

Two Differing Greek Texts: Which Is More Accurate?

By Ron Myers – Bible Translator (Rev. 11)

Much of the present-day Bible version controversy revolves around which Bible version, or which underlying Greek manuscript is best. There are **two major classifications** or two streams of Greek manuscripts in focus in this ongoing sometimes-heated dispute. They are: ^{A)} the **Alexandrian** or *Western* text-type (*also called Egyptian*; associated with the *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus*), and ^{B)} the **Byzantine** or *Eastern Orthodox* text-type (*also known as Antiochian or Syrian*), of which the *Received Text* or *Textus Receptus (TR)* is associated, albeit slight variations do occur. *Note: I show some very revealing Bible version examples in a followup paper: [Modern Version Bible Quiz](#).*

In this paper, I have attempted to provide a summary of a multi-faceted subject in a simplified, neutral format. I give an overview of the differences and reasoning surrounding this often emotionally-charged and perplexing subject, written with the layman in mind. I also address the claims of some of the more-exclusive, radical elements. Concerning the two major Greek text categories—Alexandrian vs. Byzantine—the **KJV** (*and other older versions*) were translated from the best compilation of manuscripts available at the time. These were later called the *Textus Receptus (TR)* or *Received Text*, which is closely associated with the Byzantine line of Greek manuscripts.¹ The **NKJV**[†] was purposefully translated using the same *Textus Receptus* line of Byzantine Greek manuscripts, simply as an update of the 1611 King James' Elizabethan wordage. It was *not* derived from the Alexandrian manuscript line, like the other modern-day Bibles.

In contrast, both the scholarly **NASB** and the very popular **NIV** were translated from edited derivatives of the Alexandrian line of Greek manuscripts. Today, these are known as the Westcott & Hort (WH); Critical Text; Nestle-Aland (NA) *and* United Bible Society (NU) line of Greek texts. Keep in mind that, apart from the **NKJV**, all modern-day New Testament translations are, without exception, based on these derivatives of the Alexandrian text, not just the **NASB** or **NIV**... *as well as the older American Standard Version (ASV) and Revised Standard Version (RSV).*

Of prime importance to understanding the premise of this paper, one should keep in mind that **neither** of the Greek text lines discussed here (*Alexandrian or Byzantine*) are the actual originally-inspired (*God-breathed*) autographs. They are, however, two separate compiled collections of Greek manuscripts from fragments of ancient transcripts, which originated from two separate geographical locations—Alexandria Egypt vs. the Byzantine (*Eastern Roman*) Empire; hence, their names. Therefore, what remains today (*Alexandrian and Byzantine*) are copies of copies of the original God-breathed autographs—replicated by scribes and handed down over the years until lost to antiquity, to be rediscovered later from various locations and meticulously compiled.

The question remains: Which of these two compiled sets of Greek manuscripts (*Alexandrian or Byzantine*) more closely reflects the actual inspired autographs? That is, the original writings, penned by the Apostles (Matthew, John, Paul, Peter, and James), and disciples like John-Mark (Mark) and Dr. Luke (Luke and Acts) under the divine unction and superintendence of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when we say we believe that all Scripture enjoys total verbal inerrancy, or complete word-for-word accuracy, we are referring to the original autographs, not fragments of copies—*whether Byzantine/TR or Alexandrian*—not translations based on either of these, be it the **KJV** standby or its **NKJV** update (*Byzantine/TR*), against the popular **NIV** or the more-scholarly *Alexandrian-based NASB*. The writer has now included the newer **ESV** version since it has gained recent popularity.

Among Alexandrian-based translations, the Lockman Foundation's **NASB** (which I used and advocated for years) is more accurate or "faithful" grammatically to the Alexandrian-based Greek text than any of its modern-day cousins. Then, there's the recent Reformed favorite English Standard Version (**ESV**), also Alexandrian-based. Alexandrian camp advocates might well consider it their answer to the Byzantine/TR based **NKJV**, which closely reflects its **KJV** parent.

