

Textual Criticism Summary

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I. The definition of textual criticism: Textual criticism (TC) is the art/science of analyzing multiple ancient manuscripts (mss.) to determine which words were original words. As applied to the Bible, TC seeks to determine which reading most likely represents the words written by the original authors. The goal is not to subtract from what was written, but to come back to 100% of what was there in the beginning. It is a fact that of all the extant mss. not all of them agree in every point. Our goal is to examine the objective evidence and do our best to see what was most likely an original reading.

II. The process of TC: TC involves the analysis of four sources of data in association with certain principles that hold true for the analysis of any ancient document.

a. 1st source: **Greek mss.** (there are over 5000+ extant Greek mss. and these are the primary source of data for TC of the NT. These **manuscripts** tend to fall in certain textual “families,” suggesting that copies of the copies tended to reproduce certain variants. All things equal, **one should generally prefer an older reading to a newer reading**, though this is not always the case. These Greek mss. are identified as (1) the early Papyri mss. [Identified by P+ a number, e.g., P⁴⁵—appx. 96 in number], (2) the Uncials which were written in capital letter style Greek from 4th century to 9th century [Identified by capital letters, or numbers beginning with a 0—appx. 299 in number], (3) The Minuscles, which are cursive mss. that date from appx. the 9th century to the 15th cent. [Identified by numbers that don’t begin with a 0—appx. 2812 in number]). The following are some of the more commonly cited mss.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Content</u>	<u>Textual Family</u>
i. P ⁴⁵ :	Appx. 200.	Gospels and Acts	Alexandrian
ii. P ⁴⁶ :	Appx. 200.	Paul’s epistles	“”
iii. P ⁴⁷ :	Appx. 250+	Revelation	“”
iv. P ⁵² :	Appx. 120.	John	“”
v. P ⁶⁶ :	Appx. 200.	Gospels	“”
vi. P ⁷² :	Appx. 300.	General epistles	“”
vii. P ⁷⁵ :	Appx. 175.	Gospels	“”
viii B (Vaticanus):	Appx. 340.	Entire Bible	“”

- ix. C (Rescriptus): Appx. 400. Entire except 2 Thess., 2 John Mixed
- x. a (**Siniaticus**): Appx. 330. All but Revelation “”
- xi. A (Alexandrinus): Appx. 400. Entire Bible “”
- xii. D (Beza): Appx. 400. Gospels and Acts Western

xiii. **Minuscules**: There are large numbers of minuscules due to the fact that multiplication of copies exploded after the coming of the Byzantine Empire. Prior to this time persecutions led to the destruction of large numbers of mss. These later “cursives,” though larger in number, should not be regarded with as much authority as the earlier mss. These later “**Byzantine**” family mss. will often be marked out by “Byz.”

xiv. Note on **Textual Families**: (1) The Alexandrian Family which comes mainly out of Egypt from the papyri mss. is supported by the earliest mss. as usually represented by the mss. in “i-x” above (dating from 2nd cent.+). The Western Family is represented by mss. such as “D” “F” and “G” and a few others and is known for much extra material in the text (5th cent.+). The Caesarean Family is represented primarily the “Theta” (q--Coridethi) ms. and seems to have its origin in the area of Syria/Caesarea. The Byzantine Family represents large numbers of mss. from the Byzantine era (appx. 7th-15th cent.)

b. 2nd source: **Lectonaries** (Lectonaries were small copies of Scripture for circulation among the church for liturgical readings, somewhat like our responsive readings. Their identification begins with an “l.” These are generally later witnesses, but they do help to give evidence for what may have been an original reading—appx. 2281 in number).

c. 3rd source: **Early versions and translations** (good sources of data since they generally tried to represent word for word renderings of the Greek)

- i. There are various **Coptic** (Egypt) versions from 2nd to 3rd century: Begin with “co” and found in the Sahidic (sa), Boharic (bo), Fayumic (fay), Achmimich (ach), Subachmimich (ach²).
- ii. **Old Latin**: it (many different mss. dating to 300 and probably earlier).
- iii. **Vulgate**: vg (these mss. come from copies of Jerome’s translation and would date from the 5th century onward).

