Origin of Scripture: Review

The last session we talked a little bit about the origin and production of Scripture, mainly discussing what theologians call “inspiration.” We looked at a number of texts that describe and reveal the character of Scripture, what it says about itself, the phenomenon 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 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 in Genesis 1 and 2, was active on 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 and 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 God's spirit was so at work in that process that the product is nothing less than the very word of God.

We said one of the offshoots of that for hermeneutics and interpretation is that the various methods and criticisms that we start to discuss today and even study of the different contributions of different historical persons in hermeneutics and our understanding of the interpretations, are all important because the Bible is nothing less than a human document. But it is 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 detail is “inerrancy.” That is mainly built on 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, et cetera.

**Scribal Transmission of Scripture**

So we talked a little bit then about the origin of Scripture, but I want to talk more 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 author 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 in translation, though if you know Greek and Hebrew we are going to talk about today is something immediately relevant to that point, how do we know that the Bible that we hold accurately reflects what it was the human authors wrote? What was it 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 next session, is translation. That describes how it is that we have access to the Old New Testament in 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 in interpretation is that the Old and New Testament were written in languages that are very different. There is 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 will talk about that.

**Text Criticism**

But the issue that I want to discuss briefly today is 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 state 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? That discipline 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 will see text criticism is a very specialized field. 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 so that you will have a greater appreciation for the Old and New Testament texts 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 scriptures that you have that you interpret and read. So I want to talk a little bit about this thing called text criticism.

What text criticism it deals with the transmission of Scripture starting with inspiration, the fact that the Old and New Testament claim 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 documents that the prophet Isaiah wrote and we don't have the original documents that Paul wrote, or Matthew wrote, or the author of Ruth, or 1st and 2nd 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 will be the original text 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. Often we only have access to the very tips and ends of the branches that are at quite some distance, although integrally related to the trunk of the tree.

So with textual criticism then because we don't have the original manuscripts but we only have copies, usually it's copies of copies of copies. Often several hundred years separated, although the New Testament sometimes is a little bit closer, but often the manuscripts are separated temporally from the original manuscripts. But what text criticism does is it actually works in reverse, it works backwards in attempting to explain how did we get from the original manuscripts to what we have now. 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 manuscript would have looked like. So by looking backward, and we will explain a little bit of the process by working backward using all the evidence and all the manuscripts we do have. By working backwards it's an attempt to reconstruct as closely as possible what the original author most likely would have written. Remember we don't have the original manuscripts, 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 manuscripts— the point of the process of copying and making copies was to make them more available. The assumption is that certain changes, certain errors, certain differences crept in as the manuscripts were copied. So what we have is a group of manuscripts that sometimes differ from each other in certain places. 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 where 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. 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 product it takes a lot of creative thinking. It is an art as well as a science.

The process of copying the manuscript as it—obviously in the days before we had a printing press or now we have computers and printers where 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 the scroll and whatever instruments they used to write throughout the centuries, and by hand going through the rather
laborious process of copying a text. Often what would happen, and by the way I need to preface my statement, most of my comments again reflect my area of specialty that is with New Testament, actually the Old and New Testament both approach textual criticism in a slightly different manner because they are working with different kinds of evidence, and actually we will see the New Testament is probably more well attested historically as far as the amount of evidence then virtually any other document. As we will see there's close to 6,000 different manuscript witnesses to the New Testament texts. We’ll talk a little bit about that later.

But what would usually happen especially with the New Testament is a couple of things. Number one, if a scribe it was copying a text what would happen is the scribe would have a text or manuscript next to him with, let's say the Gospel of Mark. His sheet or his papyrus sheet or whatever he was copying it onto in his writing material what would happen, the process goes, the scribe would read a group of words or perhaps a line of the text, and then have to hold it in his mind and then divert 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 can take place. As we will see in just a moment author might forget what he wrote, and no doubt if you've ever tried to write like this and copy something you're reading by hand at times you will make mistakes. You might add a word, you might miss out on a word, and we’ll see in just a moment that there are other things that can take place. But the point is as a scribe is copying that manner, going from one manuscript, the one that he has access to, to the writing utensil that he is now recording in, there are different things that could happen. Different errors, different differences, could actually transpire as he's copying. You’ve heard the statement “to error 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 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 said
something or maybe the person reading it might not pronounce 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—very human processes—of copying by hand and by sight, the manuscripts of the New Testament certain differences and certain errors can creep in.

