**The Origin of the Bible, No. 2 – BD38-02**

We’re looking again this morning at the subject of the origin of the Bible. This is the second in the series. Isaiah 40:8 tells us, “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the Word of our God shall stand forever.” The Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:18 says, “For verily I say unto you, till heaven or earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the law till all be fulfilled. It is easier for heaven and earth to pass than one tittle of the law to fail.” What we have here is a clear declaration from the Word of God that the Bible which God has given us is a book which is going to be preserved long after the created universe itself is gone. So when you sit here this morning with that Bible in your hand you are holding something of an eternal nature.

We have seen that biblical Christians view the Bible as the final authority from God in matters of doctrine and practice. With this kind of a claim, it is necessary that we view the origin of the Bible to substantiate this kind of authority. The Bible itself claims, on the words of Jesus Christ, that it is the final and supreme authority, and all that it says will come to pass. All that it says will come to pass. That implies that we can understand what it does say.

God the Holy Spirit inspired men to write the Bible. We’re going to be looking at that in some detail later. But I want you to remember as we look at this background that God the Holy Spirit not only inspired the original writings, but God did not blow the thing when it came to those copies of those manuscripts being transported and preserved over the centuries to us today. What good would it have been for God to have inspired the original writers so that they delivered His perfect and complete and accurate revelation, and then over the centuries the whole thing was lost, so that today we would have no ground of authority; so that today we’re in doubt as to whether we have what Paul or John or Peter actually wrote?

Well what this divine preservation involved were a series of considerable hazards indeed. The original Greek and Hebrew manuscripts faced several hazards. Among them was faulty copying. When they sat down to copy the original writings, it was easy to make mistakes; for the eye to jump a line; for words to be inserted and misspelled; endings to be changed; and, one thing and another.

Then there was mutilation. The heretical groups didn’t like what they read in the original Scriptures. It was not beyond them in making copies of the Scriptures to change what the text said in order to confirm a certain heresy that they were promoting or a certain viewpoint that they favored. That’s mutilation of the text.

There was neglect and loss of the manuscripts, just ignoring them and letting them lie around. In time many of these were lost. There was false emendation. The emendation means corrections. A scribe was reading a text and he decides that a word isn’t spelled right, an ending is wrong, or the grammar is of bad construction, so he changes it. So he makes corrections and the sacred text was faced with people making corrections to it as they copied it.

There was destruction of the manuscripts. In times of persecution the manuscripts were systematically destroyed by the civil powers.

Now facing all of these hazards, it is indeed a wonder that we have the manuscripts that we have today in the condition that we have them. The reason for this of course is that God has been behind all of this caring for His manuscripts. So as the centuries of time rolled by, the manuscripts were able to come through all of this and come into the hands of what we call the textual critics, or scholars. The textual critics are the people who take the manuscripts we have today and they repair the damage that was done along the line here through these various ways to the Scriptures in the original writings. There would be no sense indeed for God to inspire the originals and then let them be lost to us.

The Bible manuscripts, you must remember, are different than the manuscripts of classical literature. We have manuscripts that come down from the writing of the Greek and the Latin writers, but those manuscripts simply come down through naturalistic procedures. Bible manuscripts had upon them the providential protective hand of God. He cared for the transporting of these manuscripts to our day in a way that the classical writers had no preserving hand on them.

So it is the providence of God in the production of the preservation of the biblical manuscripts that gives us today the accurate information on what the originals contained. The way God worked this is that after the original writings were made, this went to a church to whom the letter was originally sent. These people naturally would value that manuscript very highly. It would be read and re-read and passed around, and other churches would want a copy, of the book of Romans, or of the gospel of John, so they would make copies.

Now God saw to it that these copies were made. It was essential because in time it was inevitable that the original manuscripts were going to be lost. They were going to be destroyed. They would no longer be in existence. All we would have would be copies of them. So God had copies made, and He had copies made that were trustworthy, and these trustworthy copies were copied by other people. In the process, there were copies made which were not trustworthy—copies which had been mutilated, changed, or corrected in one way or another. These, we may believe, that God’s hand was upon so that He minimized people copying those untrustworthy copies. So as the centuries come down, you have a wide stream of trustworthy manuscripts and a little side stream of these untrustworthy manuscripts which gradually filtered off and died off so that they were very much like the writings of the classical scholars of the secular world. We have very few manuscripts left from things that they wrote.