- iv. **Syriac:** syr (several versions of Syriac mss. date back as early as the 3rd of 4th century, such as the Sinaitic [syr^s], Curetonian [syr^c], Peshitta [syr^p])
- v. **Georgian:** geo (400+)
- vi. **Ethiopic:** eth (500)

d. 4th source: **Patristic citations** (from this very small sample, one must also be aware that some of these were heretics but still serve as a source of textual data).

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|------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------|-------|-----------------|
| i. | 96: | Clement of Alexandria | vii. | 215-: | Clement of Rome |
| ii. | 2 nd : | Irenaeus | viii. | 220: | Tertullian |
| iii. | 2 nd : | Didache (church manual) | ix. | 253: | Origen |
| iv. | 2 nd : | Tatian | x. | 339: | Eusebius |
| v. | 165: | Justin | xi. | 407: | Chrysostom |
| vi. | 170: | Marcion | xii. | 420: | Jerome |

III. The **canons** of TC (these canons are general principles to be carefully considered and applied, realizing that the application is not pure science).

- a. 1st: If there are textual variants, **analyze all the mss.** by seeing which authorities support a reading.
- b. 2nd: Analyze which reading has the **earliest** mss. support (prefer earlier attestation)
- c. 3rd: Analyze which reading has the **widest geographical** support (prefer wider attestation)
- d. 4th: Analyze which reading has support from a **larger number of textual families**.
- e. 5th: Analyze which reading has a **larger number of witnesses** (however, this can be misleading since most of the mss. come from a much later date).
- f. 5th: Prefer the reading that helps to **best explain how the other readings arose**.
- g. 6th: Prefer the **harder** reading (one that would tend to seem less likely) as scribes would be less likely to introduce a variant that contained a “hard” understanding, but they would seek to smooth out the sense.
- h. 7th: Give greater weight to the **more objective** data (external evidence) and lesser weight to internal evidence (probability of a reading based on what we “think” it might have been).

- i. 8th: Be mindful of the two kinds of changes: (1) **Accidental** changes, and (2) **Intentional** changes. A scribe may have intentionally copied something different than what he had in his exemplar (master) if he thought the exemplar was wrong for some reason. Accidental changes happen when there is a mistake in copying.
- j. 9th: Be mindful that accidental changes happen mainly by either (1) an **accident of the “ear”** (he did not hear properly when he listened to someone in the scriptorium), or (2) an **accident of the “eye”** (he made a mistake when looking at an exemplar and miscopied in the process).

The Formation of the Canon of Scripture

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Introduction

One of the most common questions people ask about the Bible is how it came to be in its present form. We believe that the present 66 books that are in the Protestant Bible make up the rule, or “the canon” that determines the standard for what is a sacred writing. In this paper we will present a brief summary of the formation of the canon of Scripture and what factors led to this recognition.

- I. The nature of the canon:
 - a. We believe that the 66 books of the Bible are the only books that should be in the Bible and that there are no books not included that *should have been* included.
 - b. As the word “canon” suggests, we believe that the present form is the “rule” (canon comes from the word that meant “rod” or “reed,” means of measurement in ancient times) for what makes up the proper measure of the full content of prophetically inspired writings intended by God for permanent testimony.
 - c. The essential element for canonicity is propheticity. Nothing can be included in the canon unless it was breathed out by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21).
 - d. Though not discussed much, it is possible that there were some inspired writings which God did not intend for permanent testimony and that these writings were not included because God did not intend them to be for “the canon” (conjecture).
- II. Internal factors that led to recognition