Now one question that we won't spend a lot of time with because 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 the original writers have communicated. Most of the textual changes, especially in the New Testament, 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 an accurate and reliable reflection of what it was the New Testament authors and the Old Testament authors wrote.

**Observations on Textual Criticism**

Let me make just a handful of observations related to textual criticism, and again, most of my comments are geared towards the New Testament. First of all, we have 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 materials when it comes to the different New Testament manuscripts. We said there are close to 6000 different pieces of manuscript. Now let it be said not all of them are on the same level. Sometimes you have some manuscripts that have virtually the entire New Testament, and 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, and its quality. But the point is that there is an embarrassment of riches to work with and that can be both a blessing and a curse. 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. The point is there is a surplus or embarrassment of evidence when it comes to the New Testament text, more than just about any other historical document. So 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.

**Terms of Textual Criticism**

The second thing is that it's important for you to understand some important terms when it comes to textual criticism again just so when you're reading discussions of text criticism or hermeneutical textbooks or whatever, you'll be able to follow what what's going on. The first one obviously would be the word “manuscript.” “Manuscript” as the name implies is actually a hand written document then, or a hand written scroll, or we will look at the different kind of writing materials, but a hand written 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. A manuscript is simply a hand written document or part of a document or fragment or whatever, that attests to the New Testament or part of the New Testament whether the 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, or wherever they differ where one manuscript differs from another. Often it's just a word, sometimes it's a spelling difference, sometimes it may be a group of words or something larger. We will talk a
little bit about the Gospel of Mark had a couple different endings attached to it. 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. It might have a different word or missing a word or whatever that's a variant. It's out of all those variants that the text critics start to determine which one of them, when you compare all of the texts probably reflects exactly what it was that Paul wrote or Isaiah wrote or whoever the authors of First and Second Kings or Genesis.

Another term that you need to be familiar with is “papyrus.” Papyrus was very early writing surface. A papyrus was a sheet that was constructed by using strips of a papyrus plant found in Egypt, and by drying them out and gluing them together they basically would form a sheet or page that was a very early means of writing or recording something. So you need to know what a papyrus is.

Two other terms related to that that you will need to know is a “scroll.” A scroll was again a very early form of writing technique. What it was is you took several papyrus sheets and basically glued them together, and they could be rolled up that was a scroll. Another one is “codex.” You need to understand what codex is as well. A codex was where sheets were bound together in book form, much like the very early form of putting a book together and so instead of attaching the sheets and rolling them up they just bound them together sort of in book form and that was a codex. These are simply different types of manuscripts that we have, that we have available and have access to.

A few other terms you need to be aware of one that probably is obvious but still needs to be mentioned is a “scribe.” Scribes would simply be those who copied and made copies of the New Testament text and Old Testament text. A couple of other words that you need to understand is “scribal tendency,” you will often see that word in discussions of textual criticism. Scribal tendency just refers to the types of things a scribe would do usually. How scribes recorded or copied a document was that they would read a document have to hold that, what they just read, in their mind and then transfer to their page and copied it down. There are certain tendencies that we will talk a little bit about
later, certain tendencies might dictate what happened when that text was copied. Again a
scribe could forget something or a scribe could intentionally 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 just copied the Gospel of Matthew the week before and now he is
working on Mark and there seems to be a difference, he might try to harmonize it and
make the two Gospels sound like each other. So there are certain tenancies as a scribe
was copying or as a scribe was listening to a text read in recording there are certain
tendencies or certain things a scribe might do. We will talk a little bit more about those.

