the original language texts for translation.

What is often lost in the rhetorical monologue offered by all sides in this dispute is the clear teaching of Scripture. What does the Bible have to say about its divine authorship? It states unequivocally that “All Scripture is God-breathed” (II Tim. 3:16).

Does the Bible explicitly state how God would preserve His Word? The Bible offers numerous general promises that the Word of God would be preserved intact. The Bible was written over a 1,500-year time period by about 40 authors who originally penned its messages in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, often on highly perishable papyrus scrolls and later, parchment codices. Today we possess literally thousands of witnesses to the original writings of the biblical authors. Some of the oldest passages of Holy Writ were copied by hand for more than 2,800 years.

How can we bridge the gap between the surviving manuscripts and the autographs or original writings of the prophets, apostles and their scribes? Do the texts of the surviving manuscripts represent the *ipsissima verba*—that is, the “very words” of the original writings? For many theologians and scholars, the debate over the biblical texts involves proper scholarship, namely textual, historical and literary criticism. However, there are shortfalls within the fields of textual and biblical criticism.

Shortfalls of Textual and Biblical Criticism

It is important to remember that all attempts by textual critics to recover or reconstruct the original text of the Bible are restricted to the existing evidence and their critical judgments of it. In short, one textual theory may have certain merits over others, but in the end all are based on conjecture and incomplete information. For example, some manuscripts with ancient readings referenced by the early church scholars no longer exist. In terms of quantity and quality, these readings are 3:2 in favor of the Byzantine Text (Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established*, vol. 1, pp. 94-122).

In addition, all events relating to the literary history of the biblical texts that occurred prior to their copying are beyond the scope of the so-called textual specialists (Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 297). A graphic example concerns the Pauline Epistles. From their copying and transmission, Paul's letters have had the same general form as they have today (cf. Aland, p. 296). The evidence of textual criticism (manuscript record) cannot explain how Paul's Epistles were compiled in their present form before they began to be circulated as an entire group or as several smaller groups. Scholars have presented various theories over the years to explain how this process occurred. Only the Bible offers clues to this textual mystery. They are recorded in II Timothy 4:11-13 and II Peter 3:16.

Yet, another example involves the discovery of the Bodmer Papyrus 75 (P⁷⁵), a codex of the third century AD that contains portions of the Gospels of Luke and John. Before the mid-1900s AD, scholars presumed that the earliest "pure" copy of the Alexandrian text was the fourth-century Vatican manuscript; the discovery of P⁷⁵ in 1955 changed that (Robinson, "New Testament Textual Criticism: The Case for the Byzantine Priority," *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism*, par. 79). Many scholars, including Professor J.C. O'Neill, now doubt whether Vaticanus is a carefully preserved text with ties to the late second or early third century. A careful study of scribal habits suggests instead that it was the result of a deliberate editing process at an Alexandrian scriptorium or copying center (O'Neill, "The Rules Followed by The Editors of the Text Found in Codex Vaticanus," *New Testament Studies*, vol. 35, p. 220).

Similarly, before the mid-1900s, scholars believed that Greek manuscripts with Byzantine readings did not exist before the fourth century. This notion stems from the flawed textual theory of Westcott and Hort, in which they speculated that the Byzantine Text was a creation of fourth-century church scholars. Most modern textual critics have followed the lead of Westcott and Hort on this issue and have dismissed the Byzantine Text for purposes of textual criticism. However, the discovery of early Egyptian papyri with distinctively Byzantine readings (not shared with other text types), has now made it increasingly difficult for scholars to reject the Byzantine Text in producing a Greek New Testament (cf. Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type & New Testament Textual Criticism*). In fact, the editors of the United Bible Societies third edition of the Greek New Testament restored nearly 300 Byzantine readings to their text, which they had earlier rejected due to an alleged lack of support among the early surviving Alexandrian witnesses (Robinson, "Investigating Text-Critical Dichotomy: A Critique of Modern Eclectic Praxis from a Byzantine-Priority Perspective," *Faith & Mission*, vol. 16, no. 2, p. 28).