- a. One of the things that we see is that God promised to Israel a prophetic ministry that would follow Moses and be recognizable through periodic miraculous attestation (Deut. 18:15-22).
- b. This attestation demanded perfect accuracy in the communication.
- c. This attestation demanded that the message not deviate from previously articulated revelation (Deut. 13:1-5).
- d. The words and writings of the OT prophets were recognized by the OT prophets (Dan. 9:2) and NT writers also (Matt. 21:42; Matt. 24:15; Lk. 24:32; John 5:39)
- e. The words and writings of the NT prophets were recognized by the apostles and prophets of the NT (1 Tim. 5:18 [Deut. 25:4; Lk. 10:7]; 1 Cor. 14:37-38; 1 Thess. 5:19-21; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; 2 Pet. 3:16).
- f. These authoritative and inspired writings were the only ones allowed in public readings in the church (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; Rev. 1:3).
- g. These inspired utterances, whether oral or written, were recognized by every true prophet who had prophetic giftedness, and these utterances held absolute authority (1 Cor. 14:37-38).
- h. These internal factors enabled the church, by the gift of “the discerning of spirits” to recognize all prophetic utterances given by God for permanent record within the canon (1 Cor. 12:28; 14:29).
- i. God promised that this process of prophetic revelation would come to a point of cessation (1 Cor. 13:8-10; cf. Eph. 4:13 for the concept of “perfect” [literally, “mature,” a reference to doctrinal maturity that came with the completion of the canon]) and that the Book of revelation (Rev. 22:18-19).

III. External factors that led to recognition of the NT canon (we can name at least 3 factors in how certain writings were accepted)

- a. Apostolic authorship: This was the first point that others looked at, whether or not the writing came from an apostle. To be canonical, however, a writing, did not necessarily have to come from an apostle; cf. Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews, James, Jude). Note: Some apostolic writings were not inspired and thus not canonical.
- b. Universal acceptance: During the first four centuries there was universal acceptance of the present canon. Note: This does not mean that certain individuals did not contest certain books, as there were cases where this happened).
- c. Tests of inspiration

- i. Intrinsic content: Had agreement with other revelation and centered on Christ. Had uniqueness (each writing adds its own respective contribution to the canon). Had distinguished character of inspired vs. non-inspired works (copied and circulated immediately)
- ii. Moral and spiritual content that led to transformed lives
- iii. Historical testimony as recognized by the early church

IV. Factors that led to the closing of the canon

- a. Scriptural basis for a close of the canon (recognition of a body of truth called “the faith”; cf. Jude 3; 1 John 4:1-6; Rev. 22:18-19).
- b. Theological reason for a closing of the canon: If God decided to reveal truth, He is capable of giving the words, accomplishing the writing, collection, recognition, and preservation of that truth (providentially). He also is free and capable of bringing cessation to that process.
- c. Logical reason for the closing of the canon: Those who were in the best position to recognize inspired writings (the apostolic church) recognized and collected these 27 works alone.
- d. Factual evidence for the closing of the canon: No serious attempt, apart from heretics and cults, have ever in 2,000 years made any serious attempt to change the canon.
- e. Personal experience that confirms a closed canon: God changes lives through these Spirit-inspired writings as with no other books.

V. Formal recognition of a closed canon through latter evidence and councils

- a. Partial representation of patristic citations which quote from NT books: e.g., Clement of Rome, 96; Didache—Church handbook (early 2nd); Epistle of Ignatius (early 2nd); Muratorian canon (early 2nd); Polycarp (early 2nd); Irenaeus—knew Polycarp (mid 2nd); Tatian’s Diatesseron (170).
- b. Councils
 - i. Laodecia—Revelation was not present in this list that appears to have been added some time after the council took place (363)
 - ii. Athanasius—Clear testimony to the 27 (367)
 - iii. Hippo—identical to Athanasius (393)
 - iv. Carthage—Clear testimony for the 27 (397)
 - v. Trent (Roman Catholic council of 16th century): Declared Vulgate to be official Bible and the Apocrypha to be canonical