Well the result today is hundreds and hundreds of manuscripts. We have something like 5,000 manuscripts of one part or another, or complete whole sections, of the New Testament and Old Testament Scriptures.

The Old and New Testaments were written in a phonogram type languages which means it uses letters that stand for sounds which is the kind of language we have in English. The art of writing itself went back into ancient times well before the first Old Testament book was written. The Bible was originally written probably on papyrus sheets. Later copies were on parchments or vellum, and the sources of the New Testament Greek text were these copies that had been passed down through the centuries. We looked at some of the later finds last week. We also have papyri fragments—the Chester Beatty papyri and the Bodmer papyri portions of the New Testament. We have the lectionaries which were another source which were orders of service that they would copy from the Scriptures—the Scriptures that they were going to read. Then we have the writings of the church fathers—something like 86,000 quotations from church fathers who, in their writings, would again quote Scripture.

**Is the Greek New Testament Reliable?**

Now the question is: Is the Greek New Testament reliable? 5,000 Greek manuscripts. How does this compare to classical writers. Well one of the great writings of the classical age was Caesar’s Gaelic Wars that all of you students of Latin have at one time or another had to read. We have about nine or ten manuscripts of this writing in existence today. They came from about 58 to 50 B. C. The oldest copy is 900 years after Caesar wrote his Gaelic Wars. I want to remind you that in one fragment of the book of John, we go down to within 35 or 40 years of the apostle John. That’s how close our New Testament manuscripts get to the original source. Now that’s no accident. This is providence. This is the preservation of God. When you get to the classical writers, Caesar has a spread of 900 years before they get the first copy of what he wrote.

The History of Thucydides, by the Greek historian is considered a very reliable record. Thucydides wrote about 460 to 400 B. C. We have eight manuscripts left of his writings. The earliest one is from 900 A. D. which means that from the time that Thucydides wrote to the time we have his first manuscript is a spread of 1,300 years.

There was a difference between secular manuscripts and biblical manuscripts. Bible scholars don’t always take that into account. I want to impress that upon you and let you be aware of the fact that whenever we talk about Bible manuscripts and the liberal tries to imply to you that we can’t depend on this, we’ve got all these changes and all these variants and all these errors, just you remember that in spite of all that, God was in there directing and pushing and steering and guiding. God is behind His Word.

Well we don’t have any such wide gaps as these in our biblical manuscripts. The Chester Beatty papyri and the Bodmer papyri, these go back very close to the originals.

Now, we also have thousands of manuscripts in languages which have been translated from the Greek and from the Latin. We call these “versions” or translations. Now these are early versions and of course they’re based upon early texts so they give us an idea of what the Greek text was like. It’s another clue to what we’re interested in studying. Some of those version were the old Latin version which was written after 175 A. D. This predominated for some time. Finally it became necessary to have a new edition of the Bible in Latin. So the Pope in 382 A. D. commissioned a scholar named Jerome to revise this old Latin version. He produced what was called the Latin Vulgate. This is the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church. The New Testament was completed in 390 A. D. The Old Testament was completed in 405 A. D. The word “Vulgate” means common Latin talk, language, or speech. This was the Latin that everybody could understand—the vernacular. So we have the Latin Vulgate which became a very major translation in the line of descent of our preservation of the Scriptures.

Then we had many other versions which gave us the background of the original texts. The Syriac version came from the second century. The most prominent of that was called the Peshitta. This was important to the Bible of the Syrian church and it is a language similar to Aramaic which is what was spoken in Palestine at the time of Jesus.

We have the Coptic version which is the latest form of the ancient Egyptian language. This was written from the middle of the fourth to the sixth century. This was written, incidentally, in several of the Coptic dialects. This is interesting to find manuscripts in a language in a variety of dialects which indicates how, from the first, people sensed that it was important to have the Word of God in their own language that they could read and understand.

