

## **Dr. Dave Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Lecture 3, Text Criticism**

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The last session we talked a little bit about the origin and production of scripture, mainly discussing what we and what theologians call inspiration, and we looked at a number of texts that describe and reveal the character of scripture, what it says about itself, and the phenomenon of phenomena of scripture, and how we put that together to formulate an understanding of the Bible as inspired. One of the better descriptions that I found comes from I. Howard Marshall, where he says, on a human level we can describe its composition, that is the composition of the Bible, in terms of the various oral and literary processes that lay behind it. The collection of information from witnesses, the use of written sources, the writing up and editing of such information, the composition of spontaneous letters, the committing to writing of prophetic messages, the collecting of various documents together, and so on.

At the same time, however, on the divine level, we can assert that the Spirit who moved on the face of the waters of creation, Genesis 1-2, was active in the whole process, so that the Bible can be regarded as both the words of human beings or men and the Word of God. This activity of the Spirit can be described as concursive with the human activities through which the Bible was written. So according to this understanding, in our discussion during the last session, we suggested that the Bible, while the very Word of God, at the same time reveals very human processes of production, but that God's Spirit was so at work in that, that the product, the end product, is nothing less than the very Word of God.

And we said one of the offshoots of that for hermeneutics and interpretation is that the various methods and criticisms that we'll start to discuss today, and even a study of the different contributions of different historical persons to hermeneutics and our understanding of interpretation are all important because the Bible is nothing less

than a human document. But it's certainly more than that. As the Word of God, it's more than just a human work.

It has a claim in our lives. It is authoritative. One of the corollaries of inspiration is a term that we haven't discussed, and I don't intend to go into any detail, is inerrancy.

That is a mainly a deductive argument. If the Bible is the Word of God, and if God is truthful and does not lie, it follows that that product, Scripture, therefore does not contain errors, does not deceive, etc. So we talked a little bit then about the origin of Scripture, but I want to talk more now about the transmission of Scripture.

That is, how do we know that the Bible that we have does indeed reflect what God originally revealed through that process of inspiration? How do we know what the human authors actually recorded under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? How do we know that the text of the New and Old Testament, that most of us have access to through translation, though if you know Greek and Hebrew, what we're going to talk about today is immediately relevant to that. But how do we know that the Bible that we hold accurately reflects what it was the human authors wrote and what it was God intended to communicate in the inspired text of Scripture? The first stage of transmission, there's actually two stages that are relevant to us. One of them is that we'll talk about in the next session, is translation that describes how it is that we have access to the Old and New Testament through our own language.

When we saw in one of the last sessions that one of the hurdles to overcome or one of the distances to overcome interpretation is that the Old and New Testament are written in languages very different. There's a linguistic distance between us and the original text. Translation allows us to have access to the Old and New Testament in our own language.

So we'll talk about that. But the issue that I want to discuss briefly today, one that most of us will not necessarily participate in or engage in, but one that is relevant for hermeneutics, because in some sense it is the initial stage of hermeneutics because it deals with the foundation of Scripture or the text itself. How do we know that the text that we have is an adequate basis and an accurate basis for hermeneutics and interpretation? And that is known as text criticism.

So my main purpose is not to make you text critics, though some of you might choose to do so, because as we'll see text criticism is a very specialized field. And so mainly what I want to do is introduce you to what text criticism is, so that you can follow the arguments and you can follow discussions about it, but also that you'll have a greater appreciation for the Old and New Testament text that you have. The Bible that you have in your hands is the product of a rather long and arduous journey that has been undertaken by various scholars that have done the hard work to provide the Scriptures that you have that you interpret and read.

And so I want to talk a little bit about this thing called text criticism. What text criticism is, again, it deals with the transmission of Scripture, starting with inspiration, the fact that the Old New Testament claimed to be God's inspired word, but the fact that we don't have any of the original manuscripts, we don't have the original document that the prophet Isaiah wrote, or we don't have the original document that Paul wrote or Matthew wrote, or the author of Ruth or 1 and 2 Samuel. We do not have the original documents.

Instead, what we have are copies of that, actually more literally, sometimes copies of copies of copies of the original text. One way perhaps to visualize it is that text criticism is a little bit like a tree. The trunk of the tree would be the original text, perhaps, that we don't have access to, and all the branches that go off in different directions and themselves have shoots and branches.

That would be the manuscripts and the copies that have resulted, and often we only have access to the very tips and edges and ends of the branches that are quite some distance, although integrally related to the trunk itself of the tree. So with textual criticism then, because we don't have the original manuscripts, but we only have copies, sometimes again, usually it's copies of copies of copies, often sometimes several hundred years separated, although the New Testament sometimes the evidence is a little bit closer, but often the manuscripts are separated temporally from the original manuscripts, that what text criticism does is it actually works in reverse. It worked backwards in attempting to explain how how did we get from the original manuscripts to what we have now? And based on all the evidence, it's an attempt to work backward and try to recover as accurately and adequately as possible what the original manuscripts would have looked like.

So by working backward, and we'll explain a little bit the process, by working backward from all the evidence and all the manuscripts we do have, by working backward, it's an attempt to reconstruct as closely as possible what the original author most likely would have written. Because remember, we don't have the original manuscript. We just have copies of copies of copies, and we have quite a bit of them, especially in relationship to the New Testament.

The assumption is that in the process of copying the original, starting with the original manuscript, and the process of copying and making copies to make them more available, the assumption is that certain changes, certain errors, certain differences crept in as the manuscript was, manuscripts were copied, and so that what we have are a group of manuscripts that sometimes differ from each other in certain places. And based on all that, because all the manuscripts have differences, again, we need to try to work back and ask how did those differences arise? And can we figure out which of those readings, out of all the evidence, can we figure out

which of them is probably what Paul intended? The assumption is in all the manuscripts somewhere, with each word, with each sentence, with each verse somewhere, there is the original text that Paul wrote, or Isaiah, or whoever. And so text criticism tries to establish the most accurate text possible.

