

Two Differing Greek Texts – Which Is More Accurate?

By Ron Myers – Translator (*Rev. 6.1b*)

Much of present-day Bible version controversy revolves around which version or which underlying Greek manuscript is best. There are **two major classifications**, or two streams of Greek manuscripts in focus in this discussion (*with some Bible version examples*). They are: ^{A)} the **Alexandrian** or *Western* text-type (*also called Egyptian, and associated with the Sinaiticus/Vaticanus*), and ^{B)} the **Byzantine** or *Eastern Orthodox* text-type (*also called Antiochian or Syrian*), associated with the *Received Text* or *Textus Receptus (TR)*.

In this paper, the author attempts to provide a simplification (*and hopefully neutral or impartial summary*) of the differences and reasoning surrounding this sometimes emotionally-charged and often-perplexing subject, written with the layman in mind. It also addresses the claims of some of the more-radical elements.

Concerning the two major categories of English New Testaments, the **KJV** (and [†]**NewKJV**)—and other older versions of similar heritage—were translated from the best available manuscripts at the time, later called the *Textus Receptus (TR)*, associated with the Byzantine line of Greek manuscripts.¹ In contrast, both the scholarly **NASB** and the very popular **NIV** were translated from edited derivatives of the Alexandrian line of Greek manuscripts, now known as the: Westcott & Hort (*WH*); Critical Text; or Nestle-Aland/United Bible Society (*NU*). Except for the **NewKJV**, all modern-day New Testament translations are, without exception, based on these derivatives of the Alexandrian, not just the **NASB** or **NIV** (*and the older ASV and RSV*).

Incidentally, of prime importance to the premise of this paper, **neither** of the Greek text lines discussed here (*Byzantine or Alexandrian*) are the actual original inspired (*God-breathed*) manuscripts. They are, however, two separate collections of Greek manuscripts, compiled from fragments of ancient transcripts, i.e., copies of copies that had been replicated by scribes and handed down over the years until lost in time, and later rediscovered.

Now, the yet-unanswered question remains, which of these two compiled sets of Greek manuscripts (*Byzantine or Alexandrian*) more closely reflects the actual inspired autographs? ...meaning, the original writings, penned by the Apostles and other disciples (*like John-Mark and Dr. Luke*), 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 (*be it Byzantine/TR or Alexandrian*), and definitely not any translations based on them, be it the popular **NIV**, or the venerable **KJV** standby, etc.

Incidentally, among all the Alexandrian-based translations, the Lockman Foundation's **NASB** (*which I used for many years*) is more accurate or "faithful" to the Greek than any of its modern-day cousins. This is because the scholarly translators' primary goal was to make the NASB as grammatically accurate or faithfully reflective as possible to the Alexandrian Greek text from which it was taken (*called formal or literal equivalence*). Conversely, although the **NIV** reads more smoothly, and is widely popular on that basis—not to mention enjoying a superb job of marketing—it tends to be unnecessarily *interpretive* in many of its word choices (*i.e., overuse of dynamic or paraphrastic equivalence*). Simply put, in this writer's opinion, the **NIV** translation committee could have chosen less-interpretive terms, and still maintained its ease of readability.

THE GREEK MANUSCRIPT CONTROVERSY – WHICH BEST RENDERS THE ORIGINAL?

The theory championed by scholars and intellectuals who advocate the Alexandrian manuscripts is that, since the extant Byzantine manuscripts were thought to be later, there was a greater likelihood of alteration, resulting in decreasing reliability. Their hypothesis was that ambitious scribes could have tampered with the text, adding whole sections to their own liking. The Alexandrian manuscript proponents also consider themselves as being more knowledgeable, and see Byzantine/TR devotees as being unsophisticated, which, in some cases, is not entirely without merit.

Note: Concerning the claim of scribal tampering, if one is familiar with the 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 absolutely unthinkable for any scribe to even consider editing the sacred text in any way—their only goal being to meticulously copy the ancient Greek manuscripts, scrupulously guarding against any type of error.

Byzantine proponents' rebuttal is that discovery dates have little to do with it, and, in actuality, the Byzantine manuscripts are at least as old as the Alexandrian, or older. They also insist that it is likely the more accurate of the two, and provably has not been "tampered" with by scribes, as is advanced by the pro-Alexandrian camp. Ironically, some pro-Alexandrian (*textual criticism*) scholars have begun to question the scribal-tampering theory. Consequently, these 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 similar English versions.²

Furthermore, supporters of the Byzantine position point to historical evidence that the Alexandrian text was discovered very early on to have numerous missing key words, phrases, and even complete sections, intentionally altered or deleted by certain disbelieving heretical factions in the Alexandrian region (*thus the name*). It had therefore

been set aside in caves (*not destroyed, owing to a reverence for Scripture*) only to be rediscovered later on, and touted by present-day scholars to be the more accurate text. The same omissions are found in all modern Bible translations based on the Alexandrian Greek text or its derivatives. These “differences” become clearly evident when compared alongside translations based on the Byzantine/TR text. *SEE: NIV or Modern Bible Version Quiz for 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 vast number of Byzantine manuscript remnants. 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 extent (*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 bring to a close the longstanding debate as to which Greek manuscript is closer to the original God-breathed New Testament documents (*2 Timothy 3:16*).

