

Dr. David Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 3, Textual Criticism Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 3, Textual Criticism, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from a Hermeneutics course **introduces textual criticism**, explaining how scholars reconstruct the original biblical texts from numerous manuscript copies. The process involves analyzing **external evidence** (manuscript dates, geographic locations, and family groupings) and **internal evidence** (authorial style, grammar, and theology). **Different types of scribal errors** (accidental and intentional) are examined, along with the principles guiding textual reconstruction. Finally, the lecture highlights examples of textual variations and their potential implications, emphasizing that these variations do not undermine the reliability of the Bible.

2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 3 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Introduction & Languages → Introductory Series → Hermeneutics).



**Mathewson_Herme
n_Session03.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture on Text Criticism:

Briefing Document: Textual Criticism of the Bible

Introduction:

This document summarizes a lecture by Dr. Dave Mathewson on Text Criticism, a critical step in the process of biblical hermeneutics. Text Criticism deals with the transmission of Scripture, acknowledging that we do not have the original manuscripts (autographs) but rather copies of copies of those texts. The goal is to reconstruct, as accurately as possible, what the original authors wrote, given the variations and errors that occurred during the copying process.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. The Dual Nature of Scripture:

- The Bible is both a human document and the Word of God. This means it was written through human processes (oral traditions, written sources, editing, etc.) but was also divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- Quote: *"on the human level we can describe its composition...in terms of the various oral and literary processes that lay behind it...At the same time...on the divine level, we can assert that the Spirit...was active in the whole process, so that the Bible can be regarded as both the words of human beings...and the Word of God."*
- This dual nature makes the study of the human element (through text criticism) essential to a full understanding of Scripture.
- The concept of inerrancy is a corollary of inspiration and the nature of God, and states that Scripture does not contain errors.

1. The Importance of Text Criticism:

- Text criticism is the initial stage of hermeneutics as it establishes the foundation of the text itself.
- Because the original manuscripts are lost, text criticism examines the available copies to determine the most likely original wording.

- It's a specialized field but understanding its principles helps one appreciate the text we have and how it came to be.
- Quote: *"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."*

1. Manuscript Transmission and Errors:

- We have many copies of copies, not the originals.
- Copying was done by hand (scribes) and through dictation/reading aloud.
- This process led to errors, both unintentional and intentional (scribal tendencies).
- Unintentional errors included forgetting what was read, losing one's place, errors of hearing and sight.
- Intentional errors included harmonizing conflicting passages (especially in the Gospels), smoothing out difficulties in the text, and aligning text with theology.
- The lecturer notes that there are 6,000 different manuscript witnesses to the New Testament, an "embarrassment of riches".

1. Key Terms in Text Criticism:

- **Manuscript:** A handwritten document, scroll, codex, or fragment that contains biblical text.
- **Variant:** Any difference between manuscripts, whether a single word, phrase, or larger section.
- **Papyrus:** Early writing material made from the papyrus plant.
- **Scroll:** A rolled up set of papyrus sheets.
- **Codex:** A book form where sheets are bound together.
- **Scribe:** A person who copied manuscripts.
- **Scribal Tendency:** The typical things a scribe might do when copying, including errors.
- **Uncial:** A manuscript written in all capital letters, with no spaces between words.
- **Minuscule:** A manuscript in cursive writing with spaces between words.
- **Textual Critics:** Scholars engaged in reconstructing the original text of the Bible.

1. Types of Manuscript Evidence:

- **Greek Copies:** Actual copies of the New Testament in Greek, ranging from fragments to complete books.
- **Church Fathers' Quotations:** Early Christian leaders often quoted the Bible in their writings; their quotes provide evidence of the text they used.
- **Early Translations:** Translations of the New Testament into other languages can provide insight into the underlying Greek text that was being translated.

