

How we got our Bible (Chapters 12-14)

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CHAPTER 12

The Gnostics and the Alexandrian Codices (*unbound manuscripts*)

There are multitudes of New Testament fragments, but there are few complete manuscripts. Papyri and even parchments do not withstand the brutality of time without loss. However, there are three codices which have been preserved through the ages, nearly complete New Testament manuscripts from as early as the fourth century. Unfortunately, their great age does not necessarily make them the most reliable documents. Sometimes materials can last because they haven't been used; they've been set aside while the best manuscripts were read every day and worn out. These three manuscripts are ancient, but they are not very good, and that has been the source of a lot of confusion and controversy regarding the correct Greek rendering of the New Testament.

Codex Alexandrinus: According to tradition, Cyril Lucar, Patriarch of Constantinople and former Patriarch of Alexandria, gave this ancient codex as a gift to King Charles I of England. It has since been moved to the British Museum. It is a highly important, nearly complete Greek Bible from the fifth century.

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Codex Sinaiticus: About 200 years later, around the early 1800s, a German scholar named Constantin von Tischendorf discovered the Codex Sinaiticus in Saint Catherine's Monastery at the traditional Mount Sinai. This manuscript, dated about A.D. 350 (fourth century), is one of two oldest complete manuscripts of the Greek New Testament.

Codex Vaticanus: This manuscript has been in the Vatican Library in Rome since at least 1481, but was not made available to scholars until the 19th century. It was dated slightly earlier (A.D. 325) than Codex Sinaiticus, and is regarded by many as one of the most reliable copies of the Greek New Testament.

These texts are therefore the oldest, most complete texts we now have of the New Testament. At the same time, they are missing certain verses and passages and contain a number of other deviations from the Greek texts that Jerome used to translate the New Testament portion of the Latin Vulgate (A.D. 382 - 405) and the Byzantine Greek manuscripts that were passed along into the Middle Ages. Generally speaking, it is wisest to use the oldest manuscripts, because we assume that the oldest complete Greek manuscripts contain the material with the fewest errors, the ones that are word-for-word closest to what the apostles originally wrote. In the case of these codices, however, that appears not to be the case.

The Gnostics and the Alexandrian Codices

We must remember that one of Satan's strategies has been to create doubt about the Word of God. From the beginning in the Garden, he hooked Eve with, "Yea, hath God said?"⁶³ As promised in 2 Peter 2:1-3, by A.D. 55 the twisting of God's Word had already begun. Greek philosophies and concepts were infiltrating the early Christian's ranks, and certain individuals started disparaging the existing writings of both the Old and New Testaments.

The Gnostics

Alexandria in Egypt was one of the major centers of Greek thought. The library at Alexandria was renowned for its size and dedication to housing the great classic Greek works. Alexandria also appears to be the city of origin for heretical groups called the Gnostics.

The word gnostic comes from the Greek word for “knowledge” - gnósis (γνῶσις). The Gnostics professed themselves to be wise but became fools; they saw their knowledge as a secret and special source of information, but they embraced philosophies that contradicted Scripture. For instance, they saw the physical, material world as evil while the spiritual was considered good. The Gnostics taught that Jesus Christ was not God in the flesh; Jesus must instead have been a phantom, an apparition with only the appearance of physical presence. They also disparaged existing apostolic writings and mixed the revelation of God with contradictory Greek philosophies.

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Gnosticism did not include just one set of believers holding a unified set of doctrines. Instead, it presented a strange mix of groups espousing what we might call New Age philosophy with Greek ideas stirred in - wrapped in a facade of Christianity. This movement didn't take long to sprout up and was gaining momentum even before John died. The first epistle of John rebuts its false ideas in several places: e.g., 1 John 1:1-2, 4:2-3.