Text critics often say it's both a science and an art. There are definite principles that help us get back to the text, but it's also an art. It's not like a recipe where you simply add all the ingredients, and there is your end time product.

It takes a lot of creative thinking, and it is an art as well as a science. The process of copying the manuscripts, as obviously in the day before we had a printing press, or now we have computers and printers, and you can easily print multiple copies with accuracy of virtually anything. Back then, obviously the only way they could produce multiple copies or produce copies for public consumption was by human copying.

That is a person sitting down with a scroll and whatever instruments they used to write throughout the centuries, and by hand going through the rather laborious process of copying a text. And often what would happen, and by the way, I need to preface my statement, most of my comments again reflect my area of specialty, and that is the New Testament. Actually, the Old and New Testament, both their approach to textual criticism is slightly different because they're working with different kinds of evidence.

And actually we'll see the the New Testament is probably more well attested historically as far as the amount of evidence than virtually any other document. As we'll see, there's close to 6,000 different manuscript witnesses to the New Testament text. We'll talk a little bit about that later.

What would usually happen, especially in the New Testament, is a couple of things. Number one, if a scribe was copying a text, what would happen is the scribe would have a text or a manuscript next to him with, let's say, the Gospel of Mark, and his sheet or his papyri sheet or whatever he was copying it onto, his writing material. And what would happen, the process goes that the scribe would read a group of words or perhaps a line from the text and then have to hold it in his mind and divert then his eyes from that to his manuscript and remember what he just read and write it.

Now you can see this process of going back and forth, a number of things could take place, as we'll see in just a moment. An author might forget what he wrote, and no doubt if you've ever tried to write like this and copy something you're reading and try to copy it by hand, at times you'll make mistakes. You might add a word, you might miss out a word, and we'll see in just a moment there are other things that could take place.

But the point is, as a scribe is copying in that manner, going from one manuscript, the one that he has access to, to the writing utensil that he is now recording it, there are different things that could happen, different errors or different differences that could actually transpire as he's copying. You've heard the statement, to err is human, and that's certainly true in copying manuscripts. The other thing that would often happen, one way to mass produce New Testament manuscripts would be for someone to stand as I am and read from a manuscript where you have several scribes actually copying down what is being read.

Now obviously, how the scribe, how the person reading pronounces something or says something, or maybe the person reading it might not pronounce something clearly or might accidentally miss a word, that's all going to be reflected when the manuscripts are copied. So you can see through these processes of, very human

processes, of copying by hand and by sight the manuscripts of the New Testament, certain differences and certain errors could creep in. Now one question that we won't spend a lot of time with, because I think it's anyone's guess, one could obviously ask, why would God allow, why would he inspire his word and then allow through the human process of copying certain errors to creep in or certain differences? I'm not sure why that is.

There's a number of possible explanations, but I think it's anyone's guess why God would allow the very human process of copying. But having said that, there is a very high degree and a high level of confidence that scholars think through the process of textual criticism, they have indeed recovered and restored exactly what it was that the original writers have communicated. And even then, most of the textual, especially in the New Testament, most of the changes that have been made are rather inconsequential.

Nothing significant hangs on most of them. So that we can be very confident that what we have is the accurate and reliable reflection of what it was that the New Testament authors of the Old Testament authors wrote. Let me make just a handful of observations then related to textual criticism.

And again, most of my comments are geared towards the New Testament. First of all, we've already mentioned with the New Testament there is an embarrassment of riches or an embarrassment of evidence when it comes to New Testament text. One scholar said there is an oppressive surplus of material when it comes to the different New Testament manuscripts.

And we said there are close to 6,000 different pieces of manuscript. Now, let it be said, not all of them are the same. Sometimes you have some manuscripts that have virtually the entire New Testament.

At other times, you have manuscripts that will only have one book or a few books. And sometimes they don't have the entire book. We also have fragments.

For example, some of the earliest ones are just fragments of one chapter in John or part of one chapter in John. So the manuscript evidence is very diverse as far as its completeness, its character, its quality. But the point is there's an embarrassment of riches to work with.

And that can be both a blessing and a curse. So obviously, because we have so much evidence, we can be confident that we have more to work with to try to reconstruct the text. But because there's so much, sometimes it can be oppressive and daunting to work with that much material.

But the point is there is a surplus or an embarrassment of evidence when it comes to the New Testament text more than just about any other historical document. So that again, we can be confident that we can reconstruct to a very, very high level of probability what it was that the New Testament authors actually wrote. The second thing is it's important for you to understand some important terms when it comes to textual criticism.

Again, just so when you're reading or discuss reading discussions of text criticism or in turn in your mnemonical textbooks or whatever, you'll be able to follow what's going on. The first one obviously would be the word manuscript. A manuscript, as the name implies, is actually a handwritten document then or a handwritten either scroll or we'll look at the different kinds of writing materials, but a handwritten document that attests to the New Testament.

Again, as we've said, sometimes the evidence we have, sometimes it's virtually the entire New Testament or sections of it or only sections of the book or a fragment of a



chapter or paragraph in one of the New Testament documents, but a manuscript is simply a handwritten document or part of a document or fragment or whatever that attests to the New Testament or part of the New Testament, whether a chapter or book or whatever. That is a manuscript. Another term that you need to be familiar with is the term variant.