1. Manuscript Families:

- Text critics classify manuscripts into families based on shared readings and likely genealogical relationships.
- **Alexandrian Family:** Generally considered to be an early and reliable family.
- **Western Family:** Another distinct family with its own characteristics.
- **Byzantine Family:** A later family of manuscripts, often characterized by attempts to smooth or harmonize the text.
- Quote: *"Manuscripts that seem to come from a common parent or a common source...Manuscripts that seem to have a genealogical relationship to each other."*
- It's important to note that no family is automatically considered superior. Textual critics consider all available evidence.

1. Types of Evidence:

- **External Evidence:** Date of manuscripts, family classifications, geographic distribution, scribal tendencies.
- **Internal Evidence:** The author's style, vocabulary, grammar, theology, broader context of the document itself.

1. Textual Criticism Methodologies

- **Eclectic Method:** The most widely used method today, which involves considering all evidence – external and internal – rather than prioritizing any single factor.
- The goal is to make a reasoned attempt to reconstruct what the original author wrote.

- **Common Greek Texts:** Modern critical texts, like the United Bible Society (UBS) and Nestle-Aland texts, reflect the results of the eclectic approach.

1. Principles of Textual Criticism:

- **The Most Difficult Reading:** The more difficult reading is often the correct one because a scribe was more likely to try to simplify rather than complicate the text.
- **The Shortest Reading:** The shorter reading is often the correct one because scribes tended to expand texts.
- **The Reading That Explains Others:** The reading that best explains how the other variant readings arose is more likely to be the original.

1. Examples of Textual Variants:

- **Luke 1:1-4:** Addition of "and to the Holy Spirit" in some later manuscripts.
- **Revelation 21:3:** "People" (singular) vs. "peoples" (plural) in relation to God's covenant. The plural is thought to more accurately reflect John's universalization of Old Testament texts.
- **Romans 5:1:** "We have peace with God" (indicative) vs. "Let us have peace with God" (exhortation) - a difference of one letter in Greek. The indicative is considered the more correct reading.
- **Mark 16:9-20:** These verses are absent from some of the earliest and best manuscripts and may be a later addition.
- Quote: *"The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16 verses 9 through 20."*

Conclusion:

Textual criticism is a crucial process for understanding the Bible. It acknowledges the human element in transmission, but it is also an effort to ensure that we have the most accurate and reliable text possible, recognizing that scribal errors have altered the text over time. By using a careful, reasoned, and eclectic approach, scholars seek to get back as close as possible to the original words of Scripture. While it may not always lead to certainty in every single instance, it allows us to have confidence in the text we read.

4. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 3, Textual Criticism

Text Criticism: A Study Guide

Quiz

1. How does I. Howard Marshall describe the composition of the Bible on both a human and divine level?
2. What is the primary goal of text criticism?
3. Why is it important to understand the different manuscript families (Alexandrian, Western, and Byzantine)?
4. What are some reasons that errors might occur when copying manuscripts?
5. Describe the difference between "unintentional" and "intentional" changes introduced by scribes.
6. Explain the difference between external and internal evidence in text criticism.
7. Why is it important to not simply count the manuscripts when trying to determine which reading is correct?
8. What is the "eclectic method" in text criticism?
9. What are the three principles that text critics often use when making decisions about manuscript readings?
10. Briefly explain the issue regarding the ending of Mark's Gospel (chapter 16).

Answer Key

1. Marshall describes the Bible's composition as a result of human activities like gathering witness information, utilizing written sources, editing, and composing letters, while also being guided by the Holy Spirit, so that it can be considered both human words and the Word of God.
2. The primary goal of text criticism is to reconstruct the original wording of biblical texts, given that we do not possess the original manuscripts and instead have copies and copies of copies, often with variations.
3. Understanding the manuscript families helps to categorize and understand the relationships between different manuscripts, and provides insight into the types of changes and influences that may have affected the text.