At their headquarters in Alexandria, the Gnostics would expurgate the scriptures, delete passages, and mutilate other verses or passages. The second-century church father Irenaeus taught extensively against the Gnostics. In his work *Against Heresies*, he wrote:

Since, therefore, they have been deserted by the paternal love, and puffed up by Satan, being brought over to the doctrine of Simon Magus, they have apostatized in their opinions from Him who is God, and imagined that they have themselves discovered more than the apostles, by finding out another god; and [maintained] that the apostles preached the Gospel still somewhat under the influence of Jewish opinions, but that they themselves are purer [in doctrine], and more intelligent, than the apostles. Wherefore also Marcion and his followers have betaken themselves to mutilating the Scriptures, not acknowledging some books at all; and, curtailing the Gospel according to Luke and the Epistles of Paul, they assert that these are alone authentic, which they have themselves thus shortened...But all the rest, inflated with the false name of “knowledge,” do certainly recognize the Scriptures; but they pervert the interpretations, as I have shown in the first book. ⁶⁴

The Gnostics and the Alexandrian Codices

The three codices – Alexandrinus, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus – are called the “Alexandrian codices” – “Codex A,” “Codex B,” and “Codex Aleph” respectively – and there is reason to regard them all as corrupt. It is true that they are very old and complete New Testament manuscripts, but they are all low-quality documents that were poorly transcribed, and they likely survived the destruction of the ages due to not being used.

That is the view of John William Burgon (1813- 1888), an Oxford divinity professor, vicar of St. Mary's Church in Oxford and eventual Dean of Chichester. Burgon traveled across the world to examine the Alexandrian codices in depth. The son of a British merchant, Burgon had been born in Smyria, Turkey and studied the Greek classics as a youth. He spent the last three decades of his life researching the Greek texts related to the New Testament. He traveled to the Vatican and examined Codex B firsthand. He did the same with the Sinaiticus manuscript, and he determined that these two "oldest and best" manuscripts were, in fact, horrible transcriptions. Burgon rails against Vaticanus, saying:

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It is undeniable ... that for the last quarter of a century, it has become the fashion to demand for the readings of Codex B something very like absolute deference. The grounds for this superstitious sentiment, (for really I can describe it in no way more likely) I profess myself unable to discover. Codex B comes to us without a history, without recommendation of any kind, except that of its antiquity. It bears traces of careless transcription on every page. The mistakes which the original transcriber made are of perpetual recurrence.⁶⁵

The Vaticanus text omits words and half verses and sometimes several verses. These omissions may be willful, due to a Gnostic view, or they may be the result of something else. Burgon blames the errors on "oscitancy" – that is, the weariness and dullness of a yawning copyist who isn't paying attention to what he's doing. Burgon continues:

In the Gospels alone, Codex B leaves out words or whole clauses no less than 1,491 times...accounted for by the proximity of a "like" ending... On the other hand, I can testify to the fact that the codex is disfigured throughout with repetitions. The Gnostics and the Alexandrian Codices scribe is often found to have not only written the same words twice over, but to have failed whenever he did so to take any notice with his pen of what he had done.⁶⁶

The original

Tischendorf did find the Sinaiticus codex in the great library of St. Catherine's Monastery, but he rescued it in a burn bin where it was being readied to warm the room on a cold February. It had been thrown away – likely because of its poor quality. First, the penmanship is bad. Second, Codex Aleph has the same problem as Codex B; words and even whole sentences are repeated, or clauses are left out because they have the same endings as another clause just written. This "homoeoteleuton" error takes place no less than 115 times in the Sinaiticus New Testament.⁶⁷ Note: Homoeoteleuton—the use of similar sound endings to words (suffices), phrases, or sentences.

Yet, it became the "fashion" in the 1800s to admire the Alexandrian codices because they were very old manuscripts and written in the Alexandrian style. Before these manuscripts came into popularity, translations of the Bible depended on the Byzantium text, which had developed into the Textus Receptus – the "received text."

Textus Receptus

At the end of the third century Lucian of Antioch compiled the Greek text to become the primary standard throughout the Byzantine world. At that time, the capital of the world was in Byzantium, not Rome. From the sixth through the fourteenth century, the majority of New Testament texts were produced in Byzantium and were in Greek, not Latin. The Latin version of the Bible, the Vulgate, was translated from the early Greek texts as well as the Masoretic text, and it is therefore highly regarded.

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While Jerome translated the Vulgate (Latin version), he was able to take advantage of early texts we certainly no longer have at our disposal.

