

# Textual Criticism

# Textual Criticism: Definition

*“Textual criticism is the study of copies of any written work of which the autograph (the original) is unknown, with the purpose of ascertaining the original text.”*

J. Harold Greenlee,  
New Testament Textual Criticism

# Textual Criticism: Process

*Textual criticism gathers and compares the available manuscripts (mss), and applies objective criteria to try to determine which alternative of a given variant is most likely the reading of the original.*

# Textual Criticism: Necessity

- The large number and diversity of manuscripts
  1. There are 5,338 mss, over 400,000 variants.
  2. Geographical distribution, effects of climate
  3. Historical distribution, effects of history
  4. The influence of copying methods

# Reality Check!

- 62.9% of the verses the New Testament have no variants!
- Of over 400,000 total variants, none affects a major doctrine!

*Proponents of the different views concerning textual theories, texts, translation, and versions would do well to remember this point!*

# Textual Criticism

## Kinds of Variants

# Quotes from scribes...

- “Writing is excessive drudgery. It crooks your back, it dims your sight, it twists your stomach, and your sides.”
- “St. Patrick of Armagh, deliver me from writing.”
- “While I wrote I froze: and what I could not write by the beams of day I finished by candlelight.”
- “As the sick man desireth health even so doth the transcriber desire the end of his volume.”
- “Now I’ve written the whole thing; for heaven’s sake give me a drink.”

# Unintentional Scribal Errors

## ➤ Different possible word divisions

- The earliest copies had no breaks between words.
- Different word divisions that affect meaning are possible.
- Mark 10:40



# Unintentional Scribal Errors

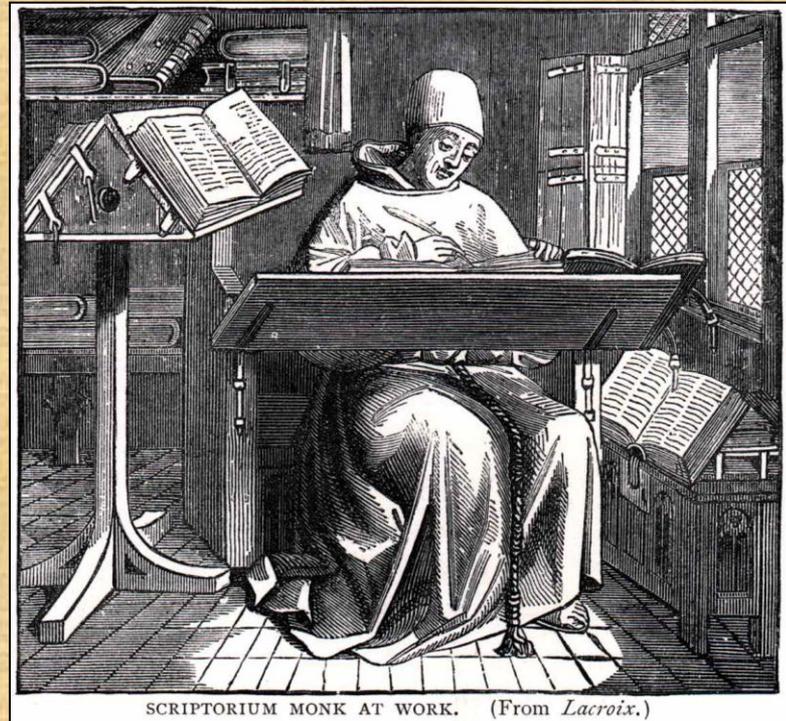
## ➤ Confusion of letters

- Different letters in uncial script were similar.
- Jude 12
- Later copyists would try to correct mistakes, introducing yet more variants.



# Unintentional Scribal Errors

- **Dittography - Haplography**
  - Individual letters were sometimes repeated or omitted.
  - 1 Thessalonians 2:7



# Unintentional Scribal Errors

## ➤ Signs of Fatigue

- Certainly scribal fatigue had a part in many errors, but some can be attributed only to fatigue.
- Romans 3:20



# Unintentional Scribal Errors

## ➤ Homoioteleuton - Homoioarcton

- When words, phrases, sentences or lines begin or end similarly, text could be repeated or omitted.
- Matthew 5:19-20
- John 17:15



