

History and Authenticity of the Bible
Lesson 17
Manuscript Evidence

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Father, we delight in Your word. We thank You that we have an accurate, reliable, written revelation from You. We delight in calling it the word of God. We know it was forever settled in heaven and that no one can add to it or take away from it without experiencing consequences from Your hand. I pray Lord that You would bless our study as we get into the details of manuscript evidence. Things many folks seem to ignore, try to treat as unimportant; yet we know that the enemy is working hard in this area to undermine our confidence in Your word. And I pray Lord that You would give us wise hearts, and kindness towards those who disagree. But give us conviction Lord that is based on the facts that we know. Thank You Lord for what You are going to do in our class today, in Jesus' name. Amen.

We're talking about manuscript evidence. There are two ways that we discuss inerrancy. One is canonicity which we've already talked about. Canonicity is the rule or standard by which something is measured. Determining how many books belong in the Bible is a big, heavy issue. But the second issue is far more important, believe it or not, and that's manuscript evidence, the actual facts.

There are two kinds of criticism. This is criticism used in the good sense, not talking about a critical spirit. There is higher criticism and there's lower criticism. Now, we've mentioned that along the way. I just want to keep repeating it so you know what you're talking about. Higher criticism deals with things like date, author, geography, background, etc. Lower criticism deals with the actual text, manuscript evidence. And so it's the lower critics that we are looking at now.

We have talked briefly about the Old Testament. And until the Dead Sea Scrolls, we didn't really know if that Masoretic text of the ninth century A.D. (which we still have today) was

truly representative of the original Hebrew. But to find manuscripts that are a thousand years before that and find hardly any variation at all, speaks well of the Jews who transcribed it and copied it. It's almost a miracle really, not having printers or computers, etc. And we begin to see the importance of those Dead Sea Scrolls.

In the Dead Sea Scrolls, class, we mentioned this at the end of our last session. I just want to make sure that you heard it. You might see it again. And that is, that every time it refers to canonical Scriptures, remind yourself this is 150 to 200 years before Christ. They always put the phrase "it is written." The Dead Sea Scrolls include a lot of other literature that is non-canonical. They don't belong in the Bible. But they were other literature that they were copying. And they never, not once, put "it is written" on any of them. So we know the Jewish people at least 150 to 200 years before Christ, this Essene community at Qumran down on the Dead Sea, were copying manuscripts. We know that at that point they already understood what was the completed canon of the Old Testament. That was confirmed in A.D. 90 at the Council of Jamnia, some twenty years after the destruction of the temple. And the Bouleme Orthodox rabbinical scholars are the ones who examined every single book. And we talked about some of the tests that they used, but we wanted you to know five and I hope you remember them: language, authorship, inspiration, acceptance and completion and some reasons behind that.

Now we're talking about manuscript evidence. When we look at the New Testament, we all of a sudden have a new ball game, so to speak. This is a much bigger problem in the New Testament than it ever has been in the Old Testament. We have 5,500 Greek manuscripts, a little bit more than that now. That doesn't mean there aren't some other fragments lying in museums around the world in various universities. But so far, we have 5,500 Greek manuscripts.

But we have over 10,000 Latin manuscripts and some estimate it as high as 20,000, because there is so much of this still laying around that hasn't been catalogued. Remember the Western church, which represents primarily the imperial government of Rome and churches around the Mediterranean, not counting the south, Alexandria, Egypt or the east from Antioch,

Syria and on. Those are other traditions. But the Western tradition, west of Constantinople, including Greece and Italy and Europe, they primarily are using Latin. That's why there are so many of them available. Latin becomes the dominate language at that particular period of time. So, contrary to what a lot of people seemingly so casually say—like it's not important—no, it's very important.

What is a version?—into another language. Okay, that is a version. The New International is not a version of English. The New American Standard is not a version of English. English is a version of the original Greek text. Okay, it means going into another language. And it's extremely important to understand that the number one version used throughout the Christian world was Latin. When Jerome translated the Latin Vulgate, the purpose of that translation was not to reduplicate all the efforts that were already going on. The purpose was to put it into the language of the people and not use the Latin of the Roman courts. That's why it's called Latin Vulgate. Vulgate means common, for the common people. So the translation of Jerome became critical. In fact, for a thousand years it was the only Bible people were using. Remember our English translations don't begin until the fifteenth century.

