

## **Text Variations in the Bible**

### **Compiled by Paul R. Blake**

I received the following question from a young brother at FC: "I noticed that there are some scriptures that aren't found in our oldest manuscripts. I am confused. Does this suggest that they are placed in the Bible after the fact? Things like the end of Mark 16 or 1John 5:7, or the woman caught in adultery... it is a bit curious."

The task of copying manuscripts was generally done by scribes and monk copyists who were trained in the arts of writing, proofreading, and bookmaking. However, an important issue with manuscripts is preservation. The earliest New Testament manuscripts were written on papyrus, made from a reed that grew in the Egyptian Nile Delta. This tradition continued into the 8th century. Papyrus becomes brittle and deteriorates with age. With few exceptions, New Testament papyri manuscripts are not complete; many consist only of fragmented pages. Beginning in the 4th century, parchment or vellum began to be a common medium for New Testament manuscripts. It wasn't until the 12th century that paper made from cotton or plant fibers began to gain popularity in Biblical manuscripts. Because the earliest manuscripts are fragmented, they will necessarily be incomplete. Some contemporary textual critics make the assumption that because the earliest manuscripts do not contain certain passages, later manuscripts with those texts are edited or enhanced by the copyists. Occam's Razor (the Principle of Least Hypothesis) simplifies this by acknowledging the fragmented condition of the oldest manuscripts as the reason the oldest manuscripts do not contain all of the text.

None of the original copies of the New Testament books exist today, and the copies of existing manuscripts vary a small amount from one another. The textual critic seeks to determine from the divergent copies which texts should be regarded as conforming the closest to the original intent. In textual criticism, eclecticism is the practice of examining a wide number of texts and selecting the one that seems most consistent with the rest of the text. The result of the process is a text with readings drawn from many sources. Experienced critics rely on both external and internal evidence with the oldest manuscripts favored above newer ones. Modern translations (NKJV, et al) note these variations. But it is not a logical necessity to assume that these variations constitute additions to the original, but rather that the fragmented condition of the oldest documents make it necessary for contemporary critics to depend on later manuscripts for the complete text.

What most beginner critics overlook is the vast quantity of manuscripts available for authentication. There are 23,000 manuscripts, codices, papyri, and fragments of documents (with more being found every year) of the Biblical documents, some of which date back to the 2nd century AD. That is 1000 times more than any other writing from the same period. In examining all of these documents and fragments, scholars have determined that there is less than one half of one percent of variation among them all, and that these variations do not impact any significant doctrine. Only the most determined skeptics believe that we cannot trust the present scriptures as genuine and complete. A person has to really want to disbelieve the Bible to dismiss all of the evidence for its authenticity and accuracy.

### **Burdens and Bridges**

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-4).

"Going down some old cement steps, I noticed an ant carrying a leaf on its back. The leaf was many times bigger than the ant. Then the ant came to a big crack in the cement that it couldn't cross. The ant stopped a moment. I wondered if the ant would turn back or proceed into

the crack without the leaf. Instead, the ant put the leaf across the crack and then crossed the crack by walking across the leaf. On the other side, the ant picked up the leaf and continued on its journey. It made me think that the burdens of today will be the bridges by which we will be able to cross the hard places in life in the future" (Bernabe Spivey). There is no school that teaches us better than the school of hard-knocks.

### **Shaping It Here**

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-4).

During the depression a good man lost his job, exhausted his savings, and forfeited his home. His grief was multiplied by the sudden death of his precious wife. The only thing he had left was his faith and it was weakening. One day he was combing the neighborhood looking for work. He stopped to watch some men who were doing some stone work on a church building. One of the men was skillfully chiseling a triangular piece of rock. Not seeing a spot where it would fit, he asked "Where are you going to put that?" The man pointed toward the top of the building and said, "See that little opening up there near the spire? That's where it goes. I'm shaping it down here so it will fit in up there." Tears filled this good man's eyes as he walked away and thought of how the words "Shaping it down here so it will fit in up there" applied to his life and eternity. The blows of hammer and chisel hurt, but hold on to your faith. Keep praying. Keep believing. The Master has to do some shaping of us down here so we'll fit in up there.

### **The Bible vs. GPS**

(Mike Palm)

What do a Bible and a GPS have in common? Put the address of the place you want to go into a GPS and it will give you step by step instructions on how to get there. The Bible is our GPS to heaven. It gives step by step instructions on how to get there.

--Hear (listen to) the word of God (Rom. 10:17; Matt. 7:24-27)

--Believe (Heb. 11:6; Mark 16:15-16)

--Repent (Acts 2:38; 17:30; Luke 13:3)

--Confess (Matt. 10:32-33; Acts 8:36-37)

--Be baptized (immersed) (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38)

--Remain faithful (Rev. 2:10)

Follow these directions and you will reach heaven. When following a GPS, if you stray from the road leading to your destination, a voice tells you to "make a U-turn as soon as possible." The Bible does the same thing. If we stray from the directions given for the road to heaven, we are told to make a U-turn (repent). (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38, 3:19, 17:30)

Follow the directions from a GPS, don't stray from them, and they will lead you to your destination. Follow the directions from the Bible (God's word), don't stray from them, and they will lead you to heaven. The Bible is our spiritual GPS. Follow it, and you won't get lost.