

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, March 11, 2015 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

ALL ABOUT THE BIBLE
How We Got the Bible – Textual Criticism
2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:19-21

FOR REVIEW

Let's review just a little bit where we have been in our study "All About the Bible." This study is primarily concerned with how we got the Bible, is it reliable and how to get the most out of it. We began our study by looking at what the Bible says about the itself. You know... the claims that the Bible makes about itself. Our two key text for what the Bible claims about itself and the key texts for our study are:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

"¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." - 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV)

2 Peter 1:19-21

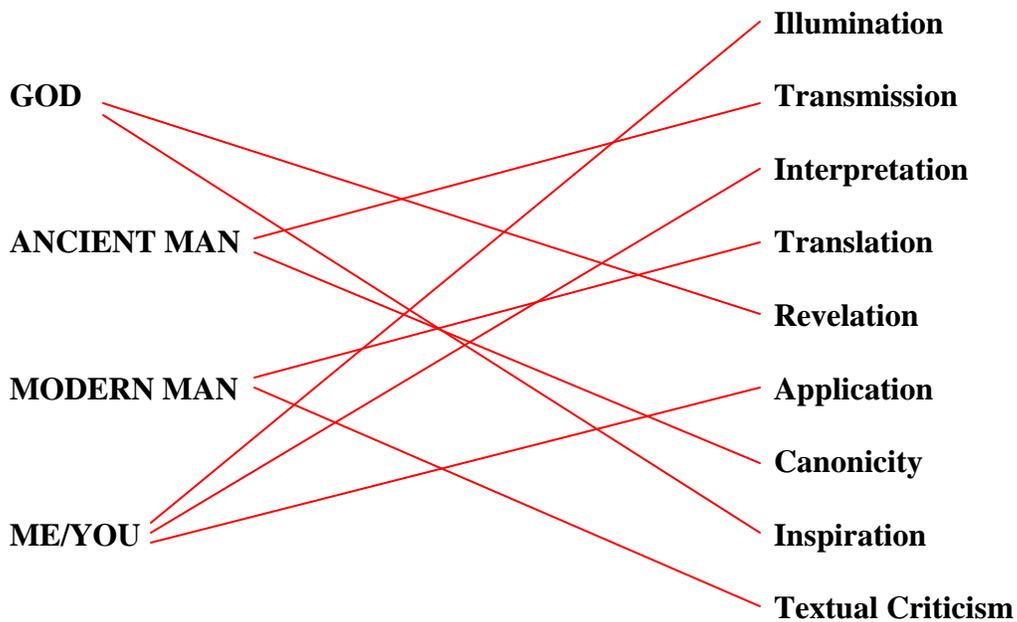
"¹⁹ We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." – 2 Peter 1:19-21 (NIV)

Observation: *Based on these two verses we must affirm that at some point our faith in the claims of the Bible must be relied upon for the ultimate acceptance and believe in the Bible as the Word of God. The Bible claim it and therefore we must choose to either believe it by faith and place the full force of our being on that claim or reject it. From this point the study of how we got the Bible and how it has been preserved by God for us becomes based solely on our understanding of what the Bible says about itself and the external evidences that point to and reinforce those claims. A major point to understand in a study like this is that it may not answer all your questions, may leave you feeling a bit vulnerable about the reliability of the Bible, and may leave you with more questions. That is why faith must be our beginning place in accepting God's Word as itself. With that said there is more external evidence that points to the Bible's claims about itself, its reliability and trustworthiness and authenticity, and the fact that it is the Word of God as it claims... there is more evidence of these things than there is for any other piece of literature or sacred writing every produced by man.*