Concerning the **NASB**, it owes its accuracy to its scholarly translation team, whose primary goal was to make it as grammatically accurate or faithfully reflective as possible to the Alexandrian Greek text on which it was based. It has a style or philosophy of translation called *formal* or *literal* equivalence, like the **KJV** and **NKJV**. Although the **NIV** reads more smoothly and is widely popular for that reason (including a brilliant marketing campaign) it tends to be unnecessarily *interpretive* in many of its key word choices. Meaning, the over-emphasis of *dynamic* or *paraphrastic* equivalence style or philosophy of translation. In this writer's opinion, the **NIV** translation committee could have chosen less-interpretive terms and still maintained its ease of readability while increasing its accuracy. reliable

THE GREEK MANUSCRIPT CONTROVERSY: WHICH BEST RENDERS THE ORIGINAL?

Note: Before we proceed, we should remind ourselves that the antiquity of a document does not prove its worth, nor does the recency of a document make it worthless. Documents may be new, yet reliable, old yet unreliable. (adapted: Ryrie)

The theory championed by scholars and intellectuals who advocate the Alexandrian manuscripts is that, since the known extant Byzantine manuscripts were: ^(a) presumably dated later than the known Alexandrian manuscripts, ^(b) thus, there was a greater likelihood of alteration, ^(c) resulting in decreasing reliability. Their hypothesis was that zealous scribes *might* have taken opportunity to tamper with the text, adding whole sections to their own liking. The Alexandrian manuscript proponents also consider themselves as being more knowledgeable, viewing Byzantine/TR devotees as being parochially unsophisticated and naïve—which, in some cases is not entirely without merit.

Note: Concerning the claim of scribal tampering, if one is familiar with every scribe's absolute reverence for Scripture, attention to detail, and striving for accuracy of ancient Biblical scribes, the pro-Alexandrian (critical text) argument becomes much weaker. It would have been unthinkable for any scribe to consider editing the sacred text, even in a miniscule way. Their only goal being to meticulously copy every detail the ancient Greek (or Hebrew/Aramaic) manuscripts—scrupulously guarding against any type of error, be it insertion or deletion.

Byzantine Proponents' Rebuttal: Byzantine proponents' rebuttal is that discovery dates have little to do with it. In actuality, the earliest Byzantine manuscripts may well be as old as the Alexandrian (or possibly older). They also insist that it is likely the more accurate of the two lines, and provably was not "tampered" with by scribes as advanced by the pro-Alexandrian camp. Ironically, some pro-Alexandrian (*textual criticism*) scholars have begun to question the scribal-tampering theory. Consequently, some now regard the Byzantine/TR as being more reliable than previously thought, and are taking a second look at the old stand-by, from which the **KJV** and **NKJV** were derived, as well as older or similar English versions.²

Furthermore, advocates of the Byzantine/TR position point to historical evidence that the Alexandrian text was discovered early on to have numerous missing key words, phrases, and even complete sections having been altered or deleted by disbelieving heretical factions located in the Alexandrian, Egypt region; thus the name. Archeologists

concluded it must have been set aside in caves—*not destroyed, owing to a reverence for Scripture*—to be rediscovered later. And yet, it is touted by present-day scholars to be the more accurate text—based on age alone—even though it is comparatively scarce in extant number. This, even though some portions were undiscernible scraps or even missing links that needed to be *guesstimated* and bridged together to *fill in the blanks*. The same changes and omissions are found in *all* modern Bible translations based on the updated derivatives of Alexandrian Greek text, despite its scarcity of extant manuscript evidence. These differences become strikingly evident when critically compared alongside the **KJV** and **NKJV**, both being founded on the Byzantine/TR text. *SEE: "Modern Bible Version Quiz" for further proof.*

THE PREPONDERANCE OF EVIDENCE *and* THE MAJORITY GREEK TEXT:

Opposing camps still disagree concerning which manuscript is more *bona fide* (*Alexandrian or Byzantine*), and both sides of the debate are convinced their own position is correct. However, if one considers the greater preponderance of available evidence, factually speaking, there are only a miniscule amount of Alexandrian manuscript remnants in existence; in comparison to the Byzantine text-type which has by far the largest number of surviving manuscripts. This was perhaps the impetus for compiling what is known as the *Majority Greek text* prototype, generated from an aggregate of the best of all extant (*existing or surviving*) Byzantine Greek manuscript remnants.