The early English Bible translators like Tyndale drew upon the Vulgate even while working to translate the Bible from the available Greek and Hebrew texts. Erasmus of Rotterdam produced what became the Textus Receptus. By the time the King James was translated in the early 17th century, the translators had access to the Vulgate, the Septuagint, the Textus Receptus, the Masoretic text, and the Tyndale Bible. After all this, in the 19th century, certain textual critics argued that the Alexandrian codices provided an older and preferable Greek text. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Before we continue with the controversy over which Greek text is best, let's take a moment and overview the history of the English Bible.

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The English Bible

John Wycliffe (1329-1384) was the most eminent Oxford theologian of his day. He viewed the words of the Bible itself as more important than papal authority, and he and his associates were the first to translate the entire Bible from Latin into English by 1382. Three decades after his death, his writings were officially banned, and the Pope had his remains exhumed and burned in 1428.

In 1525, Desiderius Erasmus, best known as "Erasmus of Rotterdam" (1466-1536), updated the Latin version of the New Testament. For unknown reasons, he translated a full Greek version at the same time, producing a Greek-Latin parallel New Testament pulled together from the Greek New Testament documents available at that time. Most of these were copies from Byzantium and not especially ancient in themselves, but they were respected as faithful transcriptions. He also used the Latin Vulgate and quotations from the early Church fathers in producing his Greek manuscript, picking and choosing whether to use the Byzantium text or the Latin text and the wording of the Church fathers.

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This was not illegitimate, since Jerome and the Church fathers themselves had used very early manuscripts. His Greek texts were missing the last six verses of Revelation, for instance, so Erasmus was forced to back-translate the Latin into Greek. Erasmus continued to update this Greek and Latin Bible, and his fifth edition did away with the Latin column entirely. This final version was used as a basis for the official Textus Receptus, the Greek edition that became the primary text for translations like the King James Version.

About the same time that Erasmus was doing his work, William Tyndale (1494–1536) translated the Bible to English like Wycliffe had done, but he used the available Greek and Hebrew texts rather than the Latin. Tyndale had graduated in 1515 from Oxford, where he'd studied Greek and Hebrew. He was a genius at languages and became fluent in eight of them. He committed his life to translating the Bible from its original languages into English for the common man, and in 1526, Tyndale made use of the Gutenberg printing press to become the first person to print the New Testament in English.

Tyndale's translation earned him the title "Architect of the English Language" because he coined many terms familiar to us today. Idioms like "twinkling of an eye" and "signs of the times," and "scapegoat" entered into English through his translation. He improved on later Bible editions with beautiful illustrations.

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Yet, because he came against the authority of the Church of England, Tyndale's version of the Bible didn't sit well with King Henry VIII and was banned. Tyndale went into hiding in Germany (visiting Martin Luther in 1525), and there he worked to translate the Old Testament. He was eventually betrayed by his friend Henry Phillips, and in 1536 Tyndale was burned at the stake. Tyndale was only able to finish the New Testament and about half the Old Testament before he died, but in 1537, Tyndale's friend John Rogers produced an entire English Bible, complete with both Old and New Testaments. Rogers published the "Matthew-Tyndale Bible" from Tyndale's notes, using the pseudonym "Thomas Matthew." Tyndale's last words at the stake were said to be, "Lord! Open the King of England's eyes."⁶⁸

His prayers appeared to be answered within a few years; Henry VIII soon authorized the Church of England to produce an official English Bible. The Bishop of Exeter, Myles Coverdale, finished William Tyndale's version and produced the Coverdale Bible. He was also involved in a complete Bible published in 1539, called the "Great Bible" because it was large and very expensive. Coverdale edited the portions that the crown had found objectionable in Tyndale's translation, but Coverdale didn't read Greek, so he had to fill in missing portions of Tyndale's work with translations into English from the German and Latin.

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There followed a series of English Bibles. The Geneva Bible was produced by Protestants who fled to Geneva, Switzerland during the reign of Queen Mary I. It was finished by 1560, but the full Old and New Testaments were not published until 1576. This was the Bible used by Shakespeare and carried to America on the Mayflower. The authorities of the Church of England took issue with the clear Calvinism of the Geneva Bible. In response, they fixed problems with the Great Bible in what came to be called the "Bishop's Bible," publishing it for respectable Anglicans in 1568.