The last two, and there are 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 “uncial.” That is a
description of a type of manuscript. And Uncial 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 uncial manuscript was one that
basically was written in all capital letters. Most of the New Testament documents
probably would have been written in uncial script, that is, the writer would have written
in all capital letters in Greek. There would have been no spaces between words, unlike
most of our languages today, where we put space between words so it’s easy to
determine. Uncial 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 uncial manuscript. Much later on, several centuries later, many of the
manuscripts are what is called “minuscule.” That is the last term I want to introduce you
to. Miniscule, that was more of a cursive type of writing that developed latter on when
words began 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 uncial and miniscule script types of
manuscripts. Those are terms you will often see when you are reading discussions or
listening to discussions of text criticism. But those are just ways of describing the types
of evidence the text critics work with to try to reconstruct, as accurately as possible and
as closely as possible, the form of the original manuscript that the New and Old Testament authors would have produced.

**Other Text Critical Sources**

So, first there is an embarrassment of evidence when it comes to 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 are uncial manuscripts in the capital letters with no division between words, or later on more of the cursive type miniscule scripts. Some of our—a lot of our manuscript evidence is in the form of actual copies in Greek of the New Testament text. And we said sometimes those are very fragmented, a piece of a section in the New Testament and other times it’s an entire book or part of a book or several books or sometimes virtually the entire New Testament. A lot of our manuscripts consist of actual copied New Testament texts. Also we have examples from the early church fathers especially from the third and fourth centuries where the early church fathers, or 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 the 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 the constructing or 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 the other peoples speaking other languages, we have the very early translations of the New Testament in languages like Syriac or Latin and
some other languages and those translations also help provide evidence for 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 and the original text.

The fourth thing to say is that all the evidence of all the manuscripts that we have available is— New Testament text critics have tried to 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” refers 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. There are manuscripts that seem to have a genealogical relationship to each other. They are manuscripts that seemed to come from a common parent or common source. For example, I will just mention or describe briefly two of the families the text critics seem to think existed seem that they can classify the manuscripts into. One of the more well known is called the Alexandrian family. The Alexandrian family describes a group of manuscripts that seem to have a common lineage that goes back to the manuscript copied in Alexandria Egypt, hence the Alexandrian family of manuscript. That family of manuscripts is thought to be of more high-quality. It's thought to have less changes and less harmonization in an attempt to smooth the text out. It often seems to reflect older readings. So, most text critics think that the Alexandrian type texts are of very high quality and very important in trying to reconstruct the original New Testament text.

Another type of family is called the Western manuscript family. But the third type that I want to just discuss very briefly is called “the Byzantine.” Most of our New Testament Greek manuscripts fall into this category. It's much later, it seems to be a later manuscript family that arose much later than the Alexandrian. It's often characterized by
attempts to smooth the text which is where 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 seems to be important though often not quite as important sometimes as the Alexandrian, but it still provides evidence for possibilities that these manuscripts might contain the original reading of the New Testament text. It's important to understand text critics though don't simply help 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 then the 50 is right. It's not simply counting the manuscripts but it's taking all the evidence you'll see in a moment, and weighing it up to try to figure out what most likely did Paul, Luke or Matthew or for the Old Testament Isaiah or the Psalmist, what most likely did they write? So again the scholars out of all the manuscripts think they can divide them into different families which seem to have a similar relationship with all the manuscripts in that group. They seem to have a similar relationship to each other have similar types of readings and so belong to a common family.

**External and Internal Evidence**

The 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. The external evidence would refer to things like the date of all these manuscripts and what family they belong to. We just looked at Alexandrian, Byzantine, or Western. So they look at the evidence as far as what family do these manuscripts belong to, what's the date of these manuscripts, and are they very early are the much later? Just because one is early and one is late that does not automatically mean one is correct and one is not. It's just part of the evidence that they take into consideration.

The geographical distribution, whether a certain reading in one manuscript seems to be tied to one location as opposed to a variant reading that maybe spread widely geographically showing up in several geographical locations. There are a number of other
factors as well that are taken into consideration like scribal tendencies. What is scribes likely to do as he's copying or as he is listening to the text read? All of that is what is called a external evidence. It's all taken into consideration when trying to determine what most likely did the Old or New Testament author write.

The other one is called internal evidence, internal evidence refers to the evidence in the text itself, that is, what do we know about the author's style, what do we know about his grammar and the words he used, and 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 theological tendencies et cetera and using that internal evidence in the text self.