Today we can better understand Westcott and Hort's partiality toward the Sinaitic and Vatican manuscripts, including Hort's motive for labeling the *Textus Receptus* as "vile." The influence of Attic Greek was not well-known during the nineteenth century. During the second century there was a tendency by Alexandrian scribes to correct the New Testament text stylistically to the Attic. This type of Greek was known for its brevity akin to classical Greek, which both Anglican scholars were accustomed to. In contrast, the New Testament (*Textus Receptus*) was almost always written in *Koiné* Greek (Kilpatrick, "Atticism and the Future of ZHN," *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 25, p. 151).

The Nature of Modern Biblical Scholarship

Bible readers are unlikely to be familiar with the texts underlying the English Bibles they read and study and even less acquainted with the methods of textual criticism used to produce those texts.

Consequently, they might be surprised to know that scholars today, in many instances, cannot agree on the original wording of the Sacred Text. In fact, interpretation of the textual evidence varies widely depending on one's personal theology and worldview. Modern textual criticism is largely a product of The Enlightenment or Age of Reason, a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophical movement that followed the Renaissance and Protestant Reformation and exalted human reason (rationalism) as the sole guide in establishing truth. Out of this movement arose a way of thinking known as naturalism, which denies the supernatural significance behind historical events. Naturalism uses science and logic to explain all phenomena.

According to the late Dr. David Fuller, former director of the Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, "The one feature that separated the Enlightenment from the Reformation [a religious movement during the Renaissance period] regarding text [textual] critical matters was

the latter's firmly held belief that the texts of scripture were canonically established by the providence of God. The Enlightenment replaced the idea that God was behind historical circumstance...with the idea that man was his own measure and must determine for himself what he will regard as scripture" (Letis, *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate*, p. i).

It is the modern age that has injected naturalistic thinking into the study of the biblical texts (known as textual criticism). The two are diametrically opposed to each other. Historical examples of naturalistic thought include attributing the miracles surrounding Jesus' feeding of the five thousand and His resurrection to trivial circumstances and natural laws. Skeptical scholars, like those of the Jesus Seminar, maintain that the biblical books were not "inspired" in the traditional sense but were written decades, if not centuries, after the deaths of the prophets and apostles.

In Burgon's day, the naturalistic approach was becoming widespread in textual criticism. He wrote: "For we assume that the Bible is to be taken as inspired [God-breathed], and not regarded upon a level with the Books of the East...It is chiefly from inattention to this circumstance that misconception prevails in ... 'Textual Criticism.' Aware that the New Testament is like no other book in its origin, its contents, its history, many critics of the present day nevertheless permit themselves to reason concerning its Text, as if they entertained no suspicion that the words and sentences of which it is composed were destined to experience an extraordinary fate also. They make no allowances for the fact that influences of an entirely different kind from any with which profane literature is acquainted have made themselves felt in this department ... therefore ... **those principles of Textual Criticism which in the case of profane authors are regarded as fundamental are often out of place here**" (Burgon, p. 9, emphasis added).

Though it is not often clearly stated, naturalistic textual scholars contend that the text of the Greek New Testament, like that of other ancient books, has been damaged and lost during its journey through time. The only way to recover the original wording in places where the manuscripts disagree, they argue, is to appeal to the testimony of the "earliest and best" Greek copies. (Ironically, the Christian Church has rejected many of these manuscripts and their readings for over 1,000 years!)

In the twentieth century, scholars have favored the eclectic method to recover the original text of the New Testament in places where the Greek manuscripts disagree. **Eclecticism** is a method of textual criticism that relies heavily on human instinct in establishing the biblical text by selecting readings randomly from one witness and then another based on a number of subjective criteria. The methods and manuscripts used by many modern eclectics have often led to self-refuting and questionable results regarding the form and readings of the New Testament. Therefore, **it is a myth to presume modern eclectic Greek texts and English translations are more accurate than those printed during the Reformation period. (Oddly, the most popular Greek texts on the market today are eclectic in nature.)**

More than four decades ago, the late Dr. Edward F. Hills (1912-1981), an internationally recognized textual critic, anticipated this eclectic trend in textual criticism and translation. He wrote: "Thus naturalistic New Testament textual criticism is inclining more and more toward a free handling of the text. The final authority is not the testimony of the extant manuscripts, even in places in which they all disagree, but the subjective insight and judgment of the critics. Thus the future of the New Testament text is unpredictable, since it depends on these intangible forces. The way is open for a multiplicity of texts—as many as there are critics....The Moffat [sic] version (1913) has already made a start in this direction with its rearrangement of chapters and its all too frequent employment of conjectural emendation" (Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 1956 ed., p. 14).