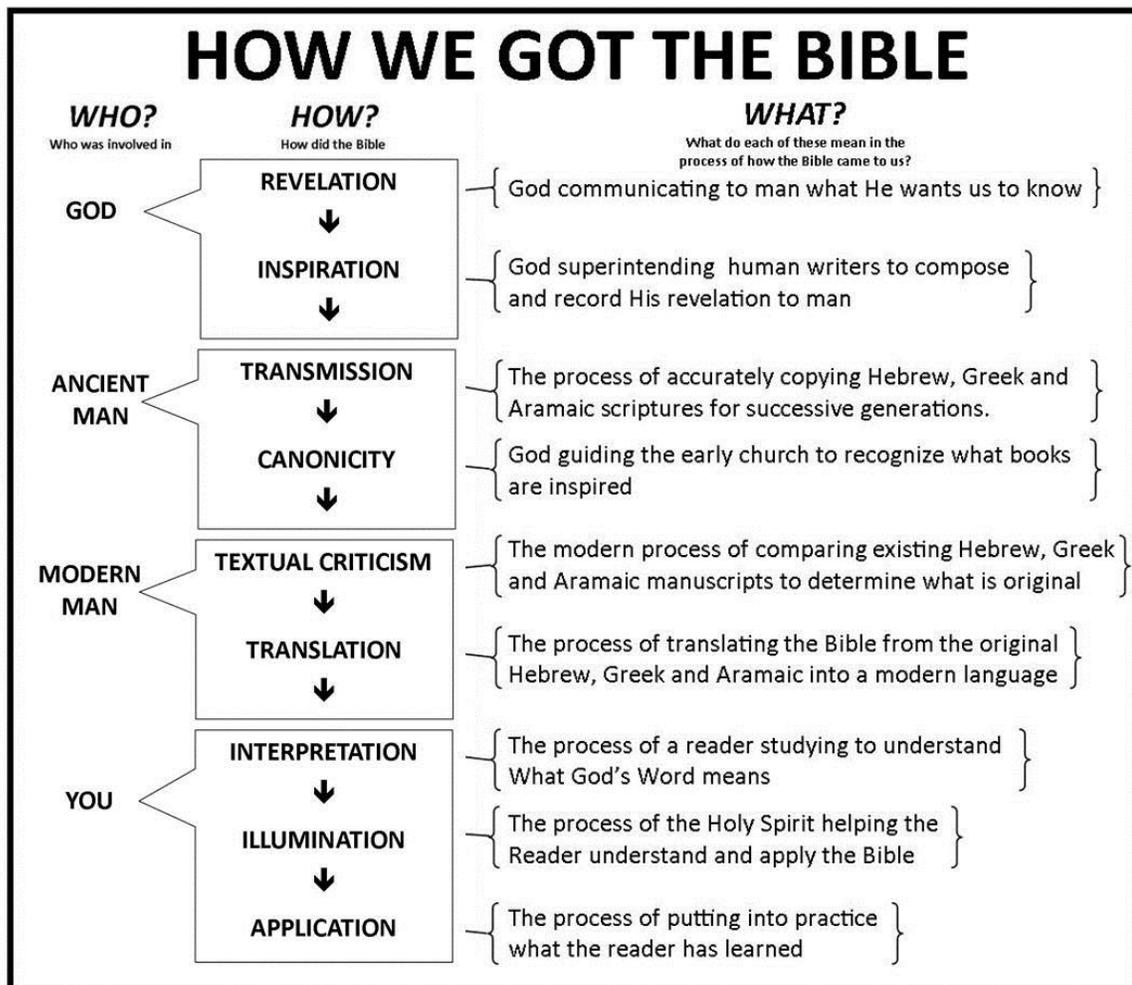
Now we began our study, a couple of weeks ago by looking at a diagram/chart of how the Bible came from God to us. It charted who the Bible came from God to you and I. Try your hand at the following matching quiz to see how much you can remember from our study and the charts we have been looking at. Match the word on the right hand side with the person or persons who were primarily responsible for that part of us receiving God's Word, the Bible... each person/persons listed on the left will have more than one word on the right matching to it based on our chart and the study.

MATCHING QUIZ

Match the person/persons listed in the left hand column with the correct word on the right that is associated with that person/persons involvement in God's Word coming to us. Draw a line from the words on the right to the correct answer on the left. Each person/persons listed on the right will have more than one word associate with them.



Below you will find a diagram/chart detailing the who, how and what of how the Bible came to us.



So up to this point in our study we have looked at God's revelation and inspiration, and we have examined how ancient man transmitted what God revealed and inspired him to write down for us, and then we took a look at how those writing were compiled and collected and determined to be the Word of God, and were recognize as the canon of scripture, the Bible.

This study will take us a step further in our examination of how the Bible that we know and love today came to us by looking into the subject of "*textual criticism.*" Within this topic we may perhaps find answers to some of our toughest questions regarding Scripture, and those of the Bible's sharpest critics.

Questions that Textual Criticism May Help Us Answer:

1. If the "original manuscripts" don't exist, how do we know for certain what they said? – By the science of textual criticism we are able to arrive at the original manuscripts actual words with certainty.

2. **How do we know for certain that the Bible we are reading today hasn't been changed or altered in some way?**
3. **How can we be certain that the original wording of Scripture hasn't been lost through hundreds and thousands of years of translation?**

While this study may not fully develop a complete answer to these questions, it may help you to begin to formulate how one may arrive at those answers, and it may indeed provide some answers. The study of "textual criticism" and how it work, I believe, should bolster and embolden our faith in God's Word, it's divine origin and wording, and it's truth and relevance to speak to our lives.