The text critics established what most likely was the original text, so for example someone again when you look at all the manuscripts there some variance between them. The correct one may be the one that would conform to Paul's style, 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, his theology and his writing elsewhere. So that is internal evidence. Again some text critics prefer one over the other. Some would give a nod to internal evidence when deciding which reading was correct, and some would focus more on the external evidence. Others would again try to weigh both of them taking both of them into consideration as much as possible. Some might prefer to focus on one family. For example, some text critics have given priority to the Alexandrian family, remember we talked about the different manuscripts that can be grouped according to families and genealogical relationship. Some text critics would give priority to the Alexandrian text alleging any readings found in Alexandrian type manuscripts are probably the original. Other text critics might give preference to the Byzantine and everything else being equal, a reading found in the Byzantine manuscripts would be the one preferred.
Eclectic Method of Text Criticism

One method of text criticism that seems to have caught on and most I think would agree with is what is called the an eclectic method. Eclectic or the reasoned eclectic system 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 anyone but weighing all the evidence, the internal and external, the date of the manuscript, and the family it belongs to. Again, if you're looking at the other manuscripts and in one verse there are some variants in the manuscript weighing all the evidence the date, the distribution, whether it's Byzantine or Alexandrian, looking at scribal tenancies, internally looking at the authors style, his vocabulary, and his grammar et cetera; taking all of that into consideration one tries to make the most reasoned reconstruction possible that most likely reflects exactly what the original author wrote. In the New Testament at least there are two new Greek texts that have emerged as the common texts that most New Testament professors and students use. One of them is the United Bible Society, the UBS fourth edition has just come out and by the way most manuscripts of the Greek New Testaments that we have they usually continued to be edited and sometimes as we discover new ways of looking at text problems it's an ongoing trying to again reconstruct as closely as possible what the original manuscript looked like. But one of the common edited manuscripts is the United Bible Society, the 4th edition.

The other one is what is known as the Nestle-Aland, those two names Nestle-Aland reflect the primary editors. The Nestle-Aland text is in its 27th edition. Those are two very common, and today the most prominent New Testament texts that have been produced based on text criticism. So again taking all the manuscript evidence and weighing all the probabilities et cetera, these are the texts that have been produced that reflect and attempt to most closely represent what it was that the New Testament authors actually wrote.
**Scribal Changes**

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 a scribe has a manuscript that he is copying from and as he is copying it, he must read a line, or however much a scribe can 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. The other possibility was that 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 the scribe is producing. For example, and to back up a little bit these changes are of two types, some changes or variants are accidental. These variants or mistakes introduced are accidental, that is, they occur unintentionally and we will 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 his 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, might try to harmonize one gospel with the other. Again if the scribe is coping, 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 that same. There can’t be any discrepancy or difference so a scribe might intentionally try to harmonize, especially with the Gospels. Again, if the scribe has perhaps just copied Matthew or knows of Matthew and as he is now copying Mark or Luke he might intentionally try to make them conform to each other.

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 the text the way it’s worded
might seem to call into question something that the conflicts with the scribe’s theological beliefs. So the scribe might change it or update it to reflect accurate theology or something like that.

So those are examples of intentional changes and the result is the scribe, and this is important, is trying to improve the texts in some way, he is trying to clarify it, harmonize it, remove conflicts or inconsistencies as he sees them, make it conform to the theology of the church and standard theological belief and try to remove any inconsistencies. Most intentional changes are attempts to improve the text, but there is the other type of change that is unintentional. Those changes that are introduced by the scribe unintentionally and the scribe is not trying to improve the manuscript but these are changes that are introduced accidentally.