The Roman Catholic Church also produced an English Bible between 1582 and 1610. Rather than returning to the original Greek and Hebrew, the Douay-Rheims Bible was translated from the Latin Vulgate as a means of upholding the authority of the Roman Catholic Church in the face of the Protestant Reformation.

King James Version

In 1611, the King James Version of the Bible was completed. James VI of Scotland became the King of England and adopted the name James I. He commissioned 47 scholars to go back to the original Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic texts and

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translate the Bible with excellence, in a manner that would uphold the ecclesiology and structure of the Church of England. The best translators were employed, and prayerfully they set to work taking advantage of more than 5556 manuscripts. The result was a crowning achievement of scholarship and beauty. The title of the first edition declared:

THE HOLY BIBLE

Containing the Old Testament and The New:

Newly Translated out of the original tongues:

and with the former Translations diligently compared and revised by his Majesties special Commandment.

All the manuscripts that were available during those days were at the disposal of these scholars, but they primarily relied on the Textus Receptus, the Greek text put together largely by Erasmus of Rotterdam. The document they developed (The King James Version) is, to this day, recognized by most as the noblest monument of English prose. Modern translations may be more readable to our contemporary eyes, but none enjoy the majesty or the veneration of the King James Version.

In short, there were nine different English versions of the New Testament produced over the course of 230 years, as well as Luther's German Bible, and the Erasmus Greek text.

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- 1382 Wycliffe Bible From the Vulgate
- 1525 Erasmus New Testament

Basis for Textus Receptus

- 1526 Tyndale Bible – First English New Testament
- 1534 Luther's Bible – First German Bible
- 1535 Coverdale's Bible – First complete English Bible
- 1537 Matthew's Bible – From Tyndale's notes
- 1539 Great Bible – Coverdale's Revision
- 1560 Geneva Bible – Protestant / Calvinist
- 1568 Bishop's Bible – Revised Great Bible
- 1609 Douay-Rheims Bible – Vulgate Catholic Translation
- 1611 King James Version

Westcott and Hort

We find that the tides will wax and wane in every area of research. The same is true for Biblical scholarship. It became popular to disparage the Textus Receptus during the 19th century while all veneration turned to the three Alexandrian codices. Scholars noted that the recently discovered codices were the oldest complete manuscripts and argued that we should rely on them and less on Textus Receptus.

The trouble began in the 18th century with Johann Albrecht Bengel. In the 1730s, Bengel produced a text that deviated from the Textus Receptus while relying on earlier manuscripts. In typical German style, he believed that the harder readings should be preferred. He was followed by Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745–1812), who published several editions of the New Testament. Griesbach developed 15 rules for determining which manuscripts were best to use, including *Lectio brevior praeferenda*, “the shorter reading is better.” It was thought that copyists were more likely to add their ideas to manuscripts than to remove verses, which was fairly short-sighted. In 1831, Karl Lachmann produced a text that represented the fourth century Alexandrian codices, and then Samuel Tregelles, who was self-taught in Latin, Hebrew and Greek, published a text in six parts from 1857 to 1872.

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Finally, Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort came along. Westcott and Hort were two Anglican churchmen who had contempt for the Textus Receptus, even though it had been the basis for their own King James Bible. Based on what we now regard as the corrupt Vaticanus and Sinaiticus documents, these two men began a work in 1853 that 28 years later resulted in a Greek New Testament. This effort undoubtedly took additional time for the simple reason that they had to reconcile all the differences found between Vaticanus and Sinaiticus. In his book *Codex B and Its Allies*, H.C. Hoskier documents 3,036 variations between these two manuscripts – in just the four Gospels alone!⁶⁹

It is a mystery why these men held the corrupted Alexandrian codices in such high regard. We do know, however, that both men were involved in the occult at points in their lives and questioned many tenets of Biblical Christianity. Both of these men were influenced by Origin and others who denied the unique position of Jesus Christ and embraced the prevalent Gnostic heresies. In college, they founded at least two occultic secret societies - the Hermes Club and the Ghostly Guild. The latter was concerned with the existence of spiritual entities, as its Ghostly Circular states: “serious and earnest inquiry into the nature of the phenomena which are vaguely called ‘supernatural’ will scarcely be questioned.”⁷⁰

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The particular beliefs of Westcott and Hort do matter a great deal, because their own brands of faith went into the specific choices of words they used in their final Greek text. These men do sound like orthodox Christians at times, speaking of the deity of Christ or forgiveness of sins, the Resurrection or the Ascension. Certain statements they made over the years, however, disclose a quiet distancing from sound Biblical doctrine and the preference for peculiar New Age-type beliefs.