# Unintentional Scribal Errors

## ➤ Itacism

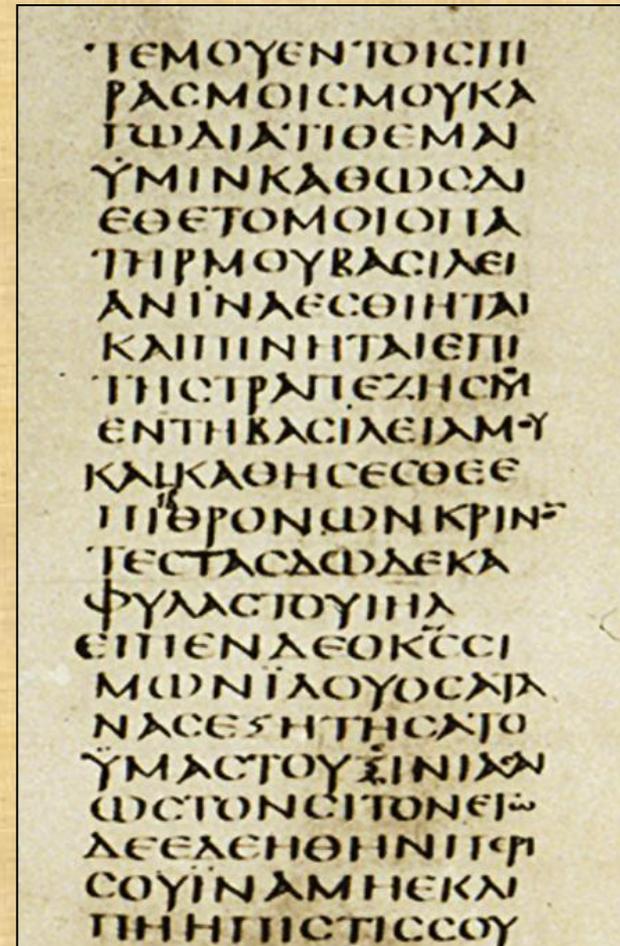
- Several vowels and diphthongs were pronounced alike.
- When the text was read aloud for a copyist, vowels were confused.
- 1 Corinthians 15:54



# Unintentional Scribal Errors

## ➤ Punctuation

- Uncial manuscripts had no punctuation.
- Punctuation was added later, requiring interpretive decisions.
- John 1:3-4



# Unintentional Scribal Errors

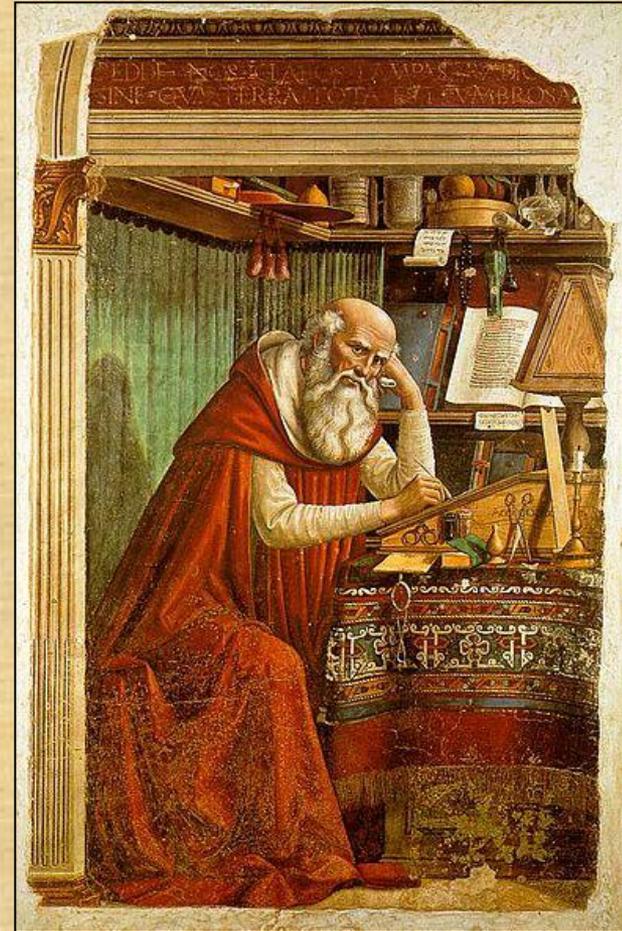
## ➤ Variants of a single letter

- A change of one letter could produce a different word or word form.
- Luke 2:14
- Revelation 1:5



# Intentional Scribal Alterations

- **Jerome (c. 347-420 AD)**
- “They write down not what they find but what they think is the meaning; and while they attempt to rectify the errors of others, they merely expose their own.” (Epist. lxxi.5, *Ad Lucinum*)