DEFINING TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Just based on a first glance at the words, "textual criticism," what do you think it means? Place a check by the definition below that you think best defines textual criticism.

- Looking with critical and discerning eye at text to determine if it is of value
- A method of research comparing writings to determine what was really being said
- Being critical of text written
- The practice of determining by critic if something written is really what it claims to be
- A written or textual critique of someone or something

A Definition of Textual Criticism: *Textual criticism is a method used to determine what the original manuscripts of the Bible said.*

What is "textual criticism"? Simply stated, textual criticism is a method used to determine what the original manuscripts of the Bible said. There are several very important parts to that definition that help us to understand exactly what textual criticism does and why it's important.

3 Important Parts to the Definition of Textual Criticism:

1. **The problem... "Original Manuscripts"** - Here is the definition again of textual criticism, "Textual criticism is a method used to determine what the original manuscripts of the Bible said." Therein lies the problem that textual criticism seeks to solve. The original manuscripts of the Bible are either lost, hidden, or no longer in existence. We don't have them and that is the problem that textual criticism seeks to solve.
2. **The process... "Determine"** - Here is the definition again of textual criticism, "*Textual criticism is a method used to determine what the original manuscripts of the Bible said.*" What we do have is tens of thousands of copies of those original manuscripts dating from the 1st to the 15th centuries A.D. (for the New Testament) and dating from the 4th century B.C. to the 15th century A.D. (for the Old Testament). In these manuscripts, there are many minor and a few somewhat major differences. Textual criticism takes us through a process of

“determining” from all those copies and fragments what the original text actually said with assurance or certainty.

3. **The procedure... “Method”** – To do this there is a method, and that method is called “textual criticism.” Many actually refer to “textual criticism” as a science of research. It is indeed a very technical research science that takes place to determine with certainty what the original text of the Bible said. This method called “textual criticism” is very important because it helps us to know that what we have in the Bible today is actually what it claim to be... the actual inspired Word of God as He revealed it to us.

METHODS OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM

What exactly does this method of “textual criticism” look like? How is it done? Here is what we are going to do to help us begin to develop an understanding of how textual criticism works. I am going to give you the three (3) methods of textual criticism with a brief description of each. Then we are going to take an actual vote to see which method you actually feel makes the most sense and would most help us arrive at what the original manuscript of the Bible said. Then we will take a deeper look at what method of textual criticism is actually used for what translation and which one today is considered the most reliable for helping us arrive at the original manuscript.

3 Methods of Textual Criticism: There are three primary methods to textual criticism...

1. **The Textus Receptus** - The first is called the Textus Receptus. The Textus Receptus is more than just a method of textual criticism. It was a manuscript of the Bible that was compiled by a man named Erasmus in the 1500s A.D. He took the limited number of manuscripts he had access to and compiled them into what eventually became known as the Textus Receptus. *The Textus Receptus is the textual basis behind the King James Version and New King James Version.*
2. **The Majority Text Method** - A second method is known as the Majority Text. The Majority Text takes all of the manuscripts that are available today, compares the differences, and chooses the most likely correct reading based on which reading occurs the most. For example, if 748 manuscripts read "he said" and 1429 manuscripts read "they said" - the Majority Text will go with "they said" as the most likely original reading. *There are no major Bible translations that are based on the Majority Text.*
3. **The Critical/Eclectic Text Method** - The third method is known as the critical or eclectic method. The eclectic method takes an “eclectic” approach and involves considering external and internal evidences for determining the most likely original text. External evidence makes us ask these questions: in how many manuscripts does the reading occur? what are the dates for these manuscripts? in what region of the world were these manuscripts found? Internal evidence prompts these questions: what could have caused these varying readings? which reading can possibly explain the origin of the other readings? *The New International Version, New American Standard, New Living Translation, and most other Bible translations use the Eclectic Text.*

Okay! You ready? Let’s take our vote. Which one of these methods do you think is the best method for arriving at what the original manuscript of the Bible said? You can only vote for one? We will name each one and you will hold up your hand for your pick:

<u>Number</u>	<u>Method</u>	<u>Description</u>
[]	Textus Receptus	<i>Erasmus, 1500 AD, limited manuscripts</i>
[]	The Majority Text	<i>Majority rules! Not used at all!</i>
[]	The Critical/Eclectic Text	<i>Internal and external data, best method</i>

How have these methods affected our Bible today? Which method was used in translating the Bible I read? These methods actually begin to help us formulate different translations that we have today and how they work and what they say?