We have the Ethiopic version from the fourth century for the churches of Ethiopia. We have the Gothic version from the middle of the fourth century for the Goths, the Germanic tribes. We have the Armenian version from the fifth century for the churches of Armenia. We have the Georgian version for the churches in Iberia located in a mountainous region between the Black and the Caspian Seas. It goes to the sixth century. We have an Arabic version for the churches of Arabia from the eighth century. We have a Slovanic version for the Slovak Christians of Europe from the ninth century, and even a Persian version. All of these are background for the Scriptures.

Now (we consider) the quality of the manuscript material. So many people are copying. So many errors are made possible in one way or another. Well indeed we have something like 150,000 variants. When you put all of these manuscripts together and match them up, there are something like 150,000 differences. However, most of these are insignificant as far as the meaning of Scripture is concerned. There are only about 400 variants that could affect meaning, and only about 50 of these are of real significance, but none of them touch a major doctrine.

If you were to say, as you look at a Greek New Testament, how much of this do we have doubt about, we could say that it would be something like a half of one page of a Greek New Testament would perhaps be in doubt that we don't have the exact word of the original manuscripts.

**Errors**

Now how are these errors made in copying? Well there are two kinds of errors. There were the unintentional kind that the scribe did not mean to make. These were errors of the eye. His eye jumps a line and skips a line in his copying. Errors of the ear where somebody is sitting and dictating to him. Or perhaps error of the memory where the scribe would look at the manuscript he was copying, he would read a few words, he would read a line, and then he would turn his attention over to the copy he was making, and in the process of changing his attention from one copy to the other, there would be a skip of memory and he would recall the manuscript in a synonym that would perhaps be more likely in his own speech. He would put a synonym in for a word instead of the very word that he read.

There are errors of judgment. One scribe will be copying and then he’ll decide in the margin to make a note—comments about the text. Well the next scribe would come along and he’d sit down and start copying this text, and he comes to this little comment out here of a few words, and he would conclude that the man who made the copy before him failed to put this in—that he made a mistake, that he skipped something so he wrote it out in the margin. So he would take it and stick it in the text. The next person would copy it and here was some scribe’s comment now that had become part of the sacred Scriptures. That’s one kind of unintentional variant.

Then there were the errors of long habits. As a scribe is writing he thinks in a certain way and he tends to reproduce ideas in his own words.

Then there were intentional deliberate changes. The scribe reads a Scripture, and from his point of view and from his understanding of Greek it seems rough. It seems to be a bad grammatical construction, so he tries to smooth it out and he changes it. Or there is the assimilation of wording from other Scripture in parallel passages. He remembers how this particular passage, like in the gospels where you have many passages, he would remember how it was said in one gospel so he’s copying this gospel and he sticks in the words that he remembers from the other one to fill it out.

Or he has a doctrinal point of view. This was a favorite one especially among the heretics. When they wanted to promote a doctrine they’d either put things in or they’d take things out to deliberately change it to support their point of view. We may have such a thing in 1 John 5:7-8, the verses about the trinity that seems like an excellent clear-cut statement of the doctrine of the trinity, but there is some question that this is indeed in the original text—that this was not inserted. So we’re not absolutely sure. There is good reason however to believe that this possibly may be a true statement, but it just so happened that the Sabellianism controversy was going on at this time—that some of these manuscripts that come from that period were being copied. Sabellius said that God is one, and sometimes He is Father, sometimes He is Son, and sometimes He is Holy Spirit. So when along comes this Scripture that says these three are one, which is a true statement of the doctrine of the trinity, we are suspicious that it may have been possible that some of the anti-Sabellians said, “We’ve got to get this verse out of there because this gives support to the heretic.” So they chopped it out.

However, in the Latin Vulgate it is in there, and in many of the Latin versions it is in there, which gives us a clue that perhaps this is indeed a true text passed on down and preserved in the Latin versions where it was lost in the Greek world because of controversies over doctrinal issues.