Again, most of the scribes read the manuscript and then transferred that verse to record it in another manuscript, or as the scribe is listening to the text read and was recording it, certain intentional changes can arise. For example, a scribe might loose his place, you might have done this before if you are reading and especially if you get tired. If they are really tired and you are reading a paragraph and you’ve experienced reading the same line over again, scribes often got tired when they were reading and recording manuscripts so at times they may, especially if they are going from one manuscript to the other, read the line and record it and when go back and read the same line again, so they will record it a second time. Another common one is if they accidentally skip a line or two so as they reading the manuscript they record a line and when they go back they may not come back to the same spot. They may accidentally skip a line especially if the line begins in the same way as the line before it. But the point is they may accidentally skip a line when they are going back and forth between the manuscript they are copying and the new manuscript they are producing. So certain changes like that that are unintentional are reflected in the new manuscript the scribe has produced. Then you can see what happens if someone uses that manuscript and copies it. That same mistake may get perpetrated in subsequent manuscripts and as a branch in a tree as it branches out, other manuscripts
might pick up the same mistakes that were unintentional changes that the scribe was making.

Another source of variants in the manuscripts is through hearing or errors of hearing. 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 or even a combination of vowels begin to be pronounced similarly or certain words may be pronounced the same way as well. So as a 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 when someone says the “bored,” is that “bored” that “I am bored out of my mind” or is it "board" such as “a board,” or even then the word “board” itself can have several connotations. So even in English you know 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 being read, how is he going to spell that? There may be different ways of spelling what he is just heard and presumably they did not have the luxury of raising their hand asking how that was spelled or something like that. So some of the changes in the manuscript and some of the differences between manuscripts may be the result of the different sounds of certain Greek words.

Another example of a variant might come from an error in sight. An English example of this, one way of doing that would be just reversing a couple of letters. For example, that can make a big difference in the meaning of the word, look at the difference between the English word “dog” and “God.” By simply reversing two letters that makes a quite a difference in the meaning of the word and the same was true and Greek. Often as he's going from one to the other he might accidentally see— reading a word reversed, two of the letters, causing a very different meaning. Again, scribes got
tired and some of them probably had bad eyesight or they may have woken up with the bad attitude that day or not had a good night’s sleep. All of that is going affect their ability to accurately copy the text and so sometimes errors of sight when they are copying manuscripts might cause them to write a word again reverse letters or something like that can produce a change in the manuscript.

A final one, and this is 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 for scribes in the margins to make notes. Sometimes it might be a rather serious note about the text sometimes it might be a something else like “my hands are cold” or “I'm running out of ink,” or “my wife burnt the toast today” or something like that may be written in the margin. 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 an note the original scribe might have written. So again when scribes write little notations in the margins once in a while if that manuscript later on gets copied by someone else those little notes in the margin might actually end up in the text. So, again, my understanding of what's going on is text critics are allowed to kind of remove that and realize that probably a scribe inserted that himself.

So 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 of these variants try to say, can I explain some of these changes based on unintentional or intentional changes made by scribe, and if I can do that then I can start to narrow down what most likely then was it that Paul, Luke or Matthew wrote.

**Principles of Text Criticism**

Let me say one final thing about text criticism then we will just look at a couple of examples very briefly. Let me give you three principles that text critics often operate with. What principles or what kind of standards did they use, what principles inform the
decisions they make? One of them is that usually when you start, when you compare all the readings— so again if you are a text critic who looks at Mark 1:1 and all the manuscripts there are 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 and sometimes there's more than one. Sometimes it’s very obvious and other times it's a little more difficult to determine but if a scribe is working with a verse and out of all the manuscripts there are some variants some differences the scribe or 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. The reason for that is that a scribe is more likely to introduce an improvement because the scribe is more likely to smooth out, to harmonize, to improve the text then he is to introduce a difficulty with a text. Again these are just principles, they don't always work because a scribe might make a mistake, because of an error in sight or because of skipping a line a scribe might make the text more difficult and in that case the most difficult reading would be not correct. But generally a scribe is more likely to improve a text to smooth out what he perceives as an inconsistency or theological problems or and roughness in the text tending to make it smooth. So with that basis of most text critics think that, everything else being equal, the more difficult of all the readings or the harder of the readings will probably be the correct one.

A second principle is the shortest reading is most likely to be the correct one. So, out of all of the various differences the one that is the shortest will probably be the correct one. Again that 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 produced in a shorter text. So this is— these are not hard and fast rules, they are principles that are usually followed
and everything else being equal the shorter reading will be the correct one because a scribe is more likely to expand and elaborate and smooth out.