These can be seen first in the open rejection of the history in the Bible, preferring allegorical interpretations of such things as the Creation and the Fall. When they speak of the “Resurrection” and the “Ascension,” they mean different things by these words than a straight-forward literal interpretation. There is a twisting of ideas that goes on in their writings that indicate they don’t believe much of it to be literally true. The dismissal of sound doctrine is more subtly seen in strange views on such things as the Fatherhood of God and the substitution of Christ to pay for sins.

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CHAPTER 14

The Westcott-Hort Heresies

Consider the following quotes taken from the letters and commentaries of either Westcott or Hort. They contain a land of mush, words that don't seem to mean anything substantial, but which quietly twist the truth of God's Word into something other than bold and literal. Westcott stated in a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1890:

... I am quite sure that our Christian faith ought not to be perilled (*pose a threat*) on any predetermined view of what the history and character of the documents contained in the O.T. must be. What we are bound to hold is that the O.T., substantially as we receive it, is the Divine record of the discipline of Israel. This it remains, whatever criticism may determine or leave undetermined as to constituent parts. No one now, I suppose, holds that the first three chapters of Genesis, for example, give a literal history - I could never understand how anyone reading them with open eyes could think they did - yet they disclose to us a Gospel. So it is probably elsewhere.⁷¹

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Hort, on the other hand, was fascinated by Charles Darwin and mentioned him repeatedly in his letters. For instance, he wrote to the Rev. John Ellerton on April 3, 1860:

But the book which has most engaged me is Darwin. Whatever may be thought of it, it is a book that one is proud to be contemporary with. I must work out and examine the argument in more detail, but at present my feeling is strong that the theory is unanswerable.⁷²

Westcott and Hort were both willing to question Genesis.⁷³ By rejecting the first three chapters of the Bible, these men both deny the Creation of the world by the Word of God, a truth confirmed many places elsewhere in Scripture.⁷⁴ God gave the Israelites the blessing of a Sabbath Day of rest as a constant reminder of His work as Creator, and the Mosaic Covenant is based on it: Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed.

Exodus 31:16-17

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Jesus Christ recognized the first chapters of Genesis as literal history, as we see in Matthew 19:4-6. If God did not make humans "male and female" in Genesis 1:27 and bind them together in Genesis 2:24, then our whole basis of marriage according to Christ is built on false premises. We also have the painfully central issue of the first sin and the Fall. If there was no literal Adam, then Jesus could not come and replace him, making 1 Corinthians 15:21ff completely meaningless. Jesus didn't just come to die for our sins, He came to reverse the destruction that Adam caused, to take Adam's place and remove the curse that has infected every one of us from birth.

As Paul tells us:

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:22).

Christianity makes no sense without the first three chapters of Genesis. From this starting point, Westcott and Hort offer an array of peculiar teachings. For instance, Westcott repeatedly denied that Jesus said,

“my Father” and chose to use text that said “the Father” instead, promoting a concept called the Universal Fatherhood of God. In his commentary on John 10:29-30, he states (emphasis in the original):

The thought, which is concrete in v. 28, is here traced back to its most absolute form as resting on the essential power of God in His relation of universal Fatherhood... I and the Father are one.

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Every word in this pregnant clause is full of meaning. It is I (*not* “the Son” as it should be); the Father (*not* “my Father” as it should be); one essence (*not* “one person” as it should be); are, (*not* “am” as it should be). The revelation is of the nature of Christ in the fulness of His double nature, of the incarnate Son in the fulness of His manifested being, and that in relation to the Father, to God as He is Father at once of the Son and of men. The Incarnation was the proof of the complete unity of the Father and the Son. Through that was shewn the true connection of God and man. And so it is that the union of believers together is made dependent on the union of the Father and the Son (xvii, 22, according to the true reading).⁷⁵

The error here is very subtle. The explanation sounds correct; Jesus does have the double nature of God and man. However, Westcott manages to bend the meaning of this powerful verse to equate the Sonship of Jesus with the sonship of mankind, and these two sets of relationships are very different. The Bible makes it clear that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God, God made flesh, and the rest of us are made the children of God by adoption.⁷⁶ Westcott cunningly advances the idea that all humans are the children of God, equal with Christ.

