

Modern Bible Versions, and Westcott and Hort

by Pastor Tobin Pederson

When it comes to the various Bible versions of our modern day, most readers assume that all Bibles are created equal, with perhaps differing degrees of readability. By the same token, most have rid themselves of the "ancient" King James Version and upgraded for a newer model, such as the NIV, or NASB, etc. When the modern Bible reader is asked if they are familiar with the two Textual Bible Critics, Westcott and Hort, most have never heard of them. They are not aware nor concerned that almost all the modern Bible versions of our day are built upon the Greek Text of Westcott and Hort, commonly called the Westcott-Hort text. In my own NIV Student Bible (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids Michigan, Copyright 1986, 1992), there is no mention of Westcott and Hort, but a mere reference to "textual criticism."

“Where existing manuscripts differ, the translators made their choice of readings according to accepted principles of New Testament textual criticism.”

Though these quotations say nothing of Westcott and Hort, they are hidden behind the words “accepted principles of textual criticism“.

Textual Criticism

To understand Westcott and Hort, you must first understand textual criticism. This requires us to reach back in history to the days of the apostles, when the New Testament was written in the original Greek language - sometime between 33-100 AD. Since the original books of the Bible do not exist any more, it becomes necessary to translate the Bible from copies of the original. The word MANUSCRIPTS is used to describe these copies or parchments which still exist. There are over 5366 manuscripts of the Greek New Testament. Not one of these manuscripts is exactly the same in Greek content. However the majority of these manuscripts agree with each other almost perfectly.

Translators of the Bible over the years have used these agreeing manuscripts to make what is called the MAJORITY TEXT. Other names for the Majority Text are Traditional Text, Syrian Text, Byzantine Text, and the Common Text. This Majority Text was made from more than five thousand (5000+) manuscripts. It is sometimes called the *Textus Receptus*. Since 99.9% of these manuscripts agree, we can be comforted knowing that God has preserved His Word among us. You could say that “Over five thousand witnesses agree, this New Testament is God’s holy Word”. Not only do we have 5000+ manuscripts which are nearly identical, but the Lord Himself promises us through His Word to preserve His Scriptures for the sake of mankind. In Matthew 24:35 Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away but My words shall not pass away." Isaiah 40:8 says, "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the Word of our God shall stand forever." See also Is. 30:8, 59:21, I Pet 1:23. The point here is simple. God has promised to preserve His Word among us, and God always keeps His promises! Likewise we dare never put confidence in man. "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man." Ps. 118:8 Putting our confidence in God and not man, it seems apparent our Lord has kept His promise and that His Word is faithfully preserved in over 5000 witnesses!

Now we have said that 99.9% of those 5000+ manuscripts agree with each other almost perfectly, but what about the other .1%??? These are commonly called the MINORITY TEXTS, but they are also known to many as the corrupted manuscripts. For much unlike the 5000+, these five

manuscripts are radically different. They do not even agree with each other. Their names are as follows:

Codex Vatican (B)
Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph)
Codex Alexandrian (A)
Codex Ephraemi (C)
Codex Bezae (D)

If we are to understand the foundation of the NIV, it is critical to understand that the NIV is translated from these five manuscripts above which do not agree with one another.

But what does this mean and is it important? Take, for example, five men who are eye witnesses to a crime. In the court room they tell it to the judge as it is, yet when the judge hears each of their stories, the witnesses do not agree. The judge then listens to the other side which holds over 5000 witnesses. These 5000 agree perfectly as to what happened.

So here is the dilemma when it comes to the "witness" of the Greek manuscripts. Do we listen to the 5000+ witnesses, or do we listen to the 5? Which group do you think would be more trustworthy? At this point we have entered the realm of "textual criticism". A textual critic is one who picks and chooses what part of whose story they will believe to be true. They make themselves the judge. For example, the witness "Codex Vatican B" (one of the five), a Greek manuscript of the New Testament, testifies that the last 12 verses of Mark do not exist. In other words, the manuscript "Codex Vatican B" does not contain Mark 16:9-20. Now take your Bibles and look at Mark 16:9-20. If you have a King James Bible you see it is about the resurrected Christ,...quite an important part of Scripture. The King James men used the Majority text (5000+) and simply translated it as is. But if you have a NIV Bible, between verses 8 and 9 there is a line and a large space along with this caption in brackets:

[The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20]

After this bracket in the NIV they then list verses 9-20 (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids Michigan, Copyright 1986, 1992, pg 1104).