The eclectic method is only partially responsible for the many different critical editions and translations of the New Testament text since the early 1900s. The loss of a recognized standard edition of the Greek New Testament within Christendom during the last century has been used by some as a license to revise, add and omit letters, syllables, words and whole sentences of the biblical narrative.

The work of the Jesus Seminar is a prime example of modern scholars who have exploited the differences (variant readings) found in the Greek manuscripts and modern editions for their own purposes. Robert Funk, the director of the Westar Institute and a leading seminar scholar, holds to the erroneous belief that variant readings make the text of the New Testament

uncertain. He wrote: “So far as I know, no one has ever canonized the Greek text of the New Testament; the United Bible Societies are claiming copyright of the Nestle-Aland version, but they have not canonized it. Both Protestant and Catholic scholars simply buy each new edition of Nestle-Aland critical edition of the Greek New Testament as it appears and use it as though it were the real New Testament. **Which edition of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament with its catalogue of more than seventy thousand significant variants is canonical? No one has yet been willing to say**” (Funk, p. 546, emphasis added).

Naturalistic methods and principles have permeated every aspect of biblical criticism so that any reading created in the transcription process and copied by some ancient scribe of the sacred text is held up and justified as legitimate. **The result of the indiscriminate acceptance of such readings has led to confusion over what actually constitutes the pure words of God, both in terms of the texts produced and the translations upon which they are based.**

A Christian Approach to the Texts

While only the Lord knows the hearts of the men and women who have studied the biblical texts over the centuries from a naturalistic perspective, their actions have left the biblical texts in a state of uncertainty as previously noted. This does not imply that all textual critical methods need to be discarded. Many sincere textual scholars have contributed to the discovery of evidence that attests to the reliability of the sacred texts.

There is an honest and defensible method that allows us to avoid the pitfalls of unbelieving and naturalistic scholarship. Dr. Hills advocated a “consistently Christian” approach to the study of the biblical texts. He rightly discerned that this approach was the only resolution to the dilemmas concerning the biblical texts. His approach was starkly different from the neutral, naturalistic methods followed by most of his fellow textual scholars, who viewed the Bible as “nothing more than just a human book.” Dr. Hills built his analysis of the Greek New Testament text “squarely and solidly on the historic doctrines of divine inspiration [authorship] and providential preservation of the Holy Scripture” and interpreted the evidence of textual criticism accordingly (Hills, 1984 ed., pp. vi, 3, 113).

Dr. Hills believed that when faithful Christians discarded “unbelieving thought” and followed this “consistently Christian” approach in their textual criticism, they would “find themselves led back step by step (perhaps, at first, against their wills) to the text of the Protestant Reformation, namely, that form of the New Testament text which underlies the *King James Version* and the other early Protestant translations” (Ibid., p. 1). As such, Dr. Hills was a defender of the Byzantine Text, which is reflected in the vast majority of Greek manuscripts. He preferred to call it the Traditional Text as Burgon did, because it is the “text which has been handed down by the God-guided tradition of the Church from the time of the Apostles unto the present day” (Ibid., p. 106).

From his perspective as a textual scholar and classicist, Dr. Hills asserted that he has witnessed many Bible students “panic and become virtual unbelievers in their biblical studies” because they have felt “obligated to depend almost entirely on the writings” of scholars, “most of whom are unbelievers” (Ibid., p. 113). To avoid possible “catastrophes of unbelief” that could accompany such an in-depth study of the biblical texts, Hills wrote: “... we must always emphasize the Christian starting point that all our thinking ought to have. If we are Christians, then **we must begin our thinking not with the assertions of unbelieving scholars and their naturalistic human logic, but with Christ and the logic of faith**” (Ibid., emphasis added).

