

They Changed My Bible! **1Peter 1:22-25**

Many speak of errors and changes to Bible text

Over "200,000 errors" "They removed verses"

We have over 5,300 manuscripts of New Testament

Some as close as 150-200 years

Nothing else from history comes close

Compare to other ancient historical works

Caesar's Gallic War (58-50 BC) - Several extant manuscripts, but only nine or ten are good, and the oldest is some 900 years later than Cæsar's day.

Roman history of Livy (59 BC- 17 AD), Only 35 of 142 books survive; these are known to us from not more than twenty manuscripts of any consequence, only one of which, and that containing fragments of Books III-VI, is as old as the fourth century.

Histories of Tacitus (100 AD) only 4.5 of 14 books survive; of the sixteen books of his Annals, ten survive in full and two in part. The text of these extant portions of his two great historical works depends entirely on two manuscripts—one of the ninth century and one of the eleventh. The extant manuscripts of his minor works (Dialogus de Oratoribus, Agricola, Germania) all descend from a codex of the tenth century.

The History of Thucydides (460-400 BC) is known to us from eight manuscripts, the earliest belonging to c. A.D. 900, and a few papyrus scraps, belonging to about the beginning of the Christian era. The same is true of the History of Herodotus (c. 488-428 B.C.).

Yet no classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Herodotus or Thucydides is in doubt because the earliest manuscripts of their works which are of any use to us are over 1,300 years later than the originals.

The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable? (7th edn., 1983), pp. 16 F.F. Bruce

Three levels of Variants

Trivial

Matthew 11:10-23

Consider the page of the Greek text for this 14 verse passage. A quick look at the bottom of the page shows that nine variant readings are listed. At first glance nine variants out of fourteen verses seem alarming. Yet every variant on the page, besides "children" or "works" in verse 19, is trivial in nature. Several of the variants concern the omission or addition of such words as "for," "and," and "the"; others have to do simply with different forms of the same or similar Greek words. In one case the variant concerns the omission or addition of the verb "to hear" (whether to read "the one who has ears" or "the one who has ears to hear"). At no point is there a real problem of the text, except with the alternative of "children" or "works," which as we have seen is rather easily resolved.

Other examples may be cited. Proper names often presented problems to the scribes. In **Acts 18:24**, is it "Apollos" or "Apelles" or "Apollonios"?[3] In **John 1:28**, is it "Bethabara beyond the Jordan" or "Bethany beyond the Jordan"? In **John 5:2**, is the name of the pool "Bethzatha" or "Bethesda" or "Bethsaida"? Likewise, a variation may be no more than a change in the order of words. In **Matthew 1:18**, is it "the birth of Jesus Christ" or "the birth of Christ Jesus"? (Other manuscripts have "the birth of Jesus," while others read "the birth of Christ.") In all of the above cases, the manuscripts read differently; but the variants are so minor that they are scarcely referred to in the footnotes of our translations.

Substantial - No bearing on the text, clearly an addition

Codex Bezae of the fifth century often has peculiar readings, one of which is found after **Luke 6:4**. Here it transfers verse 5 after verse 10 and inserts the following: “On the same day, seeing one working on the sabbath day, he said to him, ‘Man, if you know what you are doing, you are blessed; but if you do not know, you are accursed and a transgressor of the law.’” This curious incident is recorded in no other manuscript or version. It is beyond doubt a substantial variation, but we are sure that it was not a part of Luke’s original Gospel. It in no way changes our text because modern textual criticism has unhesitatingly rejected it.

Adulterous woman

A more familiar passage found in our early English translations illustrates the same principle. The story of the adulterous woman (**John 7:53-8:11**) involves a number of verses and clearly represents a substantial variation. Almost all recent translations by varying devices mark this account as textually uncertain. The American Standard Version, the Revised Standard Version, the New Revised Standard Version, and the New International Version either separate it from the text or include it in brackets. The New English Bible and the Revised English Bible place it at the close of John’s Gospel. The translations briefly explain to their readers the reasons for their actions.

Ethiopian Confession

Another passage of interest is found in **Acts 8:37**. The King James translation of this verse reads, “And Philip said, if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” These words are represented as part of a conversation between Philip the Evangelist and the eunuch at the time of the eunuch’s baptism. These are familiar words, stressing the importance of faith in Jesus Christ. Yet the words are not found in the American Standard Version or the Revised Standard Version. These and other recent translations, on the basis of the evidence, are compelled to omit this verse from the Book of Acts. It is true that a sixth-century uncial, some good minuscule manuscripts, and the Old Latin Version support the verse, but practically all the other manuscripts and versions stand opposed to it. Because no Greek manuscript earlier than the sixth century knows of this reading, beyond doubt it could not have formed a part of the original account of Acts.