This was first achieved by Drs. Arthur Farstad and Zane Hodges, who remain strong proponents of the majority or *preponderance of evidence* textual theory. The theory being, if *all* reliable manuscript fragments were diligently analyzed, tallied up, and a composite prototype was compiled from what proved to be the greater “majority” of evidence, in all probability, the resultant product would very closely represent the *long-lost* original autographs. It could also potentially end the longstanding debate as to which Greek manuscript is closer to the original God-breathed New Testament documents (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16).

Dr. W.F. Pickering later proposed questions pertaining to the objectivity of the Farstad and Hodges Majority Greek edition. Upon evaluation, Pickering believed that the compilers of the *original* Majority version (Farstad and Hodges) had not maintained strict neutrality, since certain portions appeared to give credence to the Alexandrian (*or Critical*) Greek manuscripts.

Subsequently, Pickering set about to do an in-depth evaluation and revision, aptly named the *New Majority Greek* version (*including an English translation*).³ His work indicated that the Byzantine/TR (*from which the **KJV** and **NKJV** were taken*) has a greater probability of consistent alignment to the original inspired autographs—than does the Alexandrian (*from which the **NASB** and **NIV** were derived*). Otherwise stated, the compilation of Alexandrian text fragments—which some see as *fraught with “guess-timations” and omissions*—was in all probability the altered or corrupted Greek text. Some conclude this was likely the reason it was originally set aside to be forgotten (due to being a corrupted text) and stored in clay pots in the caves at *Qumran* some 20 centuries ago.⁴

Others have suggested that, perhaps the most persuasive evidence supporting which existing Greek text-type more closely reflects the original autographs might be found in first and second century translations, or in the writings of the Apostles and early church fathers. If the research proved definitive, it could provide compelling evidence as to which text was the most accurate: the Alexandrian, the Byzantine/TR, or possibly one of the Majority Greek text prototypes.

Concerning the **NIV** (*and the other modern translations based on the critical text theory*), many have accepted the claims about these types of translations as being more accurate. I agree that the **NIV** reads very smoothly, a positive point. It also employs literal translation techniques in places; another plus. However, the major problem is with what many see as missing words, phrases, or verses (*following its Alexandrian source*). The **NIV** also has the tendency to be "interpretive" in word choice when a more straight-forward wording would work fine. These, coupled with huge marketing campaigns, has taken the **NIV** into many hearts, homes, and pulpits, often causing more disarray than depth of understanding.

With all due deference, the same could easily be said about more-recent translations, i.e., HCSB, ESV, ISV, NLB, WEB, *ad infinitum*. How many times do we really need to recreate the English translation wheel, introducing "Lilliputian" alterations along with claims of a "brand new" translation of greater accuracy? Could not time, energy, and funds be more-wisely invested by supporting greatly-needed Bible translation projects presently being undertaken on the mission field, among people-groups still without the Scriptures in their own heart language—like Thailand's *Isan people*, for instance?

THE MISSING BLOOD: A LOOK AT COLOSSIANS 1:14:

Many dislike the phrase "through His Blood" missing from Colossians 1:14 in modern English versions, including this writer. Why is it missing? The commonly held notion by conspiracy theorists is that the translators of the **NASB**, **NIV**, and other modern versions, purposefully "denied the Blood," alleging that the versions were *Satanically-inspired*. This is simply untrue—except perhaps the *Satanic Bible* by Satanist Anton LaVey (c.1969).

The underlying problem with this passage is that this key phrase ("*through His Blood*") is missing from the Alexandrian-based Greek manuscripts. The translators of these modern versions are godly and scholarly individuals who seek to remain faithful to the Greek text they believe (right or wrong) to be the most accurate—the Alexandrian and its various modern derivatives (Westcott and Hort, Nestle-Aland, NU, etc.).

CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS:

Regardless of whatever Bible version or Greek manuscript preferences are held, and with all personal notions, theories, biases, and opinions set aside, this writer believes there is *no* definitively-conclusive evidence as to which of these Greek manuscript lines most-closely reflects the original autographs—be it *Alexandrian*, *Byzantine/TR*, or *Majority* prototype based.