A variant is basically any change when you compare the manuscripts wherever they differ, where one manuscript differs from another. And again, often it's just a word, sometimes just a spelling difference, sometimes it may be a group of words or something larger. We'll talk a little bit about the Gospel of Mark, which actually the Gospel of Mark had a couple different endings attached to it sometimes, so sometimes it could be an entire paragraph.

But a variant is simply a difference between two or more manuscripts. When you compare the manuscripts where one manuscript differs in reading, and it might have a different word or missing a word or whatever, that's a variant. And it's out of all those variants, again, that text critics try to determine which one of them, when you compare all the texts, which one of them probably reflects exactly what it was that Paul wrote or Isaiah or whoever, the author of 1 and 2 Kings or Genesis.

Another term that you need to be familiar with is papyrus. A papyrus was a very early writing tool. A papyrus was a sheet that was constructed by using strips of a papyrus plant found in Egypt, and by drawing them out and gluing them together they basically were able to form a sheet or a page that was a very early means of writing or recording something.

So you needed to know what a papyrus is. Two other terms related to that you need to know is a scroll. A scroll was, again, a very early form of writing technique.

And what it was is you took several papyri sheets and basically glued them together and it could be rolled up. That was a scroll. Another one is a codex.

You need to understand what a codex is as well. A codex was where the sheets were bound together in book form, much like a very early form of putting a book together. Instead of attaching all the sheets and rolling them up, they were just bound together sort of in book form.

That was a codex. And these are simply different types of manuscripts that we have available and have access to. Just a few other terms you need to be aware of.

One that probably is obvious, but still needs to be mentioned, is scribe. A scribe would simply be those who copied and made copies of the New Testament text or the Old Testament text. A couple of other words that you need to understand is scribal tendency.

You'll often see that word in discussions of Tetra criticism. Scribal tendency just referred to the types of things that a scribe would do. Remember we said usually how scribes recorded was, or copied a document, is they would read the document, have to hold that what they just read in their mind while they transferred to their page, and copied it down.

And certain tendencies that we'll talk a little bit about later, certain tendencies might dictate what happened when that text was, again, a scribe could forget something, or a scribe could intentionally, a scribe might try to harmonize something. For example, if a scribe was reading something in one of the Gospels, and it seemed to conflict with what he, maybe he just copied the Gospel of Matthew the week before, and now he's working on Mark, and there seems to be a difference. He might try to harmonize it and make it sound, make the two Gospels sound like each other.

So there's certain tendencies. As a scribe was copying, or as a scribe was listening to a text read and recording it, there are certain tendencies, certain things a scribe might do, and we'll talk a little bit more about those. The last two is, and there's a lot of other terms we could talk about, but I want to keep it simple and introduce the major terms.

One of them is the word unseal. That's a description of a type of manuscript. An unseal manuscript was basically, and this refers more to the style of writing, unlike papyrus or scroll or codex that refers to the kind of manuscript, this refers more to the style of writing.

An unseal manuscript was one that basically was written in all capital letters. Most, I'm convinced most of all of the New Testament documents probably would have been written in unseal script. That is, the writer would have written in all capital letters in Greek, and there would have been no spaces between words.

Unlike most of our languages today, where we put space between words so that it's easy to determine, unseal manuscripts would not have had spaces between words. The sentences would have been run together, and there would have been virtually no punctuation as well. That's an unseal manuscript.

Much later on, several centuries later, many of the manuscripts are what is called, what are called minuscule. That's the last term I want to introduce you to. Minuscule.

That was more of a cursive type of writing, and later on, words did begin to be distinguished from each other and divided. So those are some of the more important terms. Manuscript, variant, papyrus, scroll, and codex, scribe, scribal tendencies, and then unseal and minuscule types of manuscripts.

Those are terms you'll often see when you're reading about or reading discussions or listening discussions of text criticism. But those are just ways of describing the types of evidence that text critics work with to try to reconstruct as accurately as possible and as closely as possible the form of the original manuscripts that the New and Old Testament authors would have produced. So first, there's an embarrassment of evidence when it comes of the New Testament.

Second, I've introduced you to some important terms. A third thing to say about textual criticism is that the manuscripts are of very different kinds. The manuscript evidence that New Testament authors work with are of very different kinds.

Sometimes, a lot of the manuscript evidence consists of actual copies of the New Testament. In the Greek language, whether they're unsealed manuscripts, again the capital letters with no division between words, or later on more of the cursive type scripts. Some of our, a lot of our manuscript evidence is in the form of actual copies in Greek of the New Testament text.

But another, and we said sometimes those are very fragmentary, just a fragment a piece of a section in the New Testament. Other times, it's an entire book or part of a book or several books. They're, or sometimes virtually the entire New Testament, but a lot of our manuscripts consist of actual copies of New Testament text.

Also, we have examples from the early church fathers, especially from the third and fourth century, where the church fathers, the early, the leaders of the early church, after the completion of the writing of the New Testament, the early church fathers often quote from the New Testament. And their quotations from New Testament text often tell us what manuscript they might have, or what form of the New Testament they might have had available to them. So, in other words, the quotations

the church fathers are quoting from the New Testament, their quotations provide valuable evidence for constructing, helping to reconstruct the New Testament and the wording of it and what it said.

So the church fathers are important. We also have, we also have various versions or early translations of the New Testament. As the New Testament manuscripts spread to more widely, geographically, and needed to be made more available to other peoples, speaking other languages, the New Testament, we have the very early translations of the New Testament in languages like Syriac or also Latin and some other languages.

And those translations can also help provide evidence for for, you know, what form of the New Testament text did these early Christians seem to have available to them. So, text critics take all of these pieces of evidence into consideration to try to reconstruct what most likely did Paul write, or what most likely did Matthew write in the original form of the manuscript. In the original text.