Also the scribes would often like to stick in their way of life. For example, you have the word “fasting” slipped in with prayer, “prayer and fasting,” because fasting was part of the monastic way of life. So it was not beyond them to slip in words that would substantiate their point of view as far as their pattern of living. You have to put yourself into the sandals of the scribe to understand what was involved in copying and how these errors could come in. If you were in the sandals of the scribe, you would have no typewriter, there would be no printing press, and you would have no printed matter to be copying from. There would be no fountain or ballpoint pens. There would be no modern paper. You’d have to have a knowledge of the Hebrew and the Greek in order to do the copying. The technique was something like this:

**Copies**

Copies of the original autographs were made in three ways. A letter was sent by the apostle Paul to your church. You would like to have a copy of that letter because it was recognized as inspired Scripture. So if you had enough money you would hire a professional scribe. He would make you quite an accurate copy of that letter. Or if you were not quite as wealthy, you might hire a non-professional person to act as a scribe. He would produce a copy for you which was not so well done. Or you might just copy it yourself, in which case it would very likely be poorly done and the chance of error would be very high.

Now there were certain principles. You say, “My goodness, 150,000 variants. How in the world are we going to decide now what the original is here?” Well it’s not as complicated as it might seem because the Greek scholars who study these things begin to discover patterns and clues which would guide them to which manuscript preserved the true text. They discovered certain things that would indicate that changes had been made.

For example, whenever they would see a reading that had the earmark of stylistic or grammatical improvement, they were then suspicious of that particular rendering. Or that a passage like this trinity passage dealt with a doctrinal controversy, that passage would be suspect. Or there were variants combining the appearance of an improvement. That would be suspect.

Then there were general principles for determining genuineness: the reading that best suited the author’s style; or, reading that fixed the context and best explains the reason for other changes which were made.

Then there were certain specific guidelines that guided a textual critic. One of them is that the age of a text of a manuscript is more significant than the age of the manuscript itself. The manuscript might be recent, but what it’s copying may be a very very old text. So if it’s an old text it gets more weight. It’s closer to the time of the original and more likely a true copy. Or readings which were supported by ancient witnesses from different groups outside of the Bible itself.

Another guideline is reconstruction of the history of a variant. How did this thing come about to be changed? So they get their manuscripts and they lay them out from their earliest time and they begin to see how changes came about. They set up the history and that gives them a guideline as to which was the true text to begin with.

The quality rather than the quantity of a witness is more important. Just because you have a lot of manuscripts doesn’t mean that that proves that that’s the reading. The identity of readings, particularly in errors, implies an identity of origin. Now what this means is: This is the same thing as a kid who sits in class. And here’s one kid who’s kind of smart and he takes a test but on questions 2, 5, and 6 he makes a mistake. There’s a circle of kids around him in class and they’re not such hot students and they take the test. When their papers come in, lo and behold they also made a mistake on questions 2, 5, and 6, identical to the kid who generally is known to be pretty bright. Now the teacher begins to suspect that there has been some collusion of copying from the kid who knew his way around, and they copied his mistakes just like they copied his right answers. Therefore, when we see a series of manuscripts and all of them have the same mistake, we look back to an old one where they all began to get it from. This gives us a line of direction as to how the mistake came in, and we trace it back and then we say, “Here’s where it started. Here’s where the change was made. This is what was correct to begin with. This down here is wrong.”

Two very important principles were that the shorter reading is generally preferable because scribes would tent to enlarge, to clarify, or to explain something, so they would put notations in the margin and later it would slip into the text. So the textual critic looks for the shorter reading as being the original. Another principle is that the more difficult reading is generally preferable because the scribe, again, would tend to make a reading that he considered difficult, he would try to make it easier. He’d try to smooth it out. So the critics look for a harder reading as representing the original.

So we have these documents. These New Testament documents fall into certain families. I want to mention those because the versions that you have today in English are dependent upon these families and this is going to be important. There are three families into which these manuscripts fall. That means that they have similarity in their wording, similarity in their structure of the text itself. That means that they have come from a similar original source and that they have been copied from one another. These families include first of all the original New Testament manuscripts, then the copies began to be made. These copies fall into three categories.