So these are some of the things we need to keep in our minds as we're looking at the problem. There are 5,500 Greek manuscripts, but there's over 10,000 Latin and 4,000 in various other languages. Once again class, be very careful what you say about this. It's not meaning that we have the whole Bible in every one of those, like we have 5,500 Greek Bibles. No. It's talking about a fragment. It may be just one or two verses, or it could be the whole Bible. But there are very few that contain the whole Bible. We need to understand that. So you have multitudes of fragments and portions of books and etc. This whole science dealing with the New Testament is just so big that one wonders how you could come to any accuracy of statement regarding it. It's huge.

In addition to that, we have the quotations of church fathers called Patristic, after the Latin word for *pater*, also in Greek for father. Church fathers do not mean like the fathers who are

Roman Catholic priests. Church fathers are the church leaders. So I kind of prefer to call them early church leaders. They were outstanding. Why?—because the average person was uneducated. These men were educated. And so they became very, very important forces in the protection of God's word and of the doctrines taught in the Bible. Eventually the leaders, key leaders gave way to church councils. There were so many leaders disagreeing with one another, they came together with church councils to deal with issues of doctrinal orthodoxy.

In the church fathers you have 86,000 separate references to quotations from the New Testament. That is pretty powerful! So when you talk about what was the actual original text, church leaders, Irenaeus or Polycarp, Clement, these men who lived in the second century and were actually born in the first, they are very close. Polycarp studied under John. Irenaeus knew John, the Apostle John. So there's a lot of close proximity here. And what they said and quoted from the New Testament would be extremely important, especially if continuous quotations by multi church fathers came out exactly the same. Then you'd know that's pretty good evidence of what the original text was. Because these quotations and the old Latin are all before we ever have these manuscripts called codexes—like *Codex Alexandrinus*, *Codex Sinaiticus*, *Codex Vaticanus*.

So class, we have a preponderance of evidence regarding the New Testament text and the job of the lower critic is to simply take the evidence of the manuscripts and draw some conclusions about the original text. This has been a long history. Now, we're talking about everything before printing. Class, when did the printing press get invented? 1450. What was the first book printed on it? The Bible in German. Boy, what a class! When did Martin Luther tack his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of Wittenberg? 1517. When was the council that the Roman Catholics fought Luther on the Apocrypha? When was that council? A.D. 1540, the Council of Trent. It actually went on for seven years.

Okay, the classification of manuscript evidence. I have in my background, stuff about textual criticism. I've worked on translations and I've had courses in it. Okay. I don't want to bore you with that evidence and what I've tried to do is streamline it. And you will find in some

courses on textual criticism that what I'm doing is really a summary because there are as many as five and six traditions of the text. I'm going to try to explain to you why they exist. In my opinion, there are only three major ones. And I do preface it with "my opinion." But, I think any scholar who would look at this would say, "Well yeah, that's a basic look at it." And that's what we're trying to do. We're not trying to bore you with a lot of details. But you cannot really understand this issue from the standpoint of where we are today without dealing with this. You have to deal with it.

Greek Manuscripts

There are three basic traditions or classifications of Greek manuscript evidence.

Byzantine – The Eastern Text

Western – The Latin Text

Alexandrian – The Modern Text

And so we look at three basic traditions of Greek manuscripts. Now class, wouldn't it make sense without cars, trucks, planes, trains, telephones—all of that—wouldn't it make sense that because it takes months to go from one region to another that the traditions of the text would kind of line up geographically? Do you understand? That would make real sense. If you lived in Syria and Turkey area and all of that, you're not going to have much contact with those down in

Egypt—rare! It would only be just a few very wealthy, intellectual, or military-oriented people, who are ever going to come to your area that you'll ever meet or see.

So, one of the first and simplest things that we understand about manuscript evidence is that they are controlled by geography. When we speak of the Western Text, for instance, that's most frequently quoted by the church fathers. Why?—because they are the ones who live in the area. They are the ones who are the leaders of the church. And it is primarily based on Latin manuscript evidence, so all those manuscripts in the Western church.