4. Errors may occur due to the scribe forgetting what was read, accidentally adding or omitting words, being tired or having poor eyesight, or due to variations in pronunciation when copying from dictation.
5. Unintentional changes are errors that occur accidentally, such as skipping a line or mishearing a word, while intentional changes are deliberate alterations made by a scribe to improve, harmonize, or correct the text.
6. External evidence refers to factors such as the date, family, and geographical distribution of manuscripts, while internal evidence focuses on elements within the text itself, such as the author's style, vocabulary, grammar, and theological tendencies.
7. It's important to not simply count the manuscripts because a majority of manuscripts may stem from a common source, which could perpetuate an earlier error. Instead, critics must weigh all the evidence, and consider which reading best accounts for all the other variant readings.
8. The eclectic method involves taking all external and internal evidence into account, weighing it, and not prioritizing one type of evidence over another, in order to make the most reasoned judgment about what the original reading was.
9. The three principles are: the most difficult reading is likely the most original; the shortest reading is likely the most original, and the reading that best explains the origins of the others is the correct reading.
10. Some early manuscripts of Mark end at 16:8 while other later ones include verses 9-20, which are substantially different. This presents a significant question of whether the original Gospel of Mark intended for that ending or if the latter portion was added later.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the implications of textual criticism for understanding the nature and authority of the Bible. How does acknowledging the human processes involved in scripture affect our view of its divine nature?
2. Compare and contrast external and internal evidence, and explain how each of these types of evidence are used in the process of textual criticism. Which is more important and why?
3. Describe the various types of scribal errors that occurred during the transmission of the biblical text, and explain how these errors present challenges for textual critics today.
4. Analyze the significance of manuscript families in text criticism. How do the characteristics of the Alexandrian, Western, and Byzantine families influence text critics' evaluation of manuscript evidence?
5. Discuss the significance of the ending of Mark's Gospel (chapter 16) as an example of textual criticism. What are some of the different arguments concerning the ending of Mark, and what are their implications for the message of the gospel?

Glossary of Key Terms

Alexandrian Manuscript Family: A family of manuscripts known for their generally early date, quality, and geographical origin in Alexandria, Egypt. Often given high priority by some textual critics.

Byzantine Manuscript Family: A later family of manuscripts that tend to be characterized by attempts to smooth out and harmonize difficult passages; often not given the same weight as Alexandrian texts.

Codex: A book-like manuscript where pages are bound together, as opposed to a scroll.

Concursive: The idea that God's Spirit worked in conjunction with human authors in the process of writing Scripture.

Eclectic Method: A method of textual criticism that weighs all internal and external evidence to determine the most likely original reading, instead of favoring one particular manuscript family.

External Evidence: Evidence used in text criticism that includes factors such as the date, geographical distribution, and manuscript family of a text.

Harmonization: The process by which a scribe attempts to make two or more passages, often from different Gospels, more similar to each other.

Internal Evidence: Evidence from within the text itself, such as an author's style, vocabulary, grammar, and theology, used by text critics to determine which reading is most likely to be original.

Manuscript: A handwritten document, whether a scroll or codex, that contains a portion of the biblical text.

Minuscule: A style of writing characterized by cursive, small letters with spaces between words, developed centuries after the unseal style.

Papyrus: A type of writing material made from the papyrus plant.

Scroll: A long sheet of papyrus or other material that can be rolled up; an early form of a manuscript.

Scribe: A person who copies manuscripts.

Scribal Tendency: The typical actions, motivations, or common patterns that scribes exhibited when copying a text, leading to accidental or intentional changes.

Text Criticism: The scholarly discipline that seeks to reconstruct the original text of a document by comparing and analyzing various manuscript copies.

Unseal: A style of writing using all capital letters, with no spacing between words, typically used for early manuscripts.

Variant: Any difference between two or more manuscripts when compared, ranging from single letters to entire paragraphs.