For the reader of the NIV this note in brackets must at least cause doubt to enter one's mind as to the authenticity of these verses. They might argue, "My Bible says the "earliest" manuscripts do not have this verse!" But does this reader know of the thousands of other manuscripts which do contain this verse? The one who writes "the earliest manuscripts....." is the man we call a textual critic. He picks and chooses what belongs in the Bible and what doesn't, based upon his education, beliefs, and ideals. His method of picking and choosing which verses belong and which verses don't, is called the eclectic method. The Westcott-Hort text is an eclectic text. They are the judges as to what belongs in the Bible and what does not.

The whole problem with textual criticism is that man becomes the judge of what belongs in the Bible and what doesn't. A textual critic sets himself up as judge over God's Word, when no man has such a right. The Scriptures are not to be privately interpreted. The Bible teaches "No Scripture is of private interpretation". No mere mortal dare add to, or subtract from God's Word (the last chapter in Revelation teaches this). Textual criticism is flawed because man's judgment is by nature flawed with

bias. It is comparable to a judge with a criminal past, making a judgment based upon the witness of five liars, and at the same time ignoring the unified witness of over 5000 men. Can his verdict be true? We know the verdict and outcome before the trial is over. So our modern Bibles today have been translated by men who make themselves judges. Instead of simply translating what the majority of witnesses agree to, they translate from their own fancy, the false witness of the five. In like manner, if a scientist is also an evolutionist and atheist, do we need to hear his science before we know his verdict? Assuredly his verdict will be against the six literal days of creation.

Westcott and Hort were the original textual critics of their day. Though they no longer live, their legacy lives on in the form of a corrupted Greek text. The influence of their methods blackens and corrupts every modern translation of the Bible available (NIV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV, NAB, REB, RSV, CEV, TEV, GNB, LIVING, PHILLIPS, NEW JERUSALEM, NEW CENTURY, and the New Word Translation). Readers of these new Bibles are quite unaware that they are reading the translation of a corrupt text. Without thinking or looking deeper into the matter, they blindly assume that every Bible is the same. They assume some are just more easy to read than others. But we must remember that Bibles are translated by men, and thus corruption is possible. Westcott and Hort did what was unthinkable.....they picked through five Greek texts which did not agree with each other, and came up with a new revised Greek version of the Bible. All modern Bibles of the day have therefore not been translated from the 5000+ Majority text, but from the 5 disagreeing witnesses. Which Bible do you think is more reliable? Isn't it better to trust that God preserved His Word in the 5000+ witnesses rather than the five witnesses who do not agree with each other? The KJV is a straight translation from the Majority text. The NIV (and others) is taken from the five Minority texts, which do not agree. We don't even know what part of which text they used and where! The consensus however is they favored the Aleph and B text more than the others.

The Men Who Made Themselves Judges

And what do we know about these men who made themselves the judges over God's holy Word? Much has been written about them, but also their own recorded words shed light on their beliefs. The following information is taken from two sources, G.A. Riplinger's *New Age Bible Versions*, and Mr. Joseph Van Beek's tract, *KJV vs NIV*.

“In 1841 an old manuscript (Codex Vaticanus) was discovered lying on a shelf in the Vatican library. In 1844 part of another old manuscript (Codex Sinaiticus) was found in a wastebasket in St. Catherine's monastery (the other part was found in 1859). It is generally believed that these were from the 50 that Eusebius prepared for Constantine. In 1853 these two Cambridge professors, Westcott and Hort, began to prepare a Greek Text based primarily on the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus manuscripts. They passed by the Traditional Text (Textus Receptus) which was the text upon which the King James Version is based. Instead they used the corrupted manuscripts of the Gnosticism-Origen-Eusebius-Jerome-Augustine lineage.” (Joseph Van Beek's tract: *KJV vs NIV*, pgs 5 & 6)

As to the personal beliefs of Westcott and Hort: 1) They never claimed or testified that the Bible was verbally inspired or inerrant. 2) They denied the Genesis account of creation and questioned whether Eden ever existed.....Instead they praised Darwin's 1859 theory of evolution. 3) Hort wrote, “The popular doctrine of substitution is an immoral and material counterfeit. Certainly nothing could be more unscriptural than the modern limiting of Christ's bearing our sins and sufferings to his death; but indeed that is only one aspect of an almost universal heresy.” 4) Hort wrote, “I have been persuaded for many years that Mary-worship and Jesus worship have very much in common in their

causes and their results.” Westcott found a statue of Mary and a crucified Christ in a remote chapel and wrote, “Had I been alone, I could have knelt there for hours.”