A third one is that as usually followed is when you have manuscripts with different readings, the reading that can best to explain the origin of the others is probably going to be the correct reading. If you can explain the origin of all the other readings based on one of them it's probably the correct reading. One example is a lot of times what you find taking place is if a scribe has more than one manuscript or he knows of more than one reading the easiest way might be to combine them all and so sometimes you'll have manuscripts that have several readings and 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 is correct he just put them all in there and combined them all together. So, that's one way to describe how some of these readings might have 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 one of them 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 the text.

**Examples of text critical texts in the New Testament**

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 differences in the words. Again I don't want you to think, or leave you with the impression that if you have a manuscript on Mark and all the other manuscripts will diverge from it then almost every aspect a whole manuscript is different. It's often just differences in wording here and there and but we will see you sometimes the difference is more substantial. One example of a very easy one that we have already mentioned comes from Luke 1:1-4 in 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 Theophilis may know of the certainty about these things.” There are a couple of later manuscripts that added the words when...
Luke says “it seems 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 it seemed good to the Holy Spirit” elsewhere. So most likely it was added because these are two later manuscripts and there's 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 story 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 this account.”

Another interesting example is Revelation 21:3 which in John's new Jerusalem vision, John now is actually quoting the Old Testament covenant formula. 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 the men (or with people) and he will live with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.” If you recall from the Old Testament you'll know that that is 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 the Ezekiel 37 version of that though it's found in Jeremiah, Zechariah, and a number of Old Testament texts. Leviticus 26 is a full expression of the covenant formula. What is interesting is that there are two types of manuscripts for Revelation 21:3. 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 from Revelations 21 where we have, “they will be my people” singular, others have “they will be my peoples” plural.

The question is which one is the correct reading? What did John most likely write? When you look at the manuscripts themselves like external evidence as far as the date,
and the number of manuscripts, and the Byzantine, Alexandrian families, etc. it's very difficult to arrive at a certain conclusion so that other types of evidence are usually brought into consideration. For example, is it more likely that a scribe would write “peoples” plural, or that a scribe would write “people” singular. One important piece of evidence is it's interesting that John frequently universalize his Old Testament texts, Old Testament texts referred specifically to the nation of Israel. Now John takes it to apply to people more generally, including Gentiles. John has that phrase over and over again throughout Revelation, “people from every tribe and every tongue and language, 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 the Israelites but Gentiles, people from every tribe and language and tongue and nation now belong to the people of God plural. 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 have singular “people.” So here’s an example where John probably originally wrote “peoples” plural, and later a scribe somewhere along the line may have change it back to the singular to make it sound more like the Old Testament formula.

Another example, an intriguing example, is found in Romans 5:1. In Romans 5:1 Paul begins a new section by demonstrating sort of the results or implications of justification by faith that he has argued for in the first four chapters. So, based on that fact that one is justified by faith in Jesus Christ starting in verse 5, “therefore, since we have been justified,” chapters 1-4 “through faith, we have peace with God.” Now that seems to be a statement of what is true and what we indeed posses by virtue of being justified, we have been justified by faith: therefore we currently, we presently, have a 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 or 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. 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 have been justified. The difference is one letter in Greek, it’s the same word “we have,” or it’s the same word “to have” or that we translate “to have” in English. But the difference is, is this word to be translated “we have” as an assertion, a statement 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 pronounced the same way.