**Families of Manuscripts**

One is the traditional. The traditional means the identical to the original texts. Sometimes this is called the Byzantine family. It includes that Codex Olof in the gospels and it includes the Codex W, the one that we have in this country in Washington, in Matthew and in part of Luke. These are in the traditional family. It also includes the Peshitta Syriac and the Gothic versions. Most of the quotes of the fathers from the fathers of Antioch in Asia Minor come from this text. And this is the text from which the King James Bible of 1611 was made. It is believed that the traditional texts came from believers who were poorer and less educated. Here’s the theory of the scholars:

People who are poor are going to value their copies of the Bible. People who are less educated find writing more difficult. They were not likely to be putting notes in the margin. They were the humbler sort of folks who had an attitude of great respect for the words of the Scripture upon the page. Therefore they were not inclined to be tampering with it. The result was that when they had a copy of the Scripture, it wasn’t all messed up like some of your Bibles are with notes all over the margins. They were clean copies. Consequently when people copied their copies, they had nothing to include here out of the margin, and they got clean copies. So the scholars increasingly believe now that the traditional family is the one that is closest to the original. That, interestingly enough, is the one upon which the King James Version was made. This is perhaps one reason that this King James translation is such a perennial favorite and it is so difficult to be replaced by other versions that come and go.

A second family was the Western family. The Western family had such church fathers as Irenaeus Tertullian Cyprian who used it. It includes the Codex B, Bezae, and D2 Claromontanus. It also includes the old Latin version, the Diatessaron of a man named Tatian, and forms of the Syriac version. It is a manuscript which apparently was in a line which the more educated had access to and who were prone therefore to put notes in the margins which later were incorporated into the Greek text. This family of manuscripts was in wide use probably because it had the prestige of the Roman Catholic Church behind it. This is the expanded text. This one tends to have more in it than the traditional text. This is the text from which the Douay Version, the English translation, the Roman Catholic Douay Version of the Bible was made.

A third family is the Alexandrian. This is the abbreviated text. This was used by such famous church fathers as Origin and others in Alexandria and the area of North Africa. This is the one that includes those papyri fragments of the Chester Beatty papyri and the Bodmer papyri. This also includes Codex V Vaticanus and Codex Olof Sinaiticus and about 25 other manuscripts. These were the more recent manuscripts. It also includes the Coptic version and this also is a series of manuscripts that seem to be possessed by more educated Christians who preferred shorter readings

In the places where they would find manuscript differences they would go for the shorter readings, so this is the more abbreviated type of manuscript compared to the traditional. It also tended to reject the difficult passages so it became shorter. But the Alexandrian school, the scholars feel, were very arbitrary and very subjective in how they would decide which readings to leave and which readings to take out.

Now, interestingly enough, after the manuscript on which the King James was based, which was called the Textus Receptus, the text received by all: About the year 1830 the newer manuscripts began to be brought into scholarly study, and a new text, the Alexandrian family of Greek texts, was formed. It is out of this line, the abbreviated form, from which we have the Revised Version in 1881, and the American Standard which was the American committees edition of this revised version that came out in 1901. Then we had the Revised Standard Version in 1946 which was made by the National Council of Churches in this country, and the New English Bible (NEB) formed in England in 1961. Both the Revised Standard Version and the NEB were the products of liberal scholarship. In them you will notice, and maybe we’ll have later to look into this: This is the problem with these modern translations made by liberal scholars. They do not begin with the attitude that they are handling the authoritative inspired Word of God. Now by and large that was true of the translators of the King James Bible. They were godly men as well as scholars who viewed the Scriptures as God’s revelation and they treated it with that respect.

These modern version you are confronted with the fact that they are produced by liberal scholars who interject into their translation their point of view.

**The Old Testament**

Now we need to talk about the Old Testament Scriptures for just a little bit for indeed we have manuscripts about them also. The Hebrew language itself was the language of Canaan, and Abraham probably learned Hebrew there. The word “Hebrew,” when it is used in the New Testament, actually refers to the Aramaic language which was the language of Syria. The language of Mesopotamia which the Bible calls Padanaram, which was Abraham’s country, was this language of Aramaic. It became the popular commercial language of the Old Testament times. We have Aramaic in our Old Testament in certain passages like in Daniel 2:4 through 7:28. Here Daniel is quoting conversation in Aramaic and he’s giving gentile history so he uses Aramaic instead of Hebrew. We have some passages in Ezra which are referring to Gentile correspondence and they are in Aramaic.

Now the Jews during the Babylonian captivity had to learn Aramaic in order to converse with their conquerors. Gradually this Aramaic became the commercial language. When they came back from captivity they still used their Hebrew, and Hebrew was always the language of the priesthood. It was always the language of literature. But gradually Aramaic encroached upon Hebrew so by the time you come down to the time of Jesus and the time of the apostles, what they spoke was not Hebrew, but Aramaic, in the normal course of everyday conversation. But Hebrew was the language of the Scriptures except for these few portions in Aramaic.