Some might disagree with this conclusion. For instance, Dr. Wilbur Pickering (formerly WBT/SIL translator in Brazil) is convinced that *Family*³⁵ of the *Byzantine/TR* text-type—*basis for his New Majority prototype*—is the exact preserved representation of the original autographs. As such, he has nothing positive to say concerning the Alexandrian text-type. Dr. Pickering is certainly way-more qualified to make this determination than this writer is to refute it. Although this writer now believes the *Byzantine/TR* text-type—including Pickering's *New Majority* prototype—are likely closer to the original than the Alexandrian, he maintains that a comparative evaluation would be an impossibility, since the actual original autographs are lost to antiquity, having become unusable through repeated handling, or destroyed by enemies of the Christian message.

While translating the New Testament into the Isan language, and after years of prayerful reflection and analysis, this translator no longer concurs with the pro-Alexandrian manuscript view. He now *strongly* favors the Byzantine/TR position and translations based on it, namely the **KJV** and **NKJV** (*Geneva, Young's, Green's LITV and MKJV, and Pickering's New Majority*) of which I reference while translating and checking, as well as Byzantine/TR-based grammatical lexicons.

† **KJV ONLYISM and the NKJV: IS IT REALLY A DECEITFUL COUNTERFEIT?**

Speaking strictly from a translator's vantage point, this writer feels compelled to address the bizarre and ludicrous assertions promoted by the most-extreme elements of the **KJV**-only camp, who: ^(a) reject the original *God-Breathed* Greek and Hebrew autographs, claiming that God's inspirational blessing now rests solely on the **1611 KJV**; ^(b) claim that people can only be saved through reading the **KJV**; and, ^(c) claim that the **NKJV** is a "*deceitfully dangerous counterfeit*," even worse than all other modern-day translations, because it is *not* a derivative of the *authentic* old **KJV** as is purported.

I respectfully suggest that those who make these untenable types of doctrinaire and dogmatic statements reevaluate the credibility of their own position. Concerning the **NKJV**, after a fairly thorough comparative analysis in many key passages against the **KJV**, I find *no* tenable evidence that the **NKJV** falls into the *counterfeit* or *deviant* category, i.e., favoring or following the wording in the Alexandrian Greek text. On the contrary, I find that it favors **KJV/TR** word choices and phraseology practically throughout. Granted, it updates Elizabethan pronouns and verb forms, and uses more-pertinent synonyms where appropriate, *all* named in **KJV/TR** based Greek and Hebrew lexicons, as being related alternatives.

I knew the late Dr. Henry Morris as a friend—co-founder of *ICR* with Dr. Tim LaHaye—and am quite comfortable with his position regarding the **KJV** and the **NKJV**. Dr. Morris is a strong **KJV** advocate, yet maintains that the **NKJV** is by far the best of the newer translations, also based on the TR. I am personally fond of my old **KJV**, and am a firm proponent of the Byzantine/TR's primacy. Yet, I resolutely disagree with **KJV**-onlyism's extremist elements, and their outlandish beliefs, claims and assertions; which, I believe, clearly cross the line into heretical idolatry—giving a bad name to the cause of Christ and the masterful **KJV**.⁵ Their hypothetical conclusions are speculation and conjecture at best, with little or no hard evidence or fact on which to base their allegations and their position.

Be that as it may, I give these people credit concerning their high regard and reverence for the Word of God, as misdirected and outside the boundary of sound reason as it may be. I seriously doubt that the Holy Spirit, when He inspired the words through the pen of the Psalmist; "*Forever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven,*" was looking down through the centuries in a prophetic sense, referring specifically to the **1611 KJV**. The key phrase here being: "*settled in heaven,*" **not** in the **1611 KJV**, as great a time-honored work as it is.

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End Notes:

¹ (pg. 1) Other Byzantine/TR related English translations include: Tyndale (1525); Coverdale (1535); Great Bible (1539); Geneva/Pilgrim's Bible (1560) ... *all of which the translators of the KJV consulted and drew from (1611)*. A variety of KJV-based edits and updates include the NKJV (1979) Thomas Nelson Publishers, as well as the Modern KJV and Literal Version (1962, 1976, Dr. Jay Green) along with other less-known modified KJV lookalikes.