Now who's in charge of that manuscript evidence today? Exactly right, the Vatican is. So for years the Vatican preferred the Latin text of Jerome's Latin Vulgate. They preferred the Latin over the Greek. People sort of said, "Well, you are not trusting the original text." But now, looking back on it, scholarship thinks differently about it. The truth of the matter is we know that these old Latin manuscripts did a wonderful job translating the original Greek text. So we understand that they were trying to communicate with people. But eventually it became a problem because the church was not able to disseminate Latin throughout the empire, as you probably well know if you know anything about history.

So there were multi-languages being spoken. The church decided that they had a measure of control over people by simply continuing to use Latin. So Latin actually became, though it was a dominate language of the Roman empire of the first three or four centuries, it actually became a language of only churchmen. That's what happened in history. So the individual dialects and languages of the empire, people would continue to speak them. They'd grow up talking at home that way and unless they went to school and studied formally, which very few people ever did that. So that's what happened when we got plunged into what is called the Dark Ages.

The Dark Ages was not only the collapse of Rome in A.D. 476, when a barbaric Visigoth tribe came down and sacked and burned the city; Rome had fallen morally long before that. But the official collapse in 476 did not collapse the church. As a matter of fact, the term Pontifex Maximus, which all the Roman empires from Augustus who was the old Octavian, all the Roman

empires took the term Pontifex Maximus, Supreme Pontiff. You had to burn incense in most of the Roman centers around the empire saying, "Caesar is lord." That's the belief of the Romans. It was polytheistic. You can follow any god you want, but ultimately you have to recognize Caesar as the number one god.

When Rome fell politically, the bishop of Rome who by now had taken on a great deal of prestige and power, you could imagine how easily that would happen. If the governments of the world were controlled by one imperial city, namely Rome, how easy it would be for that church in Rome and its leader to become the predominant person. For instance, I read in my church history background, statements from other church leaders, one from Irenaeus and Antioch of Syria, who wrote the bishop in Rome basically rebuking him for thinking that he had more authority than any other pastor or bishop. So it became a great controversy.

In A.D. 250, a man named Cyprian wrote a treatise called "On the Nature of the Church." And that was the first official document arguing that the church can be represented by its clergy. So, the idea of clergy and laity though it always has been a problem, became a severe doctrinal problem and therefore the clergy was kind of an entity unto themselves. They believed the whole church was represented by the clergy alone. They were the only ones who could interpret the Bible. They kept using Latin. The average person was not using it. They totally dominated and before long they were buying up property also, in the name of helping people. So we have the feudal state that developed over the years. And the church literally owned the people and they were slaves to them.

The world was plunged into the darkest period of history it's ever known. It was caveman time again for a thousand years of terrible plagues and pestilences, the filth and the lack of sanitation. But on the church level there was increasing wealth. All the wealth of the world—I know this is a generalized statement, but I believe it could be proven with the facts—all the wealth of the world was being poured into the Vatican. That's why today when you visit the Vatican and you see the treasury rooms and all that, I mean, it's an absolute mind-blower. You

just cannot believe the wealth of the Roman Catholic Church. There is no CEO, Fortune 500 Company, or bank in the world that can equal the wealth of the Vatican.

Now I've told you all of this to give you somewhat of an understanding of why this traditional problem of where the manuscripts are coming from developed. Syria and what we call the Byzantine text. Now Byzantine is a term that refers to the Eastern Church, whose capital was at Constantinople. Whose leader was called a patriarch and they actually split the east and the west in the eleventh century A.D. Just totally split. And the Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox they are all part of that tradition, the Eastern or Byzantine. They are Greek oriented; they spoke Greek. They are the ones who translated the Bible into various dialects in Russia and Armenian languages and so forth. They are part of what we call the Byzantine tradition and they definitely didn't trust Rome.

Rome has a tendency to be dominated by Latin manuscripts. So the Greek manuscripts that will appear behind that are generally held by the Vatican. Anyway, that's called the Western Tradition. But the Eastern Church with Constantinople, Antioch of Syria, churches all over Turkey, into Russia, into the Caspian and Baltic Sea areas, all of that was known as the Byzantine Text.