# Intentional Scribal Alterations

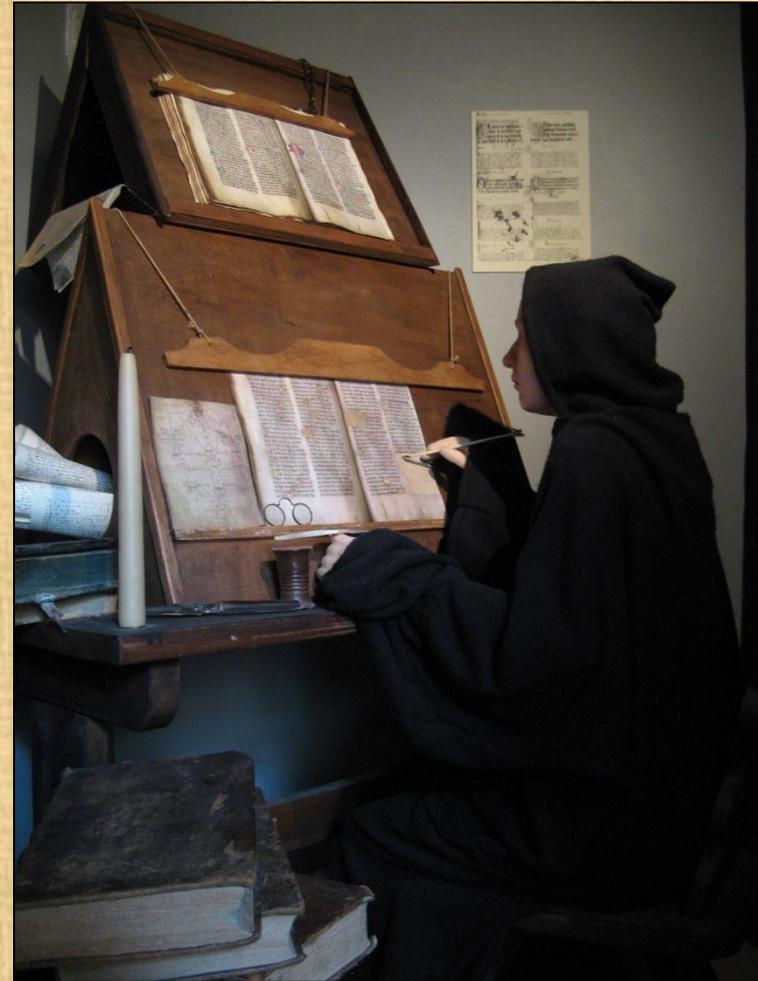
- **Porphyry (c. 232-305 AD)**
- “For I myself call the gods to witness, that I have neither added anything, nor taken away from the meaning of the responses, except where I have corrected an erroneous phrase, or made a change for greater clearness, or completed the metre when defective, or struck out anything that did not conduce to the purpose; so that I preserved the sense of what was spoken untouched.”

(quoted by Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* iv. 7)

# Intentional Scribal Alterations

## ➤ Explanatory supplements

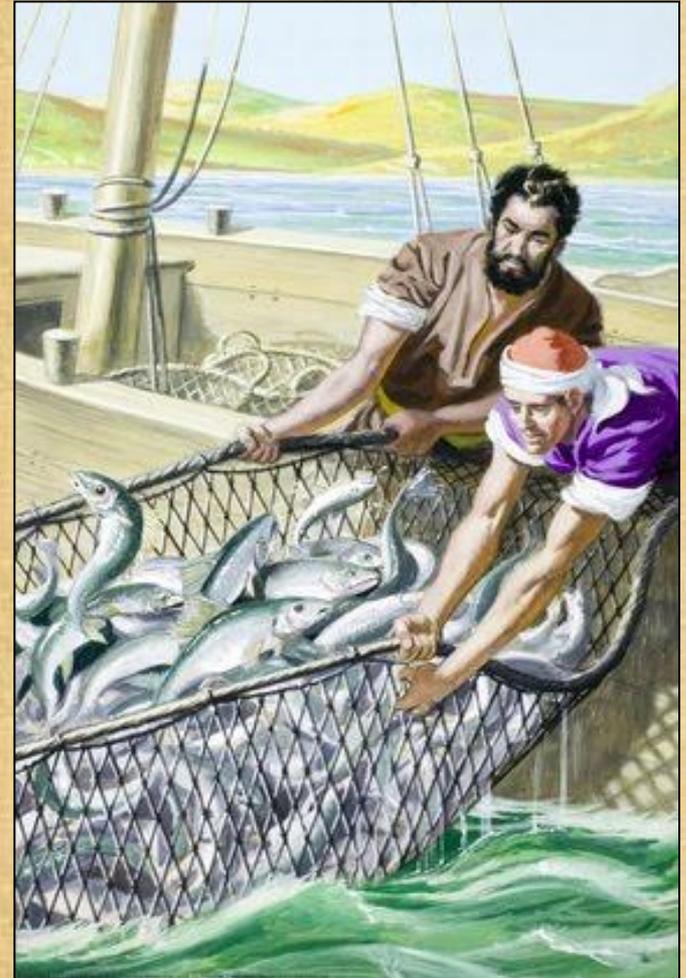
- To clarify something that might not be readily apparent to a reader
- John 5:3b-4