Please note that neither Westcott nor Hort believed that the Bible was God’s Word. Hort did not believe in the complete blood atonement of Christ for the forgiveness of sins, calling such doctrine "heresy". Both found nothing wrong with the worship of Mary.

The following are quotes of Westcott and Hort, found in Riplinger’s book.

Westcott - “I reject the word infallibility of Holy Scriptures overwhelmingly.” Riplinger, pg 622

Hort - “Evangelicals seem to me perverted. . . There are, I fear, still more serious differences between us on the subject of authority, especially the authority of the Bible.” Riplinger, pg 621

Hort - “[T]his may be cowardice - I have sort of a craving that our text should be cast upon the world before we deal with matters likely to brand us with suspicion. I mean, a text issued by men who are already known for what will undoubtedly be treated as dangerous heresy_will have great difficulty in finding its way to regions which it might otherwise hope to reach and whence it would not be easily banished by subsequent alarms. (Hort’s letter to Westcott regarding their writing other things.)” Riplinger, pg 623

Westcott - “I shall aim at what is transcendental in many peoples eyes. . . I suppose I am a communist by nature.” Riplinger, pg 624

Westcott - “our Bible as well as our Faith is a mere compromise.” Riplinger, pg 625

Westcott and Hort were spiritualists. They sought out contact with the spiritual world (talking with the dead, etc.). Riplinger speaks much on this subject and also aligns them with the New Age movement. They started the “Ghostly Guild” in 1851 and before that the “Hermes Club” in 1845. Riplinger links the spiritualist teachings of Westcott and Hort to the occult teachings of Madame Helena P. Blavatsky who wrote the *Lucifer* magazine. Westcott, Hort, and Blavatsky are all forerunners of the modern day New Age movement which aims at one world religion.

Conclusion

The conclusion is obvious. Any modern translation that is based upon Westcott and Hort's Greek text cannot be trusted, for it is based upon five manuscripts which do not even agree with one other. The KJV, on the other hand, is based upon the Majority text, over 5000 witnesses agreeing. This is to say nothing of the hundreds of church fathers who quoted their Scriptures in sermons, writings, etc., which also testify to the standard of the Majority text. Even the casual reader of the Bible, if he were to compare a modern translation (NIV) with the KJV, will easily find numerous differences between the two (Consider Revelation 1:11, Heb. 2:16, Col. 2:9). Even a brief comparison of passages between the NIV and KJV will yield useful information. Therefore it is unwise for the sincere Christian to readily accept modern Bible translations assuming them to be accurate and faithful to the Word of God. They are anything but. To learn more about Bible versions and the many problems with modern translations, consider the following:

David Otis Fuller, D. D. *Which Bible* Grand Rapids International Publications, Grand Rapids,

Michigan, 49501

David Otis Fuller, D. D. *Counterfeit Or Genuine Mark 16? John 8?* Grand Rapids International Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 49501

Pastor R. W. Shekner, *Comparisons*, Anchor Publications (anchorbooksandtracts.com)

Taylor and Young, *Distorted Scripture*, Anchor Publications (anchorbooksandtracts.com)

G. A. Riplinger *New Age Bible Versions* A V Publications, Box 388 Munroe Falls, Ohio, 44262
1-800-435-4535.

It should also be noted that the writings of John W. Burgon, Edward Hills, Benjamin C. Wilkinson will be greatly edifying. May God enlighten us all to the truth through His Word. Thanks be to Him that His Word is faithfully preserved in the accurate translation of the King James Version.

“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: 19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book.” Rev 22:18,19

In Christ Jesus our Lord,
Pastor Tobin Pederson, Reformation Day, October 31, 2007