Now, there was a third tradition that was developing down in Egypt down in Alexandria. It's an Egyptian tradition. It is encouraged by the church leader named Origen, who was an amazing scholar. It's promoted in modern times by Westcott and Hort's revision of the Greek text. That we'll be talking about. And it's primarily based on two manuscripts, *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus*. And this particular tradition has become the foundation of most English translations in the twentieth century.

Now, why do we have these manuscripts down in Alexandria? It's because the city of Alexandria was one of the three great cities of the Roman Empire—Rome of course, believe it or not, Ephesus, and then Alexandria. This is where the great libraries of the world were. There were other important cities, like Corinth, Troas, Antioch of Syria, etc., but the three great intellectual,

educational centers of the world were Rome, Ephesus, and Alexandria. The libraries of the first century, just so you get an understanding of what we're talking about, this is before printing, this is hand copied works that numbered in the hundreds of thousands—250,000 to 300,000 volumes in these gorgeously built libraries. So they became centers of intellectual leadership. So it's not surprising that around Alexandria there was a tradition developing.

Now the problem with the Alexandrian text and the tradition of this Egyptian educational system is that it was dominated by a lot of heretics. It was dominated by people who did not believe in the tri-unity of God. They denied the deity of Jesus, the whole problem of the Arian controversy. Arius against Athanasius was a problem over the deity of Jesus Christ. A major church council dealt with it. And the text, interestingly, has become the foundation also of the Jehovah Witness Bible. Their Greek text was called the Emphatic Diaglott and pretty well matches *Codex Vaticanus*.

Now one of the things that happened, Christianity became the state religion. Around A.D. 325 is the turning point. It started around 313, but in A.D. 325 we have the Council of Nicea. We have the Emperor Constantine who decides that Christianity is going to be the official religion of the empire. In many ways, that's when Christianity went down the tubes. In one day, thousands of people were forced to convert at the edge of a sword. It was said of Constantine that he saw a vision in the sky, a cross, and he felt he was under divine instruction to turn the whole empire into Christianity. There were forced baptisms and everything.

At the same time Constantine's mother, whose name was Queen Helena, took a little trip to the Holy Land to reinforce all of this and launched building projects which still exist today in the Holy Land. But she did this and as a result it still stands today. It's the biggest problem we have in the Holy Land when you go for a tourist trip. When you want to see what the original sites were, if you go down to Bethlehem, it's the Church of the Nativity. You know it's the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. They are all over the place. This was done by Constantine's mother, Queen Helena.

Now, what is happening as far as the Bible is concerned is very severe. Naturally there are godly leaders who see what's going on and are opposing it. And they are being suppressed by all kinds of means.

In the Byzantine tradition it remained pretty separate and pretty clear of influence politically. That's why many people believe that the Byzantine tradition is more likely to represent the true Greek text than any other tradition.

Now if you have any desire to pursue this, there's a book *Byzantine Text Type* written by Dr. Harry A. Sturz, who is now with the Lord. He was a very close personal friend of mine and the head of the Greek department at Biola University. He also became the general editor of the New King James Version, put out by Thomas Nelson, which used to be an upgrade of the Old King James. Dr. Sturz was one of the most amazing Greek scholars that ever lived because he was a quiet humble man. He never was dogmatic in any way; he just did his work and he was quite a scholar. He loved the Lord with all his heart and I talked to him by the hours on this problem. He was one of the major influences to pull me out of the trap that I was under, for I had been trained in the Westcott-Hort tradition of manuscript evidence. He's the one who began to show me clearly from the manuscripts that this is not a conspiracy but close to it. His book on the Byzantine text is still the number one book on the Byzantine tradition. In it he proves that it in fact represents the original Greek text far more than any other tradition.

Now, I'm not saying he's right or wrong. When you open a Greek text and it says on the front "The Majority Text"...how many of you have seen that already? There's one by Farstad and Hodge, from Dallas Seminary and you can look at the book and you know if you read the introduction and go over the details, you will hear some of this. The Majority Text basically takes all three traditions and they make judgments based on it. And one of the judgments that they make is that the majority of manuscripts would probably favor what was the original text. Now, I can prove to you that is not always true, but pardon the pun, in the majority of cases it's true. The Majority Text in the majority of cases is definitely pointing to what the original text was.