Now the Hebrew used a square type of script with 22 letters, but they were all consonants. There were no vowels. For example, in English we might say, “bd.” Now in English, “bd” could mean quite a few things. It could mean “bad.” It could mean “bed.” It could mean “bid.” It could mean “bud.” It could mean “bide.” It could mean “bode.” But if we were to say, “John is a ‘bd’ boy,” you would probably wouldn’t have to have anybody tell you that the vowel that’s missing here is “a” for “bad.” It is surprising how you can read even English by the context without the vowels. When you know the language you know how to put the thing together—the vowel that should be there.

Now that’s how Hebrew is written, with all consonants and no vowels. But the Jews were a people of one book. They had specialists, the scribes, who were professionals in copying the Scriptures. When they copied a Scripture, boy they copied it clean. They would count on a page how many letters of each type should be on that page. When they finished the page it had to have that many letters. They counted what had to be the center letter so they knew whether they had missed a letter along the line. They went through all kinds of safeguards to make sure when they finished a page that it was accurate. That’s why, with the Old Testament, we have far fewer variations between manuscripts, because they kept it clean, and when a manuscript was worn out, they set it aside and destroyed it. They always kept the manuscripts up in good condition.

But the vowels, how to pronounce things, was something that you just had to memorize, until a group of scholars called the “Masoretes” came along. The word means the traditionalist. They preserved the pronunciation because Hebrew was beginning to fade out in the Middle Ages. So from 600 to 950 A. D., they began adding to the Hebrew text what are called “vowel points,” so when you see Hebrew you see these little dots and little lines above and underneath the letters. These indicate the vowels that should be there. Once you get the code, you’re able to read the Hebrew text and put the vowels in, though what you write, even in Hebrew now, the Hebrew Old Testaments is still all consonants, but these little marks indicate the vowels that should be there.

Well, the Masoretes did this for us. They gave us this preserved insight into the pronunciation. Now the Masoretic Hebrew text, in 1488: the first Hebrew Bible was presented in this text. This is the best text that we have today. This was the text which was used by Luther in the translation of the Bible into German. This Masoretic text was used in the translation of the King James Bible.

Now the oldest of the Old Testament Bible go to about 900 A. D., copies of this this Masoretic text. We have the Cairo Codex of the prophets from 895 A. D., the Aleppo Codex from about 925, and the Leningrad Codex from about 1108 A. D. This is the text of the “Biblia Hebraica” of Kittel.

In more recent years, in 1947, a shepherd boy is out looking for a lost cave. He sees a cave and he thinks that maybe the goat went in there. So he takes a rock and throws it into the cave, and it has a funny sound. It sounds like a pot breaking. So he picks up another rock and he heaves it into the cave again, and it sounds like a pot breaking again. So he walks into the cave and guess what he finds: Two broken pots along with a lot of others which were not broken. Lo and behold, the pots contained manuscripts—parchments. These parchments go back even to the first century, B. C. And among these parchments were found portions of almost every book of the Old Testament, in the Hebrew text. This carried us back 1,000 years before the manuscripts that we’ve had of the Masoretic text to date.

Now immediately this was going to be of interest. We know that since the Masoretes came along that they preserved the text. The question is: What about before them? There has to be that bridge back to Isaiah, back to Jeremiah, and all the way back to Moses. The studies thus far of the Dead Scrolls (which is where the found them, a little south of Jericho) have confirmed that the Masoretic text is practically identical to what they find in these scrolls—again a testimony to how careful the Jews were and how much the respected the Word of God. So we have the providential hand of God with all of the mistakes, with all of the variants, we had God behind it guiding and directing.

Now we also have versions of the Old Testament that again give us the text. You’ve heard us speak about the Septuagint—code number LXX (70). This, tradition says, was made in Alexandria by 70 Jewish leaders, and thus the name Septuagint. The 70 leaders translated the Hebrew into Greek because many in the Hellenistic world from 200 B. C. on could no longer read Hebrew. So they had to have their Scriptures in a language that they could read, and that was the commercial language of Greek.