The fourth thing to say is that all of the evidence, and of all the evidence and manuscripts that we have available, is New Testament text critics have tried to and think that they can classify them according to different families. So instead of having all this hodgepodge of evidence, based on similarities between certain texts, textual critics, and that's another term, textual critics, just refer to anybody that is engaged in textual criticism and is attempting to reconstruct the original text, but textual critics think that they can classify all of these manuscripts and all this evidence into certain families. Manuscripts that seem to have a genealogical relationship to each other.

Manuscripts that seem to come from a common parent or a common source. For example, I'll just mention two of the, or describe briefly, two of the families that text

critics seem to think existed and seem to think that they can classify the manuscripts into. One of the more well-known one is called the manuscript, the Alexandrian family.

The Alexandrian family stems from, would describe a group of manuscripts that seems to have a common lineage that goes back to the the manuscripts copied in Alexandria, Egypt, hence the Alexandrian family of manuscripts. And that family of manuscripts is thought to be more of more high quality and it's thought to have less changes and less harmonization and attempts to smooth the text out. It's often seen, seemed to reflect older readings.

So most text critics think that the Alexandrian type texts are a very high quality and very important in trying to reconstruct the original New Testament text. Another type of family is called the Western Manuscript. But the third type that I want to discuss just very briefly is called the Byzantine.

Most of our New Testament Greek manuscripts fall into this category. It's much later. It's seen to be a later manuscript family that arose much later than even the Alexandrian.

It's often characterized by attempts to smooth the text where if a scribe writing in relationship to this family of manuscripts, if a scribe thought a text was too difficult he might try to smooth it out or he might try to harmonize it with another text or something like that. The Byzantine manuscript family is seen to be important though often not quite as important sometimes as the Alexandrian. But it still provides evidence for a possibility that this these manuscripts might contain the original reading of a New Testament text.

But it's important to understand text critics though don't simply count the evidence or say that if the Alexandrian has it or if 50 manuscripts have this reading and only three or four have this, the one with 50 is right. It's not simply counting the manuscripts, but it's taking all the evidence we'll see in a moment and weighing it up to try to figure out what most likely did Paul or Luke or Matthew or for the Old Testament again Isaiah or the psalmist, what most likely did they did they write? So the again the scholars out of all the manuscripts think they can divide them into different families that seem to have a different related a similar relationship. All the all the manuscripts that seem to have a similar relationship to each other and have similar types of readings are seen to belong to a common family.

A fifth thing fifth concept to introduce to you is the idea that there are two types of evidence that text critics deal with in reconstructing the New Testament text. One of them is known as external evidence and one is known as internal evidence. External evidence would refer to things like the date of all these manuscripts and whether what family they belong to.

We just looked at Alexandrian or Byzantine or Western so they that they look at the evidence as far as what's what family did these manuscripts belong to? What's the date of these manuscripts? Are they very early? Are they are they much later? Just because one is early and one is late does not automatically mean one is correct and one is not. It's just part of the evidence that they take into consideration. The the geographical distribution, whether whether a certain reading in in one manuscript seems to be tied to one location as opposed to a reading a variant that may be spread widely geographically.

It may show up in several geographical locations. And there's a number of other factors as well that are taken into consideration. Scribal tendencies, what a scribe is likely to do as he's copying or as he's listening to the text read.

All of that is what is called external evidence and it's all taken into consideration in trying to determine again, what what most likely did the the older New Testament author write? The other one is called internal evidence. Internal evidence refers to the evidence in the text itself. That is what what do we know about the author's style? What do we know about his grammar and the words he used? What do we know about his theology? So looking at the broader context of the document itself, especially for Paul looking at all of his letters and looking at his theological tendencies, etc.

and using that evidence to again internal, that is evidence in the text itself, to help the authors, the text critics, establish what most likely was the original text. So for example, someone, again when you look at all the manuscripts and there's some variance between them, the correct one may be the one that would conform to Paul's style and his vocabulary, his theology in the letter and elsewhere in the letters he wrote. Trying to pick the reading that is most consistent with what we know about Paul and his theology and his writing elsewhere.

So that is internal evidence. Again, some some text critics prefer one over the other. Some would would give a nod to internal evidence when deciding which reading was correct.

Some would focus more on the external evidence. Others would again try to weigh both of them and take them both into consideration as much as possible. So again, some might some might prefer to focus on one family.

For example, some text critics have have given priority to the Alexandrian family. Remember we talked about the different manuscripts can be grouped according to families and genealogical relationship. Some text critics would give priority to the



Alexandrian as any text that is any reading found in Alexandrian type manuscripts is probably the original.

Another one, other text critics might give preference to the Byzantine and everything else being equal, a reading found in the Byzantine family of manuscripts would be the one preferred. One one method of text criticism that seems to have caught on that most I think would agree with is what is called the an eclectic method. Eclectic, reasoned eclecticism is the fancy term for it.

Simply what that means is taking into consideration all the evidence and weighing it up and not giving priority necessarily to any one, but weighing all the evidence, internal, external, the date of the manuscript, the family it belongs to. Again, if you're looking at all the manuscripts and in one verse, there are some variants in the manuscripts, is weighing all the evidence, the date, the distribution, whether it's Byzantine, Alexandrian, looking at scribal tendencies, internally looking at the author's style, his vocabulary, his grammar, etc. Taking all of that into consideration to make the most reasoned attempt, the most reasoned reconstruction possible that most likely reflects exactly what the original author wrote.

In the New Testament, at least, there are two Greek texts that have have kind of emerged as the common text that most New Testament professors and students use. One of them is the United Bible Society, the UBS, the fourth edition has just come out. And by the way, most manuscripts, most the Greek New Testaments that we have, they usually continue to be edited and updated as more evidence is found, sometimes as we discover new ways of looking at text problems.