When you buy a Majority Greek Text up there and it has a critical apparatus at the bottom, it is really taking all three traditions. It's trying to take all known manuscripts that have been catalogued on that particular passage and gives you a summary at the bottom. Now, the actual one they choose to put in there when there's a variation, the actual one they put in there favors the majority of manuscripts. Let's suppose you have twenty manuscripts on 1 John 1:1. That is on that particular verse, there are only twenty manuscripts in Greek known on that verse. If fifteen of them read a certain way and five read another way, they will take the reading of the 15. Do you follow? That's why it's called The Majority Greek Text.

The Peshita is Aramaic. The Peshita is an Aramaic translation. Aramaic is a form of Hebrew. It's a derivation of Hebrew. Because there's a big argument over whether Jesus and the disciples spoke Aramaic or Hebrew, many feel that the Peshita might have been the original language of the Bible. That theory is just blown out of the saddle by numerous things that I won't get into here. But the original language is Greek. It was translated into Aramaic and that's the Peshita. There is also Old Syriac that's involved here. I just don't want to complicate where we are now with that. But simply to say it is one of the versions, what we call primary versions into which the Bible was translated.

What's the difference, class, between a primary and a secondary version? The answer is whenever you have a primary version you go directly from Greek into that language. A secondary version is going from another language rather than Greek. For instance, if the English translated Jerome's Latin Vulgate, which many English versions did, then it's a secondary version. It's not primary. If it uses a Greek text like the old King James did, then it's a primary translation. Okay.

The book of Revelation has probably, out of the 5,500 manuscripts, only about 350 fragments. In the controversial text for instance, in Revelation 5:9 about the new song that the elders are singing in heaven, whether they are singing it about themselves—"we've been purchased of God with His blood"—or about those that are on earth that are going to get saved, is the difference between being a pre-tribulationist and a post-tribulationist. That's how serious it is.

So, it's a matter of manuscript evidence. Some manuscripts read "them." Some manuscripts read "us."

Now if these twenty-four elders are singing a song of redemption about themselves, then they aren't angels, which is the number one view of the post-Trib. So you understand, if they are singing a song about themselves, they are representing the church of Jesus Christ in heaven all during the Tribulation period, which makes you a "pre-tribber." So, many manuscripts read "them or thus." In fact you'll see a number of NIV, New American and all of that saying in the margin, "most ancient authorities agree with this," Which is a flat out lie. Why? Because there are only twenty-four Greek manuscripts on [Revelation 5:9](#) that we know are in existence—twenty-three of them read "us." The only one that doesn't is *Codex Alexandrinus*, the Egyptian tradition.

Now, why is that? Not because there is deliberate deception on their part, but there may be by those who started this. But the translators, these lower critic guys, like I told you, they are not preachers. They are not going around, you know, yelling and screaming about it. They're paid to do a job. They translate the text that's given to them. The text that is given to them is Westcott and Hort, a Greek text, which by the way doesn't even have the book of Revelation in it.

I told you, class, when we began, you're going to hear a lot of things that are going to blow you away and they're going to upset you. But at the end, you are going to come out very well established and I hope thoroughly convinced of what we have is an authoritative, inerrant, totally reliable Bible. I know it is a little troubling right now. It's going to get more so. I want to warn you about it, but I'm not afraid of it at all. I love this stuff.

Okay. Now we have listed under Byzantine Text, notice it says it is often called Textus Receptus or the "Received Text." It's a Latin word that was put on one of these Greek texts. It actually didn't come until A.D. 1633, the name Textus Receptus. What it means is the text that was universally read and accepted by the churches. Which text was universally read and accepted by the churches, class? This is not a difference of opinion. This is a fact. What text was

universally read and accepted by the churches? What tradition? Was it Byzantine? Was it Western? Was it Alexandria? It was Byzantine.

You see the Western Text became quickly Latin. That's all it was. So what Greek text was used universally by the churches? The answer is Byzantine. Not Western. That's why this whole issue is kind of interesting. When you come to the King James translation, people are always trying to undermine that one. People are always trying to say it was dependent upon a text that is not that reliable. No, excuse me. It's not only reliable, it's the one everybody used!