3 Methods of Textual Criticism and the Bible Translations Based in Them:

- 1. Textus Receptus** – The King James Version and the New King James Version which is simply a modernized translation based off of the King James Version both use the Textus Receptus as its method of textual criticism to determine what the original manuscripts said. *What do you think might be the problem with this?*
- 2. The Majority Text Method** – When the methods are first described to someone, the person typically picks the Majority Text as the method that should be used. It is essentially the "majority rules" and the "democratic" method, and it seems on the surface to make the most sense to the most people because if most of the manuscripts and fragments say it one way surely that must be what it said. Right? However, there are not translations of the Bible based on this method... none! *Why do you think that might be the case?*
- 3. The Critical/Eclectic Text Method** – This is considered the most reliable and surest method of textual criticism and the one that virtually all of our “modern” translations today use... the New International Version, the New American Standard Bible, the English Standard Version, the New Living Translation.

THE DEBATE OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Which method is most accurate? That is where the debate begins. When the methods are first described to someone, the person typically picks the Majority Text as the method that should be used. It is essentially the "majority rules" and the "democratic" method. However, there are important issues to consider there.

3 Issues to Consider in the Debate of Textual Criticism: Remember the debate is which method is most accurate? Obviously by looking at the methods translators have used you can begin to formulate an answer to that question, but why? Why do they choose the method they do?

- 1. Language Issue** – Language played a role here. In the first few centuries of the church, the vast majority of Christians spoke and wrote in Greek. Starting in the 4th century A.D., Latin began to become the most common language, especially in the church. Starting with the Latin Vulgate, the New Testament began to be copied in Latin instead of Greek. However, in the eastern Christian world, Greek continued to be the dominant language of the church for over 1000 more years. So we have some manuscripts in Greek and some in Latin. Translations from one language to another are already taking place... from Hebrew to Greek to Latin.
- 2. Regional Issue** – Where did the text come from? There is a regional issue to consider here. As a result of the above language issues going on, the vast majority of Greek manuscripts are from the eastern / Byzantine region. These Byzantine manuscripts are all very similar to each

other. They likely all originated in the same few Greek manuscripts. While being very similar to each other, the Byzantine manuscripts have numerous differences with the manuscripts found in the western and central regions of the church where the story of Scripture had its origins and there the language was now Latin as reflected in many early manuscripts and some Greek.

3. **Manuscript Issue** – So, it essentially boils down to this: if you started with three manuscripts, one was copied 100 times, another was copied 200 times, and the third was copied 5000 times, which group is going to have the majority rule? The third group, of course. However, the third group is no more likely to have the original reading than the first or second group. It only has more copies. The critical / eclectic method of textual criticism gives equal "weight" to the manuscripts from different regions, despite the manuscripts from the East having the overwhelming majority.

A LOOK AT THE CRITICAL/ELECTIC METHOD OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM

How does the critical / eclectic method work in practice? Let's look at a scriptural example of how this has entered into our own Bible translations.

1. If you compare John 5:1-9 in the King James Version (Textus Receptus) and the New International Version (Critical Text), you will notice that verse 4 is missing from the NIV.
2. In the KJV, John 5:4 reads, *"For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had."* Why is this verse missing from the NIV (and the other Bible translations which use the Critical Text)?
3. The eclectic method works as follows:
 - (1) The text of John 5:4 does not occur in most of the oldest manuscripts we now have.
 - (2) The text of John 5:4 occurs in all of the Byzantine manuscripts, but not many of the non-eastern manuscripts which are older.
 - (3) It is more likely that a scribe would add an explanation than it is that a scribe would remove an explanation. John 5:4 makes it more clear why the crippled man wanted to get into the pool. Why would a scribe remove this verse? That does not make sense. It does make sense for that the tradition of why the crippled man wanted to get into the pool would be added. As a result of these concepts, the Critical / Eclectic Text does not include John 5:4. Because using the oldest manuscripts that don't include it we can see that it was later added for the purpose of clarity, but was not originally there.

SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS ON TEXTUAL CRITICISM

As you may see, the issue of which method of textual criticism is best at arriving at the actual wording of the original manuscript of the Bible is a complicated and diverse one. While there isn't much debate about the usefulness of the majority text method actually helping us accurately arrive at the original autographs of scripture, the other two are hotly debated and defended. Given this propensity for division and discord in the debate, there are a few important truths and axioms that should be embraced and remembered by all believers.

3 Important Truths To Be Remembered in the Debate of Textual Criticism:

1. **No matter what method of textual criticism you believe is correct, this is an issue that should be discussed with grace, respect, and kindness.**

2. **Christians can and do disagree on this issue. We can debate the methods, but we should not attack the motivations and character of those with whom we disagree on this issue.**
3. **We all have the same goal—to determine the most likely original wording of the Bible. Some simply have different methods to achieve that goal.**