It's an ongoing trying to, again, reconstruct as closely as possible what did the original manuscript look like. But one of the common manuscripts is the United Bible

Society, the fourth edition. The other one is what is known as the Nestle-Aland, those two names, Nestle and Aland, reflect to the primary editors.

The Nestle-Aland text, which is in its 27th edition, those are two very common and today the most prominent and common New Testament texts that have been produced based on text criticism. So again, taking all the manuscript evidence and weighing all the probabilities, etc. These are the texts that have been produced that reflect and most closely our attempts to represent what was it that the New Testament authors actually wrote.

One other final issue to talk about briefly is the different types of changes and motivations for those changes that a scribe might introduce. Again, remember, as the scribe has a manuscript that he is copying from, and as he's copying it, he must read a line, or however much a scribe read, a few words or a line, and then hold that in his mind as he then moves over and begins to write it on the blank page. As he does that, or we said the other possibility was a scribe might be listening to someone read a text.

As those two scenarios are taking place, certain changes might take place and might be introduced into the manuscript that the scribe is producing. For example, and to back up a little bit, these changes are of two types. Some of these changes are accidental, or some of these variants or mistakes introduced are accidental.

That is, they occur unintentionally, and we'll talk about a couple of those. The other type is intentional. A scribe might intentionally try to improve the manuscript in some way.

So he has this manuscript, he might see a difficulty in it, or something that is unclear, that he will try to improve. So there are some changes that are intentional. So intentional changes might be this.

A very common intentional change is harmonization. Again, a scribe, especially with the Gospels, a scribe might try to harmonize one gospel with the other. Again, if a scribe is copying, for example, this is a very prominent example of how this has happened.

If the scribe is copying the Lord's Prayer in Luke, and perhaps the scribe is very well aware of the version of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew chapter 6, the scribe who is copying Luke might intentionally try to make Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer sound just like Matthew's, because he wants them to sound the same. There can't be any discrepancy or difference. So a scribe might intentionally try to harmonize, especially with the Gospels, try to harmonize certain texts.

Again, if the scribe has perhaps just copied Matthew or knows of Matthew, and as he's now copying Mark or Luke, he might intentionally try to make them conform to each other. Another one is a scribe, a second one is a scribe might try to improve or smooth something out that is rough or appears to be a problem or inaccurate or an inconsistency. So again, a scribe might be reading a text and especially maybe theologically, maybe the text seems to call into question, the way it's worded might seem to call into question something that conflicts with the scribe's theological belief.

So the scribe might change it or update it to reflect accurate theology or something like that. So those are examples of intentional changes, where again, the result is the scribe, and this is important, the scribe is trying to improve the text in some way. He's trying to clarify it, harmonize it, remove conflicts or inconsistencies as he sees

them, make it conform to the theology of the church and the standard theological belief, and try to remove any inconsistencies.

So most intentional changes are attempts to improve the text. But the other type of change is unintentional. Those changes, again, that are introduced by the scribe unintentionally.

The scribe is not trying to improve the manuscript, but these are changes that are introduced accidentally. Again, most of them, as the scribe reads a manuscript and then transfers that over to record it in another manuscript, or as the scribe is listening to the text read and recording it, certain unintentional changes can arise. For example, a scribe might lose his place.

You've done this before, perhaps, if you're reading, and especially if you get tired. If you've ever been really tired and you're reading a paragraph and you read, you've experienced reading the same line over again. Scribes often got tired when they were reading and recording manuscripts, and so at times they may, especially if they're going from one manuscript to another, they may read a line and record it, and when they go back, they may read the same line again, and so record it a second time.

Or another common thing is if they may accidentally skip a line or two. So as they're reading the manuscript and they record a line, when they go back, they may not go to the same spot. They may accidentally skip a line, especially if the line begins in the same way that the line before it, but the point is they may accidentally skip a line when they're going back and forth between the manuscript that they're copying and the new manuscript that they are producing.

So certain changes like that that are unintentional are now reflected in the new manuscript that the scribe has produced. And then you can see what happened. If someone uses that manuscript and copies it, that same mistake may get perpetrated in subsequent manuscripts.

And as the branch, the tree, as it branches out, other manuscripts might pick up in those same mistakes that the scribe or unintentional changes that the scribe is making. Another source of variance in the manuscript is through hearing, errors of hearing. That is, as a scribe or as someone is reading a manuscript again, that person may not pronounce something clearly.

And furthermore, especially as the Greek language progressed in the early centuries, in the centuries beyond the first century, and this was already happening in the first century, certain vowels begin to, or even combination of vowels, begin to be pronounced similarly. So that, or certain words may be pronounced the same as well. And so if the scribe hears a sound and it can actually be represented by more than one letter, which letter is he going to write? For example, in the English language, if someone says the word bored, is that B-O-R-E-D? That I bored out of my mind? Or is it B-O-A-R-D? Such as a board.

Or even then, you know, the word board itself could have several connotations. So even in English, you know, where words often sound similar. And often the context is enough to help disambiguate that.

But you see what I mean. As someone is reading something, it may not be pronounced the same. Or in Greek, especially when vowels begin to be pronounced similarly.

When a scribe is listening to something read, being read, how is he going to spell that? There may be different ways of spelling what he has just heard. And presumably they did not have the luxury of raising their hand and asking how that was spelled or something like that. So some of the changes in the manuscript, some of the differences between manuscripts may be the result of the different sounds of certain Greek words.

Another example would be kind of a another example of a variant might come from an air in sight. An English example of this. Well, one way of doing that would be just reversing a couple of letters.