Is everybody still with me? Unless you were a dedicated Roman Catholic priest, which then of course you didn't use that one at all. Which one are you using? Jerome's Latin Vulgate. Is everybody understanding me? I don't want you to misunderstand here. If you were a Roman Catholic, you weren't paying attention to the Greek text. You were following Jerome's Latin Vulgate—for over a thousand years they did—from the 400s clear to the 1500s, when they had a revision and the Douay-Rheims Version, which is now in use today.

So all of those Protestants, those Reformers, which Greek text did they use? The Byzantine, there wasn't any exception to this. Well how did we get into the mess we are today? Thought you would ask, and we're going to answer it.

My assignment here is to give this class an apologetic understanding of how you have an inerrant, totally reliable Bible. I hope you will walk out of this class with no fear anymore or hesitation whatsoever about what is the word of God.

I said *the Greek text* that was universally read and accepted was the Byzantine. Now, if you put that another way, *the Bible* that was universally read...the answer would be "no." The Bible that's universally read was the Latin Bible, but the Eastern Church wasn't using Latin. Do you understand? What was dividing the east and west and eventually led to the split was not just over the pope. There was the Patriarch in Constantinople and the Pope in Rome. It wasn't just over idols vs. images. You know the Greek Orthodox people have pictures rather than statues. That isn't all the issues; the issue also related to the Bible they were using.

The Orthodox, let's call them "Orthodox" because there's Eastern, there's Armenian, there's Greek, there are all kinds of them. By the way, they are in numbers equal to the Roman Catholics. We sometimes forget that because we are so far removed here in the west from them. But Eastern Orthodox, Romanians, Russian Orthodox etc., you're talking about millions and millions of people who are in that tradition, okay. They look very Catholic, and by the way, you will see them all over Israel also. You go into the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and you'll see every branch represented. But they aren't depending on Latin, they're depending on Greek. That's why, still today in the Eastern church you will see the leaders using Greek very strongly because they believe that that was the original text. And they are correct, it was in Greek.

One of the reasons they stayed with Latin was so that they could control the people. That went clear until the present day. This generation is not so much, but do you know the parents of this Catholic generation, never understood the church services. You see, what you have is ritual. What does ritual or liturgy mean? It means the participant is doing something—kneeling, genuflecting, crossing themselves, lighting candles, taking communion, the Mass—in other words it's performance oriented.

Were people in these Catholic churches actually opening their Bibles and learning it? No. In fact until Vatican II, they really didn't feel they had permission to do that. Only the priest could interpret the Bible for you. Now they still believe that, but they've opened it up now in order to include all the separated brethren, they are fostering Bible study movement. So there are a lot of Catholics in this generation who are studying the Bible, to which I say, "Praise the Lord!"

But my generation, the people I knew that were Catholics, they were astonished to learn that we are actually studying the Bible. "What gives you the right to do that?"—they used to argue with us about it. They didn't understand worship our way at all. It was frightening to them. See, I remember. I was alive and in part of this controversy when they decided to allow English in the Mass. Do you know there were many Catholic people who left their Catholic churches that

went to English to go to the Latin because they thought they were more true to the faith. That controversy kind of died now.

We're talking multitudes of fragments and we've got to put this together. We've got to find out what is the basis of determining the original text. We haven't even gotten to that yet. So where we are so far class, I want you to understand there are three traditions. They are largely traditions because of geography. The lack of communication, of course, forced those traditions to exist.

They become also linguistic, as well as geographic. Why?—because the Western starts using Latin. The multitude of manuscripts is Latin and it becomes the official text of the Western churches. The Eastern churches say, "No, it's Greek." So the division that eventually led to the split in the eleventh century was caused, I believe probably in a primary sense, by language more than anything else. Okay?

Now, class when we look at the tradition of the New Testament manuscripts, please don't misunderstand, I'm not saying every Catholic who is loyal to Latin is therefore not following the correct tradition. On the contrary, the Old Latin literally supports the Greek text behind the King James. So these weren't bad translations at all. The trouble didn't start until the late nineteenth century—didn't start until then at all! And you're going to see the history of that. We're going to walk through it carefully.

Okay, let's take a break.