Remember we said if a scribe is sitting there listening to the text read, sometimes when a letter is pronounced the same way, what is 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. Does everyone see that if the author were to use the Greek words, one of them would be *exomen* which would be “we have,” the other would be *exōmen*, you see the difference is just one letter, *exōmen* would be “we should have” or “let us have” as opposed to *exomen* which would be “we have,” as an assertion. The problem is the o and the ō were pronounced the same. So if you have someone reading that says “exomen” 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” as a statement or assertion. Most commentaries of Romans I have read are all convinced that most likely the translation is “we have,” it’s an assertions or statement that 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 identically 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.
The final example is a much more significant one as far as the length. Most of what we've looked at so far has been simply—for example, Luke 1, a couple of words, the other two were just the spellings. Literally both the other two were just one letter and instances of the difference between the one letter. But I want to look at one briefly that is a little more lengthy and that is the ending of Mark chapter 16. And again 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 and this was so substantial that almost every English translation I've ever looked at includes a mention of this. If you look at most English manuscripts they will 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: 9 – 20.” So if you look at most of your Bibles, Mark 16, the very last chapter of Mark goes all the way to verse 20. But, every English translation I've seen has some little note there in a text or maybe in the footnote that says, “some early manuscripts or other witnesses do not have verses 9 through 16.” There actually was another—some English Bibles also have another possible ending that's a lot shorter and they will have a similar note. This ending sometimes will be in a footnote, and again they will 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 chapters 16 that goes only through verse 8: the other version of Mark has an ending such as the verses 9 to 20. 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 has Jesus telling his disciples: “go into the world and preach this gospel of this good news to all of creation” et cetera, et cetera. So you have this long ending that again my English Bibles 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 eight? A lot of manuscripts have Mark 16:8 and in 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 of the details on this but, is it possible that Mark did indeed intend to end at verse 8? I will read it here is how Mark 16:8 ends. 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 verse 8. And so you may wonder, what kind of way is that to end the Gospel with the women trembling of fear and being afraid to go tell anybody? That's not how a Gospel ends especially when you read Matthew, Luke and John. But perhaps that's how the ancient scribe thought, and perhaps verses 9 through 20 were some ancient scribe’s attempt to construct a proper ending for the Gospel. Many manuscripts then picked up on that and included verses 9 through 20. But is it possible that Mark actually ended at verse 8? I think there are good reasons even theological reasons and contextual reasons with Mark that suggest that that's maybe where it ended. Some suggest that actually verse 8 of Mark himself wrote more after verse 8 and somehow that got lost, cut off, or burned off a manuscript or something. Somehow that got lost and later on a scribe included verses 9 through 20. But is it possible that Mark intended to end at verse eight and we won't go into why that might be but perhaps 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, Luke and John even some of these verses 9 through 20 resemble, especially 15 and 16, very closely 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 they may not be the original ending that Mark himself wrote.

**Conclusion**

So In conclusion to textual criticism, textual criticism is meant to take into consideration all the evidence possible, external and internal. Externally the date of the manuscripts, the families that they belong to, the distribution of the manuscript, whether the 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.
Also one should look at the date of the manuscript and the scribal tendencies. Then internally looking at the authors style, the vocabulary, grammar, elsewhere in the book where the author of other documents such as Paul, looking at his theology, and style in 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 of the manuscript evidence, using all the criteria and information working backwards to reconstruct as accurately and as closely as possible what most likely did the author of Mark, Matthew, Romans, Jeremiah, Isaiah or Genesis, did they write. Remember much like the 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 how, most likely, the original manuscript read. Out of all of the manuscripts and 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 would like to add, it must be said that nothing important is at stake 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 the original text said, and we operate every day with high degrees of probability. It allows us to reconstruct with a very high degree of probability what, most likely, the biblical author originally wrote. When we look at the manuscripts the evidence text criticism allows us to work back and reconstruct to hide a degree of probability what it was that the author wrote so that we can have confidence in the text that we have and that we have something that is an accurate object of interpretation that provides a basis for hermeneutical thinking, reflection, interpretation, and application of the Bible as the Word of God.

So that is the first stage of the process of transmission that will lead us into discussing hermeneutics in more detail the process of transmission from inspiration of the original production and origin of the biblical text through all the evidence as the text was...
made available working back and reconstructing through text criticism to a text for the Old and New Testament that is an accurate reflection of the original inspired text.

That now leads us to the second stage of transmission that is based on the reconstruction of the Old and New Testament text: translation of the Greek and Hebrew into a modern language like English. Translation then allows that text to be made available in a variety of languages that we speak so that now we can have an adequate basis for hermeneutics and interpretations. So in our next session we will 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 and what translation should you perhaps utilize in your own hermeneutical endeavors.

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