For example, and that can make a big difference in the meaning of a word. For example, look at the difference between the English word dog and God by simply reversing two letters. That makes a quite a change in the meaning of that word.

And the same was true in Greek. An author, as he's going from one to the other, he might accidentally, reading a word, reverse two of the letters, causing a very different meaning. And again, scribes got tired.

Some of them probably had bad eyesight. They may have woken up with a bad attitude that day or not had a good night's sleep. And all of that's going to reflect their ability to accurately copy a text.

And so sometimes errors of sight when they're copying manuscripts might cause them to write a word, again, reverse letters or something like that, and produce a variant or a change in the manuscript that they're copying. A final one that's kind of interesting is once in a while, and these are a little bit easier for text critics to deal with, is sometimes it was a common practice. This is just kind of an interesting one.

It was a common practice sometimes for scribes in the margins to make notes. Sometimes it might be a rather serious note about the text. Sometimes it might be something else, like, my hands are cold, or I'm running out of ink, or my wife burned the toast today, or something like that may be written in the margin.

And then when some other scribe has that text and is copying, the scribe might accidentally include that note in the margin right in the text. So right in the middle of Mark's text, there might be something such as, my hands are freezing, because that's what kind of a note that the original scribe might have written. So, so again, when scribes write little notations in the margins, once in a while, that, if that manuscript later on gets copied by someone else, those little notes in the margin might actually end up in the text.

And so again, by understanding what's going on, text critics are allowed to kind of remove that and realize that probably a scribe inserted that himself. So those are, those are some of the scribal tendencies. Those are some of the things a scribe might do.

And so again, a text critic will work backwards, and out of all these variants, try to, try to say, can I explain some of these changes based on unintentional or intentional changes made by a scribe? And if I can do that, then I can start to narrow down what, what most likely then was it that, that Paul or Luke or Matthew wrote? Let me say one final thing about text criticism, then we'll just look at a couple of examples very briefly. Three, just to give you three principles then that text critics often operate with, what, what principles or what kind of standards do they use? What principles inform the decisions they make? One of them is that usually when you start, when you compare all the readings of a man, so again, if, if you're, if a text critic is, looks at Mark chapter 1 and verse 1, and all the manuscripts, there's some differences in them. The question he's trying to ask is which one of these differences most likely

reflects what Mark wrote? And again, I don't want to leave the impression that every verse has multiple differences.

Sometimes there's only a couple, sometimes there's more than one, sometimes they're, it's very obvious, at other times it's a little more difficult to determine. But if a scribe is, is working with a verse, and out of all the manuscripts there are some variants, some differences, the scribe, the, the text critic wants to know which one of those most likely is the one that Mark wrote. So one of the principles is this, that out of all those differences, the most difficult or the hardest reading is probably the most correct one.

And the reason for that is that a scribe is more likely to introduce an improvement. The scribe is more likely to smooth out, to harmonize, to improve the text, than he is to introduce a difficulty into the text. And again, these are just principles, they don't always work, because a scribe might make a mistake, could plausibly, because of an error in sight, or, because of skipping a line, an author could, a scribe might make the text more difficult, and in that case the most difficult reading might not be correct.

But generally, a scribe is more likely to improve a text, to smooth out what he perceives as inconsistencies, or theological problems, or roughness in the text. The scribe will tend, tend to make it smoother. So in that basis, most text critics think, everything else being equal, the more difficult of all the readings, the harder of the readings, will probably be the correct one.

A second one is the shortest reading. The second general principle is the shortest reading will most likely be the correct one. So out of all the variants and differences, the one that is the shortest will probably be the correct one.



And again, the reasoning for that is, a scribe is more likely to expand and smooth out and improve the text, and add to it. Although again, there are exceptions. We saw a scribe might accidentally skip a line in copying a text, producing a shorter text.

So this is, these are not hard and fast rules. There are principles that are usually followed. Everything else being equal, the shorter reading will be the correct one, because a scribe is more likely to to expand and elaborate and smooth out.

A third one is, that is usually followed, is that the reading out of, again, when you have manuscripts with different readings, the reading that can best explain the origins of the others is probably going to be the correct one. If you can explain the origin of all the other readings based on one of them, it's probably the correct reading. For one example is, a lot of times what you find taking place is sometimes if a scribe has more than one manuscript, or he knows of more than one reading, the easiest way out might be to combine them all.

And so you often, sometimes you'll have manuscripts that have several readings, again, because the scribe might have had several texts, or he might have known of more than one reading, instead of trying to figure out which one was correct, we'll just put them all there in and combine them all together. And so that's one way to describe how might, how might some of these readings been given rise to by one of the other manuscripts. So if you can explain of all the variants, if you can explain them all based on one of them, that if one seems to give rise to the other readings, it's probably the correct one.

So those are just some of the principles that text critics utilize in trying to determine what most likely was the correct reading of a text. Now, let me just give you a couple of brief examples from the New Testament. One of them we've already referred to, and again, most of these are just the differences in words.

Again, I don't want you to think, leave you with the impression that if you have a manuscript on Mark, and all the other manuscripts will diverge from it in almost every aspect. The whole manuscript is different. And that's often just differences in wording here and there, and but we'll see that sometimes the difference is more substantial.

One example, a very easy one that we we've already mentioned, comes from Luke chapter 1 and 1 through 4, Luke's prologue, where Luke says, it seemed good to me to write my own or produce my own account of the life of Christ, so that you, Theophilus, may know about the certainty about these things. There are a couple of later manuscripts that added the words, when Luke says, it seemed good to me, they added the words, and to the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, there are only a couple of manuscripts that do this, out of all the manuscripts that don't include the words, and to the Holy Spirit.