From the time of the conquest of Alexander the Great, the Greek language had been a bunch of variant dialects over the Greek-speaking tribes. They were practically unintelligible to one another. When Alexander took over the conquest, that his father had left to him, and began building on that himself, he began bringing together an army of people from these various Greek tribes. It was inevitable, as men sat in tents with one another, whatever there dialects were, that they should have to understand one another. It was very important to a military operations, that the men be able to understand their officers and be able to follow directions. So gradually what evolved here under the leadership of Alexander the Great was the shaking down of the Greek language out of a form called the “Attic Greek.” The Attic Greek was the Greek of 5th century B. C. from Athens, but there was a vernacular Greek. There was the classical Greek. This is what the classical writers have written in. If you’re going to read classical Greek, it’s this Attic Greek. But the vernacular Greek was kind of a middle Greek and it began dominating all of the other dialects. Gradually, because of the conquest of Alexander the Greek, and the bringing together the various dialects among his army, they began meshing together and shaking itself down to the Greek which eventually produced the vernacular Greek, the common language Greek, of the New Testament called the Koine. The Koine means “common.” The New Testament was written in Koine Greek.

Now for a long time the scholars didn’t understand this. There was a time when they would actually call the Greek Testament “Holy Ghost language.” They would consider it a special language that God prepared just to write the Scriptures in. Well, he did, but he prepared it through the natural means of the conversation of people. Gradually the Koine Greek, shaken down from the conquest of Alexander the Great, became the commercial language. Everybody in the civilized world, whatever else you spoke locally, you learned to talk Greek. And you talked the common Greek and everybody understood everybody else. This was providential again that God prepared a language when the time came for Christ to be born and for the sacred Scriptures of the New Testament to be written. There was a language that had been prepared and was ready for this to be done in.

Now the way the scholars finally realized this was through these archaeological discoveries. They began to recover these papyri fragments and these ostraca—the little pieces of potsherds, of pottery left over and which people used for notepads and they wrote. The scholars began putting these things together and finally it dawned on them that the Greek of the New Testament was the language that the guy out in the street talked when he conducted business and as he went about his daily life. This was the common language of the people. That’s why it was an expressive language because Greek in its very nature can say things in a very detailed was. But it was a splendid preparation by the hand of God that when it came time for the New Testament Scriptures, here was the best of all languages for it.

So the Koine Greek was a descendant eventually of this Septuagint version of the Scriptures which was the Old Testament from the Hebrew for people who could no longer read the Scriptures as they once knew them. Well this version of the Septuagint very rapidly spread throughout the whole Greek-speaking world, and it became the source of the copies of which we have from the later manuscripts. They were actually Septuagint copies such as Sinaiticus that we talked about last week. Very frequently the Scripture writers, the apostles, when they quoted from the Old Testament they were quoting from the Septuagint version.

We have already mentioned that we also had the Latin Vulgate which also preserved the Masoretic text. Then we have something called the “targums” that we ought to mention before we stop this morning. The “targums” are translations of Hebrew into Aramaic. They were for synagogue use. We have another version called the “Samaritan Pentateuch.” This was a third type of Hebrew text. The Masoretic text is one type. The Septuagint is the second type. The Samaritan Pentecost is the third type. The Old Testament manuscripts fall into families just like the New Testament ones do. The Samaritan Pentateuch was the one that the Samaritans produced for themselves when they built their temple on Mount Gerizim. After the Jews came back from the Babylonian captivity, they wanted to mingle and with the Assyrian invaders who were half-breeds. They were call the Samaritans up in Samaria. They offered to help the Jews rebuild the Temple, but the Jews—according to the divine principle of separation in spiritual things from the nations around them said, “No.” So the Samaritans came up with their own Pentateuch—a copy of the five books of Moses. This again is a copy of the original writings of Moses, and therefore a reliable text and an informative text concerning the original.

So as we compare the Old Testament texts that we have today with the versions of the Dead Sea Scrolls reveals that we have an accurate reproduction of the autographs. Archaeology confirms this, that the Masoretic text is reliable. The ancient scribes were professionals so they were accurate. We have not one part in 1,000 that is in serious doubt of the Old Testament Hebrew text. And we have a language that God prepared. And the same way for the New Testament—we have a language that God prepared.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1971