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It is true that God made us all, but the Bible teaches that we are made sons of God when we are born again – and some people are not God’s children. Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be born again, and He calls the Pharisees the sons of the devil:

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:5-6).

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:44).

The Apostle Paul understands these things and states them clearly, making no bones about the difference between being born of the flesh and being born of the Spirit. We are sons of God by salvation who “believe on His name.”⁷⁷ For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26).

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That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed (Romans 9:8).

It seems strange that something as simple as changing “my Father” to “the Father” could have such massive theological implications, but these are the sorts of decisions that Westcott and Hort deliberately and pointedly made when developing their Greek text.

Fenton Hort repeatedly struggles to understand Christ’s sacrifice and our position in Him. In his letter to Westcott on August 14 and 16, 1860, he states his view that man is divine, having been made in the image of God:

... It is of course true that we can only know God through human forms, but then I think the whole Bible echoes the language of Genesis 1:27, and so assures us that human forms are Divine forms.⁷⁸

He also has confusion over the idea of Christ as a “ransom,” saying:

Of course, I confess I have no repugnance to the primitive doctrine of a ransom paid to Satan, though neither am I prepared to give full assent to it. But I can see no other possible form in which the doctrine of a ransom is at all tenable; anything is better than the notion of a ransom paid to the Father.⁷⁹

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This is an issue Hort long wrestled over. Almost 11 years earlier, on November 16, 1849, he wrote a long letter to one F.D. Maurice on his bewilderment about Christ’s substitutionary punishment for our sins, evil and the Devil. His biggest frustration here at age 21 seems to be that some people might have their sins paid and others not, and that offends him (emphasis in the original):

The fact is, I do not see how God’s justice can be satisfied without every man’s suffering in his own person the full penalty for his sins. I know that it can, for if it could not be the case of some at least, the whole Bible would be a lie; but if in the case of some, why not of all? ⁸⁰

Hort’s views of universalism are thus seen early. He knew the Bible and orthodox Christian doctrines well, but those doctrines bothered him. In fact, the ransom is not paid to Satan, who is himself a criminal doomed to ultimate destruction.⁸¹ The ransom is paid to God the Father, whose laws we have broken. It is the Father who has a right to judge us and charge us for our crimes, and “the wages of sin is death.”⁸² Yet, Jesus’ sacrifice that pays the price of death for us originates in the words of Jesus Himself:

And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:27-28).

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Surely Hort could appreciate the simple idea of dying so that somebody else could live. Hort wanted all mankind to be saved, though, and the Bible’s punishment of some and not others bothered him. It led to his unorthodox views on the nature of man. By 1860, Hort had completely flipped the meaning of salvation in a letter to Westcott:

My dear Westcott...I entirely agree - correcting one word - with what you there say on the Atonement, having for many years believed that “the absolute union of the Christian (or rather, of man) with Christ Himself” is the spiritual truth of which the popular doctrine of substitution is an immoral and material counterfeit.⁸³

Hort wrongly unifies all mankind with Christ Himself (not just Christians), and he dismisses as “immoral” the view that Jesus was substituted for us as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. His error is clear, because the entire Bible supports Christ as a substitutionary sacrifice: the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 23 is of a substitute for sin. The entire Levitical sacrificial system was set up to represent the atoning sacrifice of Christ, with His blood spilled for our sins. Hebrews 10 describes this very directly.

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Westcott and Hort created a Greek New Testament to reflect the twisted doctrines they wanted to believe – ideas not based on the clear meaning of the Word of God. Hort blatantly confuses the unity of the Church and Christ by declaring that Christians (and non-Christians) are Christ, mixing in the heretical New Age idea that we are God, taking the authority from God Himself and handing the power and glory to us, where it does not belong.