Western Manuscript Family: A family of manuscripts characterized by their generally free and often expansive readings, sometimes exhibiting paraphrasing and alterations, and often geographically associated with the western Mediterranean regions.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 3, Textual Criticism, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Textual Criticism of the Bible

1. **What is textual criticism, and why is it important for understanding the Bible?**
2. Textual criticism is the study of biblical manuscripts to determine the most accurate and original wording of the text. It's important because we don't have the original manuscripts of the Bible, but rather copies of copies, which can vary due to accidental or intentional changes during the copying process. Textual criticism helps us get as close as possible to what the original authors actually wrote, ensuring a more accurate foundation for interpretation and hermeneutics.
3. **Why do we not possess the original manuscripts of the Bible?**
4. The original manuscripts, written by the biblical authors themselves, no longer exist. What we have today are copies of those originals, often copies of copies made over centuries. These copies were handwritten on materials like papyrus, and were subject to wear and tear and human error over time, hence the need for textual criticism to examine and compare the manuscripts to determine the original reading.
5. **What are some common sources of variation or errors that occurred during the copying of biblical manuscripts?**
6. Variations in biblical manuscripts arise from both unintentional and intentional sources. Unintentional errors include mistakes in sight (misreading letters, skipping lines), mistakes in hearing (misinterpreting words pronounced similarly), and accidental omissions or repetitions. Intentional changes include harmonization of similar passages (especially in the Gospels), smoothing out perceived difficulties or theological inconsistencies, and updating language or grammar.

7. **What are the different types of manuscript evidence that text critics use to reconstruct the original text of the Bible?**
8. Textual critics use various types of manuscript evidence, including: * **Actual Copies:** Manuscripts in Greek and other languages representing copies of the Bible, sometimes complete, sometimes fragmentary. * **Quotations by Early Church Fathers:** Writings by early church leaders that quote from the New Testament, providing insight into what manuscripts they had available. * **Early Translations:** Versions of the Bible translated into other languages, offering indirect manuscript evidence. This evidence comes from different forms, such as papyrus scrolls, codices (book form), uncial manuscripts (all capital letters without spaces), and minuscule manuscripts (cursive with spaced words).
9. **What do text critics mean by the terms "manuscript", "variant", and "scribal tendency"?** * **Manuscript:** A handwritten document, either a complete book, part of a book, or a fragment. * **Variant:** Any difference between two or more manuscripts, whether it is a single word, a phrase, a spelling difference, or more. * **Scribal Tendency:** The typical types of actions a scribe would perform. For example, scribes could accidentally forget a word or line of text, or they could deliberately harmonize different texts.
10. **How do textual critics classify biblical manuscripts, and what are some major "families" of manuscripts?**

Textual critics classify manuscripts into "families" based on their shared characteristics and apparent genealogical relationships. Some significant families include: *

Alexandrian: Generally considered to be one of the most reliable due to its early date and geographic origin. * **Western:** A family of manuscripts with some unique readings. * **Byzantine:** A later family with many manuscripts, often characterized by harmonizations and smoothing of text.

1. **What are the two main types of evidence that text critics use, and how do they contribute to the reconstruction process?**

Textual critics use two main types of evidence: * **External Evidence:** Relates to the physical characteristics of manuscripts, including their date, family affiliation, geographic distribution, scribal tendencies, etc. * **Internal Evidence:** Refers to the text itself, considering the author's style, vocabulary, theology, and the context of the passage. Both types of evidence are combined to assess the most likely original reading.

1. **What are some of the key principles or guidelines that text critics use when attempting to determine the original wording of a biblical passage when there are textual variants?**

Text critics often follow certain principles when evaluating variants: * **The More Difficult Reading:** The more challenging reading is often preferred as scribes tended to smooth out difficulties, rather than introduce them. * **The Shorter Reading:** Shorter readings are often preferred because scribes were more likely to add or expand on the text than to shorten it, although there are instances where a scribe might skip a line or omit text accidentally. * **The Reading That Best Explains the Others:** If one reading can account for the existence of all other variants, it is more likely to be the correct one. * **Eclectic Method:** Most scholars today use a reasoned eclectic method where they evaluate all of the external and internal evidence, not automatically prioritizing any one.