Questions later arose pertaining to the objectivity of the Farstad/Hodges Majority Greek edition by Dr. W.F. Pickering. Upon evaluation, he believed that the compilers of the *original* Majority version had not maintained strict neutrality, in that certain portions appeared to give credence to the Alexandrian (*or Critical*) 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 consistently reflecting the original, inspired autographs than the Alexandrian (*from which the NASB and NIV were derived*). Otherwise stated, the Alexandrian text (*with what some see as being fraught with changes and omissions*), in all probability is the altered or corrupted Greek text, very likely the reason it was originally set aside to be forgotten, 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 other 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 quite literal translation techniques in many places; another plus. However, the major problem is with what many see as missing words, phrases, or verses (*reflecting the Alexandrian source text*), as well as the tendency to be “interpretive” in nature, when a more straight-forward wording would work fine. That, coupled with huge marketing campaigns, has taken the *NIV* into many hearts, homes, and pulpits, often causing more disarray than depth of growth.

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 NOTE ON COLOSSIANS 1:14:

Many highly dislike the idea of the phrase “through His Blood” missing from Colossians 1:14 in modern English versions, this writer included. That being said, what is the cause? The commonly held notion by many conspiracy theorists is that the translators of the *NASB, NIV*, and other modern-day versions, purposefully “denied the Blood,” alleging that they were *Satanically-inspired*. This is quite simply untrue—except for the “Satanic Bible” published by Anton LaVey in 1969.

Actually, the underlying problem here is that this key phrase (“*through His Blood*”) is *not* present in this passage in the Alexandrian-based Greek manuscripts. As a general rule, 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, i.e., the Alexandrian and its various derivatives (Westcott and Hort, Nestle-Aland, NU, etc.).

CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS:

Regardless of whatever Bible version or Greek manuscript preferences held, and with all personal notions, theories, biases, and opinions aside, this writer believes, *at this juncture*, that 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. Pickering is convinced that *Family35* 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 *Byz/TR* text-type—including Pickering's *New Majority prototype*—are, in all likelihood, closer to the original than the *Alexandrian*, he maintains that a comparative evaluation would be an unprovable impossibility, since the actual original autographs are lost to antiquity, having become unusable through repeated handling, or destroyed by enemies of the Christian message.

On a personal note, 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 **New KJV** (*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.

† ADDENDUM: THE NewKJV – 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, among other things, claim that the **NKJV** is a "deceitfully dangerous counterfeit."

May I respectfully suggest that those who make these types of outlandish statements reevaluate the credibility of their own position. After a thorough comparative analysis of many key passages, I find *no* evidence whatsoever that the **NKJV** falls into the *counterfeit* category, i.e., favoring the wording in the *Alexandrian* Greek text. In fact, I find that it reflects **KJV/TR** word choices and phraseology pretty-much throughout. Granted, it updates Elizabethan-age pronouns and verb forms, and uses more-apropos synonyms in some cases, where appropriate, all found in **KJV**-based Greek lexicons.

I knew the late Dr. Henry Morris of *ICR* as a personal friend, and am very comfortable with his position regarding the **KJV**, and the **NKJV**, who maintains it is the best of the newer translations. I am 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 and assertions*, which clearly cross the line into heretical idolatry, giving a bad taste to an otherwise worthwhile cause.⁵

Be that as it may, I need to give these people due credit concerning their high regard and reverence for the sacred Word of God. However, 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."

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¹ Other *Byzantine/TR* English translations include: Tyndale (1525); Coverdale (1535); Great Bible (1539); Geneva/Pilgrim's Bible (1560)—all of which the translators of the *KJV* drew (1611); a variety of *KJV* edits and updates, including: the Modern *KJV* and *Literal Versions* (1962, 1976, Dr. Jay Green); the *NKJV* (1979) Thomas Nelson Publishers.

² This was learned by the author firsthand from a noted *SIL/WBT* Bible translator, whose father was a member of the *NIV* editing committee.

³ The *reevaluation* of the original *Majority* Greek compilation was done by [Dr. Wilbur Pickering, ThM, PhD](#). 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 *Family35* of the *Byz/TR* Greek manuscript set.

⁴ [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 These controversial 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* alone; that it is supernaturally inspired and thus inerrant—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 the natives English so they can read the *KJV* and get saved; that using any "man-made" study resources (including *Strong's* lexicon) usurps the *KJV*'s final authority. Confronting these types brings little constructive results, and often gets one scorned and labeled. Like all cult-like sects, they're fully convinced they are right and refuse to listen, feeding off of each other's self-propagating peer pressure to maintain their doctrinaire zeal.