In his book, *The King James Version Defended*, Dr. Hills discussed how the early Reformers followed the methodology he called the “logic of faith” in compiling, editing and printing the Greek texts used in translating the early Protestant English versions. As noted previously, these texts became known collectively as the *Textus Receptus* and are essentially identical to the common text used by the Greek Orthodox church for centuries.

While Dr. Hills “did not hold an uncritical, perfectionist view of the *Textus Receptus*,” he did contend that it best represented the Greek canon and its true readings (Ibid., p. viii). He believed that the *Textus Receptus* offered Christians “maximum certainty” for their faith in contrast to the uncertainty of the dubious eclectic or critical texts offered by naturalistic textual criticism (Ibid., pp. 3, 106-108, 224-225).

While our approach to this topic is similar to that of Dr. Hills because of his Bible-

believing viewpoint, references to his research are not necessarily an endorsement of all his conclusions. However, his work and intimacy with the issues involved in this study, along with that of other defenders of the traditional Hebrew and Greek texts, form the basis of our technical study of the biblical texts.

Furthermore, our study of the Sacred Text is based on the same premise as Dr. Hills: “In the past true believers won great victories for God through their faith...Today we also can be victorious through faith if we *doubt not*, **if we take God and His revelation of Himself in holy Scripture as the starting point of all our thinking**...in New Testament textual criticism, and in every other field of intellectual endeavor, our thinking must differ from the thinking of the unbelievers. We must begin with God” (Ibid., p. 61, bold added).

Historical Reliability of the Text

Scholars estimate that almost all Greek manuscripts, regardless of their origin, agree on at least 90 percent of the New Testament text. This percentage “presents the autograph [original] form of the NT [New Testament] text with *no* variation” (cf. Robinson, par. 107, n. 9). Scholars disagree over how to treat the remaining 10 percent of variant readings, many of which, depending on the New Testament book, are minor and have no bearing on how the text is translated into English.

The historical reliability of the biblical manuscripts can be verified using the same principles for confirming the reliability of other historical documents. Author Josh McDowell offers an in-depth review of this evidence. It can be found on pages 23-109 in his book *The Best of Josh McDowell: A Ready Defense* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993). In addition to the historical reliability of the documents, the actual wording of the Bible can be determined in nearly every case by examining faithful representatives of the original text in accordance with the precepts given in Scripture, a Christian approach to textual criticism and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Under these circumstances, 98-99 percent of the original wording of the Greek New Testament text, for example, can be recovered. In the remaining 250-400 places where two closely competing readings make it impossible to determine the original wording of the autographs, textual scholar, author and linguist Dr. Wilbur N. Pickering wrote that in most of these instances “the difference of meaning is slight” (Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, www.esgm.org). In a personal correspondence, Dr. Pickering clarified that 80 percent or more of these places relate to “matters of spelling, word order, absence of a pronoun (where it [i.e., the pronoun] must be understood anyway), and change in verb tense that doesn’t alter the point [i.e., meaning of the text]. In those places where the meaning is altered no doctrinal problem is created” (Pickering, “Personal interview,” Sept. 5, 2003). This is because the alterations are so minor, it makes no difference in doctrine or meaning.

However, there are still unknowns in the wording of Scripture because most of the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament have not been thoroughly studied and their readings made available to scholars (Aland, “The Significance of the Papyri for New Testament Research,” *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, p. 330). It is important to realize that the majority of such manuscripts are not whole pages of the New Testament. Rather, these are fragments of copies of New Testament texts, and only represent a very minuscule percent of New Testament witnesses—only 250-400 individual places. That becomes very significant.

Some of the principles of a Christian approach to textual criticism are outlined by the late Dr. Edward F. Hills in his book entitled *The King James Version Defended* (cf. pp. 2-3, 86, 111-114). Also, the late John William Burgon established principles of sound textual criticism. A description of his seven principles is available on pages 40-67 in his book *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established* (London: George Bell, 1896).