Hort writes in a letter to F. D. Maurice which expands on his confusion in central concept:

It is easy to see that there is a close relation between this idea and that (whatever it may be) which underlies sacrifice, the prohibition of the eating of the blood, circumcision and its abolition, and finally St. Paul’s mysterious words, “Without shedding of blood there is not remission of sins.” But I have labored so utterly in vain to apprehend in any measure what this idea is, that I hope you will deepen and widen the hints you have already given. I am quite conscious that I have given but few distinct objections to the common belief in what I have written, but so indeed it must be; language cannot accurately define the twinge of shrinking horror, which mixes with my thoughts when I hear the popular notion asserted...⁸⁴

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Often Westcott’s commentaries sound perfectly orthodox. Yet, there are numerous other questionable statements made by both men in reference to Christ and the Biblical teachings. Hort supported the idea of purgatory: “I agree with you in thinking it a pity that Maurice verbally repudiates purgatory...”⁸⁵

Westcott doubted the reality of a physical Heaven: “No doubt the language of the Rubric is unguarded, but it saves us from the error of connecting the Presence of Christ’s glorified humanity with place; ‘heaven is a state and not a place.’”⁸⁶

The Westcott-Hort Greek Text

All these statements, however, are not as striking as a simple comparison of the words and phrases that Westcott and Hort left out of their Greek New Testament.⁸⁷ The differences are easy to find with a comparison of verses in the King James with newer versions like the RSV, NASB, NIV or NLT that use the Westcott-Hort Greek text. Trends can be seen just from words removed from a few verses in the Gospel of Matthew.

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Matthew:

1:25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.
 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;
 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.
 9:13 But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.
 13:51 Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.
 16:20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.
 17:21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.
 18:11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.
 19:9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.
 19:17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.
 20:16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.
 23:14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.
 25:13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.
 27:35 And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.

How We Got Our Bible

Jesus as Lord

These trends continue through the rest of the Gospels. From the very beginning of the book of Mark, Christ's deity is denied with the rejection of the words, "Son of God." References to Jesus as Lord and Christ are removed (Mark 9:24; 11:10; Luke 4:41, 7:31; 22:31, 23:42; John 1:14, 4:42, 6:69) and in Luke 2:33 the name of Joseph is replaced with "father" as a subtle way to discredit the virgin birth.

Punishment and Rewards

There is a reluctance in the Westcott-Hort text to recognize that anybody will be lost. In Mark 9:44 and 46, they've removed the verses that say, "where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." The entire verse of Mark 11:26 is omitted: "But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses." The mention of negative consequences are gone from Mark 6:11 and John 3:15 as well. Not all, but many references to Heaven and Christ's return to the Father are removed, as in Luke 11:2-4; 24:51 and John 3:13, 16:16.

The Power of the Scriptures

Christ's fulfillment of scriptural prophecies are consistently scrubbed in the Westcott-Hort text, as in Mark 13:14, 15:28 and Luke 11:29. The end of Luke 4:4 is removed and with it, Jesus' emphasis on "every word of God."

The Westcott-Hort Heresies

And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

Outside the Gospels

The purging doesn't stop at the Gospels. In Acts "according to the flesh," is removed from the following verse in accordance with Gnostic prejudices: Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne (Acts 2:30).

In Acts 8, Westcott and Hort chop out the Ethiopian eunuch's confession of faith by removing verse 37.

And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Acts 8:37).

How We Got Our Bible

They also hacked up the verses in Acts 9 when Jesus speaks to Paul:

And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do (Acts 9:5,6 KJV)

Versus

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do" (Acts 9:5,6 NIV)

Consider others:

Ephesians 3:9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

Ephesians 3:14 For this cause, I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart

1 Peter 4:1 Forasmuch then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;

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1 John 5:7, 8 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

Revelation 11:17 Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou has taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.

It seems that Westcott and Hort chose the Alexandrian codices with their many errors because these texts gave them the freedom to pick and choose what they would and would not keep in the New Testament. Sometimes their choices coincide with the Latin Vulgate, and sometimes they do not. Yet, Westcott and Hort were able to defend their text by saying they used the oldest complete manuscripts.