² (pg. 2) This was learned by the author firsthand ² from a noted SIL/WBT Bible translator with whom I am friends, and whose father was a member of the NIV editing committee.

³ (pg. 3) The [reevaluation](#) of the original Majority Greek compilation was done by [Dr. Wilbur Pickering, ThM, PhD.](#), formerly with SIL/WBT in Brazil. His findings were that the original majority compilation was, in fact, not impartial, but unduly weighted towards a more-sparse *minority* aggregate of manuscript fragments, which comprise the Alexandrian Greek text with all of its omissions. Dr. Pickering undertook a new rendering, a more-accurate [New Majority Greek text](#), with accompanying [New Majority English version](#) (*with copious footnotes*). Pickering also defends the absolute inerrancy and authority of Scripture, including precise preservation today, which he believes is found exclusively in *Family*³⁵ of the Byzantine/TR Greek manuscript set.

⁴ (pg. 3) [Qumran](#) is the site of an ancient Jewish settlement (possibly of the [Essenes sect](#)), located on a dry plateau about a mile from the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. It is best known as the location of the [Dead Sea Scrolls](#), which were stored in the caves of the nearby sheer desert cliffs. Extensive excavations of the settlement have been undertaken since the discovery, in 1947, of nearly 900 scroll fragments in various states of completeness—written on parchment (*sheepskin*) or papyrus.

⁵ (pg. 5) These controversial KJV-Only assertions (which fit in the category of flawed logic and unprovable fabrications) include:

- ✓ That God abandoned the original Hebrew and Greek autographs in favor of the 1611 KJV, which corrected any mistakes in the originals;
- ✓ That the 1611 KJV is supernaturally inspired and thus inerrant (*the writer suggests they should reread the KJV translators' notes*).
- ✓ That no one can be saved by reading other versions, as they are all "Satanically inspired," including the NKJV.
- ✓ That missionaries need to teach remote, heathen tribal natives English so they can read the KJV and get properly saved.
- ✓ That using any "man-made" study resources (*including Vines dictionary, Strong's lexicon, etc.*) usurps the KJV's final authority.

Confronting these extremist types with the error of their ways brings little constructive results and often gets one scorned and labeled. Like all cultish-like sects, they're fully convinced they are right and refuse to listen, feeding off each other's self-propagating peer pressure to maintain their doctrinaire zeal. Their position is typically based on judgmental peer-pressure and naiveté—not reason, knowledge, or fact.

Note-1: As a church planting missionary and Bible translator, I have been quizzed and even lost much-needed support from former supporting churches whose pastors later took this position . . . even after assuring them I always referred to the trusted KJV while doing translation and don't use or advocate the NIV or other modern translations—their favorite *hobbyhorse*. One (a sold-out Peter Ruckmanite) threatened to drop my support because I said I consulted the Greek. I knew the man previously as he had been called to pastor the fledgling church my mother helped start as organist. Personally, I am a *Byzantine/TR-Only* advocate, not a *KJV-Only* advocate, which is essentially the same thing from a translator's point of view.

Note-2: Once, when I was on a deputation tour, hoping to raise our waning support, I stopped in on a few pastors in what turned out to be staunch KJV-Only territory. Telling them I was a church-planter and Bible translator, they would usually ask what translation I used. I often replied that I had seen most of them, but felt the old KJV standby was at the top—which I used and was saved under. It was true as I wasn't trying to deceive anyone in the least, just hoping to avoid unnecessary arguments, knowing what they believe, how they think, and the questions they typically ask. One pastor, a more-friendly fellow who claimed to be a staunch KJV-Onlyite, asked me later in our conversation what I thought of the NASB, saying he often read from it. I said I knew that it was known to be grammatically very accurate, and that I had once used it before I had studied the differences in Greek texts. Here's a purportedly staunch KJV-Only advocate that admitted "jumping ship" in his private reading time. An amazing discovery! I give that pastor credit for being forthright and honest with me. I wondered, how many others hypocritically do the same, but would never admit it to anyone, especially their KJV-Only peers for fear of being ostracized.