We do see the words, and to the, it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, elsewhere in Acts. So most likely, because these are two later manuscripts, and there's none, no other manuscripts that attest to this, and because Acts does include this phrase elsewhere, and because it seems most likely to be the attempt of scribes to perhaps reflect what Luke says elsewhere, and maybe even add divine sanction to the text. In other words, it's not just Luke's doing, it must have the sanctioning of the Holy Spirit probably, Luke did not write those words.

Luke simply wrote, it seemed good to me to produce these, to produce this account. Another interesting example is Revelation chapter 21, and verse 3, which in John's New Jerusalem vision, John now is actually quoting the Old Testament covenant formula. And chapter 21 says, in verse 3 of Revelation, And I heard a loud voice from

the throne saying, Now the dwelling of God is with men, or with people, and he will live with them.

They will be his people, and God himself will be with them, and be their God. If you recall some of your Old Testament, you'll note that that is a the covenant formula that frequently in various forms crops up throughout the Old Testament. I will be their God, they will be my people.

John appears particularly to be drawing on Ezekiel 37's version of that, though it's found in Jeremiah, Zechariah, and a number of Old Testament texts. Leviticus chapter 26, a full expression of the covenant formula. But what is interesting is that there are two types of manuscripts for Revelation 21, verse 3. In the section where it says, they will be his people, and God himself will be with them.

Some manuscripts have the singular people, whereas other manuscripts have the plural people, or we could say in sort of stilted English peoples. We don't use that very much, but some manuscripts on Revelation 21, verse 3 have, they will be my people, singular. Others have, they will be my people's, plural.

And the question is, which one then is the correct reading? What did John most likely write? When you look at the manuscripts themselves, like the external evidence, as far as the date and the number of manuscripts, and the Byzantine and Alexandrian, etc., it's very difficult to arrive at a certain conclusion. So that other types of evidence then are usually brought into consideration. For example, is it more likely that a scribe would write people's plural, or is it more likely that a scribe would write people singular? And one important piece of evidence is, it's interesting that John frequently universalizes Old Testament texts.

Old Testament texts that referred specifically to the nation of Israel. Now John takes to reply to people more generally, including Gentiles. And John has that phrase over and over again throughout Revelation, people from every tribe and tongue and language, etc., and nation.

So that, is it possible that John himself changed the Old Testament formula that had singular people referring to Israel, and now he intentionally made it plural, peoples, to make it clear that all people, not just Israel, but Gentiles, people from every tribe and language and tongue and nation, now belong to the people of God, plural. And that maybe a scribe would have a scribe knowing the Old Testament covenant formula that is in the singular people, may have tried to change it back to make it sound like and conform to the Old Testament covenant formula from Ezekiel and Leviticus 26 that had singular people. So here's an example where probably, probably John originally wrote people's plural, and a later scribe somewhere along the line may have changed it back to the singular to make it sound more like the Old Testament formula.

Another example, intriguing example, is found in Romans chapter 5 and verse 1. In Romans chapter 5 and verse 1, Paul begins a new section by demonstrating sort of the results of the implications of justification by faith that he's argued for in the first four chapters. So based on the fact that one is justified by faith in Jesus Christ, starting with verse 5, therefore, since we have been justified, chapters 1 through 4, through faith, we have peace with God. Now that seems to be a statement of what is true and what we indeed possess by virtue of being justified.

We've been justified by faith, therefore, we currently, we presently have peace with God. We no longer are at enmity with God. We are no longer in a hostile relationship, and now we have a peaceful relationship.

However, some manuscripts, interestingly, have a word here that could be translated let us or we should have peace with God. More of an exhortation or a command. So which is it? Again, some manuscripts read, we have peace with God, making an indicative statement, an assertion.

Some other manuscripts have, we should have or let us have peace or we should have peace with God. More of an exhortation or a command. And this one makes a little bit of a difference.

Which did Paul write? Was Paul commanding us to have peace or we should have peace, or was he simply making an assertion? This is in fact true, based on the fact that we've been justified. The difference, the difference is one letter in Greek. It's the same word we have, it's the same, or it's the same word to have or that we translate to have in English.

But the difference is, is this, is this word to be translated we have as an assertion, a statement, that would be spelled one way. Or is it a command? We should have, let us have, that would be spelled another way. The difference is one letter that could have been, that could have been pronounced the same.

Remember we said if a scribe is sitting there listening to the text read, sometimes when a letter is pronounced the same way, what's what's he going to write? And this is an example of where the verb to have could have been written with the change of just one letter, and both letters would have been pronounced identical. Everyone see that? If the author, to use the Greek words, one of them would be ekomen, which would be we have, the other would be ekomen. You see the difference is just one letter.

Ekomen would be we should have or let us have, as opposed to ekomen, which would be we have, an assertion. The problem was the ah and the oh were pronounced the same, oh. So if you have someone reading and says ekomen, what am I going to write? Am I going to write let us have or we should have, or am I going to write we have, a statement or assertion? Most, most commentaries and Romans I've read are all convinced that most likely the translation we have, it's an assertion or a statement, is the correct one.

But you can still see what text critics have to do when they have manuscripts such as Romans 5.1 that even have just the difference of one letter, that probably goes back to the fact that both letters would have been pronounced identical, and causing some scribes to write one letter or others to write another letter that would result in interpreting the text in a slightly different way. A final example is a much more significant one as far as the length. Most of these that we've looked at so far have been simply, for example, Luke 1 was just a couple of words.

The other two were just the spellings, literally both the other two were just one letter instances of the difference between one letter. But I want to look at one briefly that is a little more lengthy, and that is the very ending of Mark chapter 16. And again, I don't, I don't hope to solve this, and I don't hope to go into any detail as to why this took place or how we should treat the text.

