

HOW WE GOT OUR NEW TESTAMENT

INTRODUCTION:

A large number of persons alleges that the New Testament was written so long ago and that it was copied, translated and changed so many times that we can't possibly have today an accurate edition of what it originally contained. I have never met a person who made such a claim who has read a single book tracing the origin and transmission of the New Testament Scriptures.

There are numerous scholars, who have spent their lifetimes searching for and analyzing thousands of ancient documents in an attempt to determine the facts about this important matter. Let's examine both the Scriptures themselves and a few of the writings which will help us to learn "how we got our New Testament."

I. ITS ORIGIN DESCRIBED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ITSELF

A. Writers of the various books of the New Testament claimed to be inspired by God...

1. I Corinthians 14:37-38
2. I Thessalonians 2:13
3. I Corinthians 2;12-13
4. II Thessalonians 3:17

B. These New Testament documents were sent to the various churches by trusted associates of the writers...

1. Ephesians 6:21-22
2. Colossians 4:7-9

C. These inspired New Testament documents were read and exchanged by various churches...

1. Colossians 4:16

2. I Timothy 4:13

II. ITS ACCURATE TRANSMISSION TO US IS A MATTER OF RECORDED LITERARY HISTORY

- A. Copies of these original Greek New Testament documents were made and circulated throughout the Roman Empire...
1. Approximately 5,000 Greek manuscripts of all or parts of these New Testament documents have been discovered...(The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration, 2nd edition, by Bruce Metzger, p. 36)
 - (a) Josephus' "Jewish Wars," was written in Greek shortly after A.D. 70. It exists in only 9 complete manuscripts, the oldest being a 5th century Latin translation and 8 Greek partial manuscripts dating to the 10th century.*
 - (b) Tacitus' "Annals of Imperial Rome," the principal history of the Roman Empire, written about A.D. 110, exists in only one manuscript, and 1/4 of that is missing. * Is the New Testament Reliable? by Paul Barnett, page 45
 2. Greek papyrus containing a portion of John 18 has been dated to AD 94-127 (The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament, by Philip W. Comfort, page 31)
 3. The Chester Beatty Greek Papyrus II (P46), containing all of Paul's writings except Timothy and Titus, have been dated back to AD 85-150. (The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament, by Philip W. Comfort, pp. 30-31)
- B. These original Greek manuscripts of the inspired New Testament documents were translated into various languages within the first two centuries...
1. They were translated into the Syriac language A.D. 411-431 from manuscripts dating back to the 2nd century. There are some 350 copies existing today. (Metzger, pp. 69-70)
 2. They were translated into the Latin language before A.D. 200. Many copies were being circulated during the 3rd century. (Metzger, p. 72)
- C. These inspired New Testament documents were quoted in the Greek writings of early church theologians (often called "Church Fathers")

1. Polycarp, Ignatius and Clement of Rome quoted from 25 of our 27 NT books by the year AD 100, proving that these books were in wide circulation by that time. (Is The New Testament Reliable? by Paul Barnett, page 39)
2. A search of these writings up to AD 340 reveals that they quoted the inspired documents some 36,000 times, virtually reproducing the entire New Testament (A General Introduction to the Bible, by Geisler & Nix, page 357)

D. First attempts at translating the New Testament into English...

1. The Scriptures were translated from Latin into an early form of "Old English," called "Anglo-Saxon" up to about A.D. 1150*
 - (a) Caedmon....Metrical version of OT & NT...A.D. 600's
 - (b) Bede...Gospels...A.D. 735
 - (c) Alfred the Great...Ten Commandments...A.D. 900
 - (d) Lindisfarne...Gospels...A.D. 950
 - (e) Aelfric....Portions of the Bible...A.D. 1000
2. The Scriptures were translated from Latin into "Middle English" up to about A.D. 1500*
 - (a) William of Shoreham...Psalms....A.D. 1300's
 - (b) Richard Rolle...Psalms....A.D. 1300's
 - (c) John Wycliffe (with Nicholas of Hereford).. NT, 1380; OT 1382
 - (d) John Purvey....Revised Wycliffe Bible...1388
3. The Scriptures were translated from Greek into "Modern English" since 1500*
 - (a) William Tyndale....New Testament (first printed edition)...1525
 - (b) Myles Coverdale...Bible...1535
 - (c) Thomas Matthew (John Rogers)...Bible...1537
 - (d) The Great Bible....1539
 - (e) The Geneva Bible....1560
 - (f) The Bishops' Bible...1568
 - (g) King James Version Bible...1611 (Used only 7 Greek manuscripts)

* The Making of English, by Henry Bradley, pages 7-8)

E. Principle Manuscripts:

1. Textus Receptus (Received Text)

- (a) Prepared in the area of Byzantium (ancient capital of Turkey)
- (b) Oldest is 10th century
- (c) Manuscripts from which KJV, NKJV were translated

2. Alexandrian Text

- (a) Prepared in the area of Alexandria, Egypt
- (b) Oldest vellum (A.D. 350); papyrus (A.D. 125)
- (c) 5,000 in existence

3. Eclectic text

- (a) A text derived from all of the oldest and best manuscripts
- (b) All New Testament manuscripts agree on 98% of the text

F. Types of Translations:

1. Formal Equivalence (word for word): KJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NKJV
2. Dynamic Equivalence (thought for thought): TEV, NEB, REB, JB, NJ
3. Mediating (uses elements of both of the above): NIV, NRSV