Believers can approach the Old and New Testament texts of their Bibles with confidence when faithful and reliable manuscripts are employed and sound methods of textual criticism and translation are followed. **Ultimately, believers must place their confidence in God’s promises to preserve His Word intact.** These promises were made to reassure true believers that they would possess His very words in every age. Thus, they could with confidence fulfill the commissions that He had given them, which were contingent on their having an accurate record of the words spoken by Jesus and written by the New Testament prophets and apostles (Matt. 28:19-

A Standard, Reliable Greek Text

A great deal of uncertainty about the state of the Greek New Testament needlessly exists among the ranks of textual critics today. The editors of the two popular eclectic or critical Greek New Testaments inform us that they do not yet consider their texts as established (cf. Aland, *The Greek New Testament*, p. viii). These texts include the various Nestle-Aland editions (NA²⁷) and those of the United Bible Societies (UBS⁴) and form the basis of almost all recent English translations of the New Testament such as the *NIV* and *TNIV*.

The editors of *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982) are equally explicit and inform us that they “do not imagine that the text of this edition represents in all particulars the exact form of the originals. Desirable as such a text certainly is, **much further work must be done** before it can be produced....the present work ... is both **preliminary and provisional**” (Hodges, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, p. x, bold added).

In spite of the uncertainty being expressed by the unbelieving, naturalistic editors of the most popular Greek texts on the market today, there is a standard, reliable Greek text available for use. After researching the alternate Greek texts—eclectic or critical and *Majority Text*—we stand firmly behind the tradition of the *Textus Receptus* (1550 *Stephens Text*). Our choosing the *Textus Receptus* does not imply that it is perfect in every detail, for no text has been untouched by human hands; however, the *Stephens Text* is a highly reliable New Testament text, which is **98 percent or more** in agreement with the *Byzantine Text*, which was the dominant form of the Greek text during the age of manual copying. We believe that the Byzantine Text, more than any other, represents the original God-breathed words of the New Testament.

Today, there is a modern Greek text whose editors claim reflects the primary and dominant form of the Byzantine Text and likely represents the canonical autographs more accurately than any other text type (i.e., Alexandrian, Western and Caesarean). This text, *The New Testament in the Original Greek according to the Byzantine/Majority Textform* by Dr. Maurice Robinson and the late William G. Pierpont (1991, 2004), had a seasoned textual critic as one of its editors and a sound underlying theory; yet, since it is a recent edition of the Greek New Testament, it needs further evaluation.

What sets the *Textus Receptus* (and its various editions) apart from all other Greek texts, including the Robinson-Pierpont edition, is its unique, proven pedigree rooted in the ancient history of the Greek-speaking Church. From the first printing by Erasmus and Johann Froben in 1516 AD, it had the near universal acceptance of Bible-believing Protestants for nearly 375 years. The *Textus Receptus* is largely a product of the pre-critical era, having been edited without being fully subjected to the musings of the human mind of the unbelieving naturalistic methodology.

The excerpt that follows is from an article written in 1983, in which historian S.M. Houghton evaluated the *Majority Text*. At that time, he concluded the *Textus Receptus* was sufficient and preferable in light of the alternatives. It seems fitting to recall Houghton’s words in our study of the Greek text: “For scholars to suggest that a particular translation of the Word is faulty is one thing; to suggest that the *final* form of the divine revelation is still remote—a form, as some might even say, that will never be reached—would appear, to not a few, to place the Christian Faith itself in jeopardy. Finality belongs to the Faith, and in a very true and real sense finality belongs to the Word on which that Faith is based and in which it is rooted.

“We are not infrequently told by liberal theologians that the Christian Faith is a progressive Faith. They intend to convey a very different meaning from that of the Puritan John Robinson who, in taking leave as the pastor of some of the Pilgrim Fathers of 1620, expressed himself as ‘very confident the Lord had more truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy word.’ We thank God that it is so. At the same time we can surely thank Him, too, that across ‘the running centuries’ He has never left His Word at haphazard. The discovery some thirty years ago of the Dead Sea scrolls gave us amazing confirmation of the accuracy with which OT Scripture has been transmitted to us, and we may be sure that God has taken no less care of the

Our Approach to This Study

As you read this lengthy volume, containing a modern English translation of the New Testament and many essays pertaining to the texts and canon of the Bible, you may encounter numerous terms and concepts that are unfamiliar. We have attempted to present the information contained in this publication in an understandable format. Some sections may require multiple readings in order to fully comprehend them.