But even most English, this is so substantial that almost every English translation I've ever looked at includes a mention of this. And that is if you look at most English manuscripts, they'll have a note like this. I'm looking at an NIV text, and it says the earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16 verses 9 through 20.

So if you look at most of your Bibles, Mark 16, the very last chapter of Mark, goes to the end of verse, goes all the way to verse 20. But on every English translation I've seen has some little note there in the text, or maybe in a footnote that says some early manuscripts and other witnesses do not have verses 9 through 16. And there actually was another, some English Bibles also have another possible ending that's a lot shorter, and they'll have a similar note.

These verses, or this ending, sometimes they'll have it in a footnote, and again they'll say it wasn't in some of the earlier or ancient witnesses. So the problem is, we have apparently two versions of Mark. One version contains Mark chapter 16 that goes only through verse 8. The other version of Mark has an ending on it, such as verses 9 through 20.

And I'm not going to take time to read it, but verse 9 of Mark 16 begins, when Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him. And then it goes on, and actually in verse 15, it has Jesus telling his disciples, go into the world and preach this gospel, this good news to all creation, etc, etc.

So you have this long ending that, again, my English Bible says some manuscripts don't have this ending, verses 9 through 20. So the question is, where did Mark end? Did Mark end at verse 8? That's, as a lot of manuscripts, have Mark ending verse 8. That's it. That's the end of the gospel.

Other manuscripts include verses 9 through 20. So where did Mark end? Again, I don't want to solve this problem and go into all the details on this, but is it possible, is it possible that Mark did indeed intend to end at verse 8? And I'll read it. Here's how Mark 16 ends.

This chapter 16 is the account of Jesus' resurrection and appearance to some of his disciples. And verse 8 says, trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.

And that's the end of chapter 16 in verse 8. And some of you may wonder, what kind of way is that to end the gospel? With women trembling and fearing and being afraid to go tell anybody? That's not how a gospel ends, especially when you read Matthew and Luke and John. That's not how the gospel's end. But perhaps that's how an ancient scribe thought.

And perhaps verses 9 through 20 were some ancient scribe's attempt to construct a proper ending for the gospel. And so many manuscripts then picked up on that and included verses 9 through 20. But is it possible that Mark actually ended at verse 8? And I think there are good reasons, even theological reasons and contextual reasons with Mark that suggest that may be where it ended.

Some suggest that actually verse 8, Mark himself wrote more after verse 8 and somehow that got lost, cut off or burned off the manuscript or something. Somehow that got lost and later on the scribe included verses 8, 9 through 20. But is it possible that Mark intended to end at verse 8? Again, we won't go into why that might be.

But perhaps then a scribe having a manuscript where Mark ends at 16, 8 thought that that was an insufficient way to end the gospel and knew of Matthew and Luke even and maybe John. And so in fact, some of these verses of 9 through 20 resemble, especially 15 and 16, resemble very carefully Matthew chapter 28, the great commission text. So maybe a scribe thought that he needed to add an appropriate ending to the gospel of Mark.



And so verses 9 through 20 appear on some manuscripts but may not be the original ending that Mark himself wrote. So in conclusion, textual criticism, textual criticism is meant to take into consideration all the evidence possible, external and internal. The externally, the date of the manuscripts, the families that they belong to, the distribution of the manuscript, whether a certain manuscript is located or has its origin in only one place, or whether a reading seems to be spread geographically across several locations and was more well known.

Looking at the date of the manuscript, the scribal tendencies, and then internally looking at the author's style, vocabulary, grammar, elsewhere in the book, or if the author wrote other documents such as Paul, looking at his theology and style, the broader context, using all of that information and trying to reconstruct as closely as possible and as accurately as possible by working backwards from all the manuscript evidence, using all that criteria and information, working backwards to reconstruct as accurately and closely as possible what most likely did the author of Mark or Matthew or Romans or Jeremiah or Isaiah or Genesis, what most likely did they write? Remember, much like a tree where a trunk branches off in several directions, we don't have the trunk, we don't have the original manuscript, we just have the branches and usually the ends of the branches. So we try to work backwards and reconstruct what most likely did the original manuscript read out of all the manuscripts that, again, in the process of copying, differences crept in, changes crept in, and text criticism tries to work back from the evidence to reconstruct what most likely was the original reading. But again, I want to add, it must be said that nothing important, in my opinion, and most evangelical scholars have confirmed this, nothing important to our faith in Jesus Christ hinges on text-critical differences.

The process of text criticism allows us to arrive at a very high degree of probability exactly what, and we operate every day with high degrees of probability, but allows us to reconstruct to the very high degree of probability what was the most likely did

the biblical author originally write. When you look at all the manuscripts and the evidence we have, text criticism allows us to work back and reconstruct to a high degree of probability what it was the author wrote, so that we can have confidence in the text that we have, that we have something that is an accurate object of interpretation that provides a basis for hermeneutical thinking and reflection and interpretation and application of the Bible as the Word of God. So that is the first stage of the process of transmission from that will lead us into discussing hermeneutics in more detail.

The process of transmission from inspiration, the original production and origin of the biblical text, to through all the evidence as the text was copied and made available, working back and reconstructing through text criticism a text for the Old New Testament that is an accurate reflection of the original inspired text. That now leads us to the second, the second stage of transmission, and that is based on the reconstruction of the Old New Testament text, now translation in Greek and Hebrew, translation then allows that text to be made available in the variety of languages that we speak to, so that now we can have an adequate basis for hermeneutics and interpretation. So in our next session we'll talk a little bit about translation, the process of translation, what makes a good translation, what are the different types of translations, and what role does translation play in hermeneutics and interpretation, what translation should perhaps you utilize in your own hermeneutical endeavors.