

# How We Got Our Bible

## Part Four: New Testament Textual Families

- I. The Textual Families of New Testament Manuscripts
  - A. Alexandrian Manuscripts (1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> Centuries)
  - B. Western Manuscripts (3<sup>d</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> Centuries)
  - C. Byzantine Manuscripts (5<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries)
- II. How Textual Families Developed
  - A. As Copies of the Bible spread around the world, regional variants developed because of easy access to a particular set of regional templates.
  - B. The Middle East was impacted early by Islamic conquest (7<sup>th</sup> Century). Because of the spread of Islam places like Egypt, Syria, and Palestine did not see a long history of Bible manuscripts.
  - C. Because Latin became the dominant language in the Western Roman Empire (about 3<sup>d</sup> Century), the making of Greek Manuscripts slowed.
  - D. Greek remained the both the spoken language and the language of worship for the Byzantine Empire (Eastern Roman Empire) until Byzantium fell in 1453.
- III. Characteristics of Textual Families of New Testament Manuscripts
  - A. Alexandrian manuscripts tend to be older, are characterized by more abrupt readings, and have a higher percentage of difficult readings.
  - B. Western manuscripts tend to be old, but not the oldest manuscripts. They tend to paraphrase (gloss) difficult passages, and they tend to harmonize parallel passages. Only one Uncial manuscript represents the Western tradition, Codex Bezae (ca. 400).
  - C. Byzantine manuscripts have a preference for proper Greek, they contain less difficult readings, and often contain longer readings. There are no Papyri that represent the Byzantine text type. Uncial, Codex Alexandrinus, is Byzantine in the Gospels and Alexandrian in the rest of the New Testament (5<sup>th</sup> Century). The Textus Receptus, which we will cover later, is based on about 6 manuscripts from the Byzantine tradition. There are places where the Byzantine Text (sometimes called the Majority Text) omits verses that are included in the TR (Luke 17:36; Acts 8:37; 15:34).
- IV. Approaches to the Textual Families (Age and Number of Manuscripts).
  - A. Because the Byzantine textual family was the most available and most numerous, the earliest printed editions of the Greek New Testament (Erasmus and the Textus Receptus) were basically Byzantine in character.
  - B. As Scholars discovered Older Manuscripts (Uncials and Papyri) interest in the Western and Alexandrian family of Manuscripts developed.
  - C. Two New Testament scholars in England published an edition of the Greek New Testament entitled The New Testament in the Original Greek. It favored the Alexandrian Manuscripts, which its editors Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton J. A. Hort, called the Neutral Text. In hindsight this edition was overallly enthusiastic about the Alexandrian Readings from certain impressive manuscripts like Vaticanus and Sinaiticus.
  - D. John William Burgon (Dean of Chichester Cathedral) gave a critical response to the text of Westcott and Hort and the revision of the King James they oversaw in England, the Revised Version.

- E. Today the most common approach is called “reasoned eclecticism” by its proponents. This is the approach of the NT texts edited by Bruce Metzger and Kurt Aland.
- F. There are raging debates today about which approach to the text is best. Some favor the Textus Receptus, some the Majority Text, others favor the modern eclectic approach. There are good Christian people and scholars and all sides of this debate. None of the textual differences of the New Testament impact matters of doctrine, but simply wording of individual verses. In other words, the creation, inspiration of the Bible, deity of Christ, virgin birth, the atonement, the resurrection, the second coming are all taught in the Bible no matter what approach a person takes to determining the original text of Scripture.