Three that bear record

The case of **1John 5:7** is less complex. The King James Version reads, “*For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.*” An interesting circumstance led to the introduction of this verse in the English Bible. After the invention of printing, the first person to publish an edition of the printed Greek text was a Dutch scholar by the name of Erasmus. His first edition came out in the year 1516. But the first and second editions of Erasmus did not include **1John 5:7**. A mild controversy was stirred up because the verse was indisputably in the late Latin copies. Erasmus insisted that his text was right and was so sure of himself that he rashly promised to include the verse in his text if one single Greek copy could be found in support of it. At length a copy turned up, and Erasmus, true to his word, included the verse in the third edition of his Greek Testament. William Tyndale was the first man to translate the New Testament into English based on a Greek text (instead of Latin); and it was Erasmus’ third edition that he employed in making his translation. So from Tyndale down to the King James Bible, **1John 5:7** has been a part of English Scripture.

Textual evidence is against **1John 5:7**. Only two, very late date (14th-16th century), Greek manuscripts, contain it. Two other manuscripts have it written in the margin. All four manuscripts show evidence this verse was apparently translated from a late form of the Latin Vulgate. In the cases of **1John 5:7**, **Acts 8:37**, and **John 7:53-8:11**, there really is no problem because all the authoritative evidence looks in one direction. They do not belong in the text.

Substantial - Bearing on the text, no clear answer

Mark 16:9-20

Almost all recent English translations, separate these verses from the main body of the text. The problem of **Mark 16** is rather unique in that the evidence apparently looks in two directions.

The evidence against **Mark 16:9-20** mostly rests on the Vatican and Sinaitic Manuscripts. These two uncials of the fourth century are our very best manuscripts and as textual witnesses are acknowledged as being in a class by themselves. We are thus confronted with the problem that the two manuscripts which we rely upon most do not have these closing verses of Mark. Additional significant evidence is against **Mark 16:9-20**, including the witness of the earliest known manuscript of the Old Syriac, the earliest known manuscript of the Latin Vulgate, a large number of Armenian manuscripts, and so forth.

Other factors are against the acceptance of **Mark 16:9-20**. Although it is difficult to argue on the basis of vocabulary, nevertheless about twenty terms and expressions do not fit in with Mark's style of writing. Some of these expressions never occur (1) in the rest of Mark or (2) elsewhere in the Four Gospels or (3) anywhere else in the entire New Testament. Further, verses 8 and 9 do not seem to connect well, changing from the subject of the women disciples (v. 8) to Jesus' post-resurrection appearances (v. 9). And is it not strange that Mary Magdalene is "introduced" to the reader in verse 9 even though she has been present from verse 1?

But in favor of **Mark 16:9-20** are a host of witnesses: the Alexandrian Manuscript, the Ephraem Manuscript, Codex Bezae, other early uncials, all late uncials and minuscules, a number of Old Latin authorities plus the Vulgate, one old Syriac manuscript, the Syriac Peshitta version, and many other versions. Besides, there is a plain statement from Irenaeus, an early Christian writer, which clearly shows the existence of **Mark 16:9-20** in the second century and the belief that Mark was its author.

The unparalleled reliability of Vatican and Sinaitic Manuscripts or almost all of the other manuscript evidence. The problem persists: What about the negative evidence of the Vatican and Sinaitic Manuscripts? Is it best to say simply that the last leaf of Mark's Gospel may have been accidentally torn away?

The truthfulness of this passage is not in dispute. The main events of **Mark 16:9-20** are recorded elsewhere, so at any rate we are not in danger of forfeiting heavenly treasure.

Why Were They Included?

During peace in 4th century Church tended to centralize under influence of Constantinople (formerly Byzantium). Lead to dissemination of Byzantine (Westcott-Hort Syrian) text in place of diverse local ones.

The Byzantine/Syrian text is characterized by a conflation of divergent readings from earlier text forms. This gave variants that have been shown to come from a mixture of other variants, thus must have come after them. It is not represented in translations or citations of the first three centuries like the other text types. Chrysostom is the first Greek Father whose biblical citations show a Byzantine character (A.D. 347-407).

Most of the later Greek manuscripts are based in this text, as well as the earliest printed editions of the Greek NT (Received [Authorized] Text). These are the texts used to translate KJV.

Some have defended the Received Text's claim to represent the original text of the New Testament, but there are now few scholars who hold the primacy of the Byzantine text.

The variant readings in the manuscripts are not of such a nature that they threaten to overthrow our faith. Except for a few instances, we have an unquestioned text; and even then not one principle of faith or command of the Lord is involved.

Do You Believe?

God's Word is clear and certain

Even critics agree what we have is what was written originally

Listen to The Word, obey and be saved through obedience

DLH

How We Got The Bible; Neil R. Lightfoot; Chapter 9: Significance of Textual Variations
The Books and the Parchments; F.F. Bruce; Chapter 14: The Text of the New Testament