We encourage you to persevere in your efforts to understand the information presented in this publication because it concerns the Holy Bible, the most important book ever written. A Bible that accurately reflects the original texts (letters, syllables and words) given by God is extremely critical for Christians. If we cannot have confidence in the words of the Bible, we cannot base our lives and doctrine on it. Since very few of us are fluent in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, we must rely on text editors and Bible translators for the Word of God. The subject matter of this volume is vital because of the confusion created by many modern English versions of the Bible, which are based on highly questionable texts and translation methods. It is also vital because of the many prophecies concerning a coming one-world government and religion that have yet to be fulfilled. These prophecies will have a direct impact on the Bible, its texts and the lives of Christians.

In our analysis of the divine authorship, preservation and translation of the biblical texts, we have endeavored to “prove all things” (I Thes. 5:21). Our goal, as far as is humanly possible, has been to furnish you with an accurate and thorough understanding of the history of the Bible and its Sacred Texts. If you believe that we have strayed from this task, we encourage you to offer your evaluation in a Christ-like manner.

This volume does contain extra-biblical material, such as citations from the apocrypha, Jewish or rabbinic literature and writings of certain historical figures. Citations taken from these writings are not an uncritical endorsement of them or of the beliefs and actions of the writers. Also, the authors are not bona fide textual critics, and those sections pertaining to textual matters have not been peer reviewed by seasoned professionals. In an effort to present reliable evidence in these areas, we have included the research of scholars, whose scholarship has been distilled through the filter of truth contained in the Bible.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how God has faithfully preserved His Word for us today. Our hope is that readers will be strengthened in knowing that God has indeed kept His promises and the veracity of His Word intact.

This publication is not intended to replace other resources on biblical criticism. That would be an impossible task, considering the width, breadth and depth of this subject, which in many cases covers a span of almost 2,000 years. One essay alone on Mark 16:9-20 fills a 300-page book (cf. Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to Mark, Vindicated Against Recent Critical Objectors and Established*, Oxford: Parker and Co., 1871). For this reason, only a few in-depth reviews of selected important passages of Scripture have been offered for your edification.

Westcott and Hort: As a part of this historical overview of the biblical texts, we have briefly reconstructed the steps leading to the change in the Greek New Testament text in the late 1800s. We have also assessed the main elements of the theory of Westcott and Hort in our study of the preservation of the Greek New Testament.

The Historic and Modern Controversy: Numerous chapters offer abbreviated historical accounts of this controversy and review of the words of scholars, translators, theologians and Bible publishers, allowing their own rhetoric to reveal if an alleged “conspiracy” surrounds the biblical texts and modern translations. We have highlighted ways in which the Roman Church and its various agents, including the papacy and the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), have tried to keep the Bible from true believers and the masses at large.

At various points, we have examined how the rhetoric and arguments of prominent theologians and scholars have obscured honest textual criticism over the centuries, and how their actions have unwittingly concealed the true doctrines of the Bible and set stumbling blocks before

Bible-believing Christians.

Today, these same forces, including the various Bible societies, are using the latest scholarship and the common language of the masses to keep the truth of God's Word from Bible readers, marshaling in another "Dark Age" through their critical arguments, theology and the various ecumenical, humanistic Bible translations.

Divine Authorship and Preservation of the Bible: When viewed in the light of clear scriptural evidence, the historical record offers clues and proof of the Bible's integrity. Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen frame this subject for us by highlighting the Bible's view of divine authorship (i.e., inspiration in the traditional sense), and canonization and preservation.

Chapters Three through Ten provide a scriptural and historical reconstruction of how the authors and scribes of the Old and New Testaments composed and sealed their autographs or original writings. Charts tracing this process, and how the scribal copies of the original writings were preserved throughout history, are included in Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen.

Early and Modern Texts and Translations: It is beyond the scope of this publication to review the reliability of every English translation available today. Leland Ryken's book entitled *The Word of God in English* explores common fallacies and enumerates sound principles of Bible translation. It also offers standards for comparing contemporary English versions.