# Intentional Scribal Alterations

## ➤ Stylistic improvements

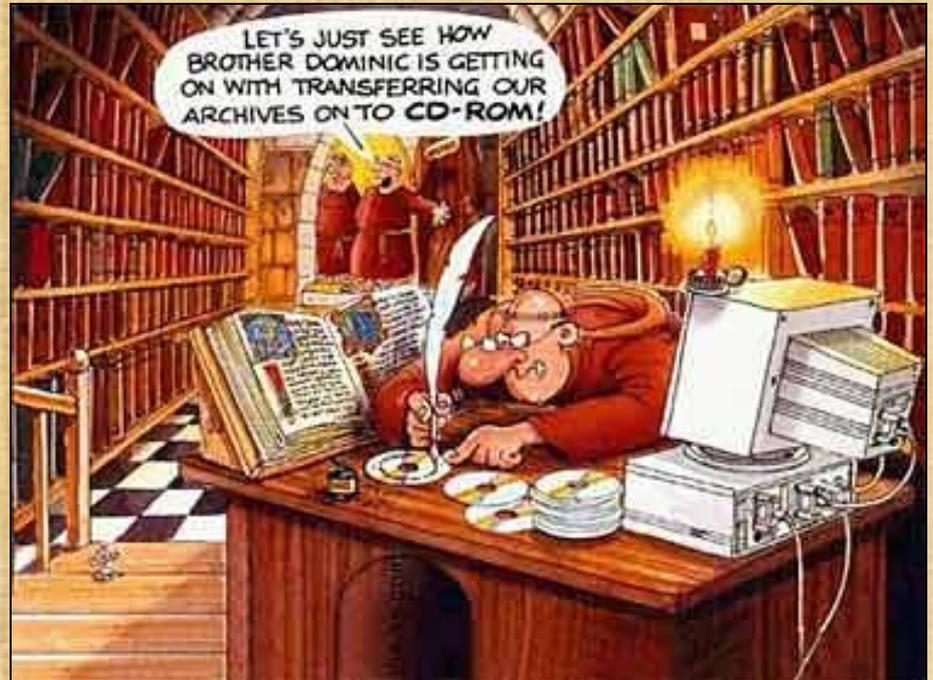
- Most of the New Testament writers were Jews whose native tongue was probably Aramaic.
- They were “uneducated and untrained men” (Acts 4:13) and their Greek showed it!
- Revelation 1:4-6



# Intentional Scribal Alterations

## ➤ Harmonization

- Differences in wording or details between parallel accounts were often harmonized.
- Luke 23:38





# Intentional Scribal Alterations

## ➤ Perceived historical and geographical difficulties

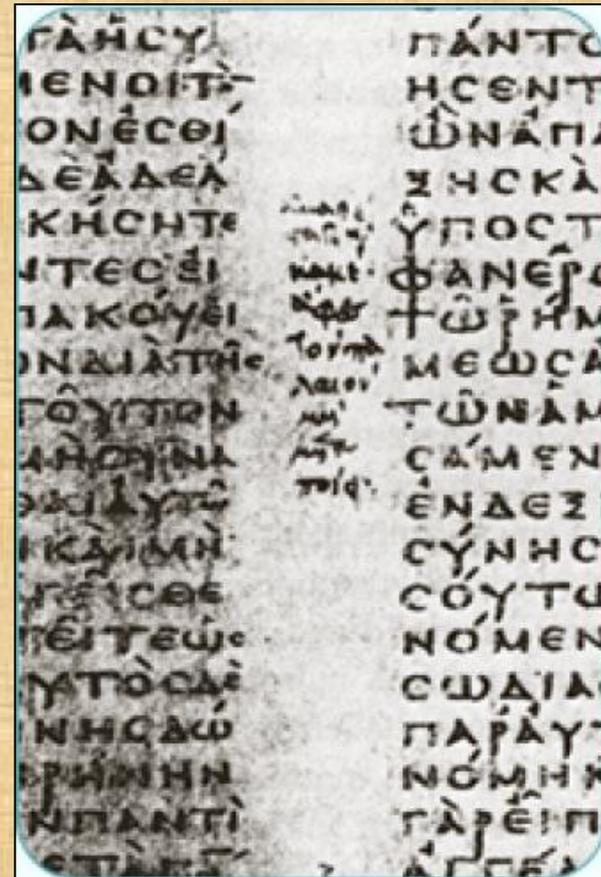
- Sometimes copyists believed there was an error of time or place in the text.
- Mark 8:31
- John 1:28



# Intentional Scribal Alterations

## ➤ The tenacity of the textual tradition

- Once a reading was included, it had a tendency to remain.
- Even if a reading was doubtful it would be included, sometimes in the margin or with a note.



"Fool and knave, leave the old reading, don't change it!"

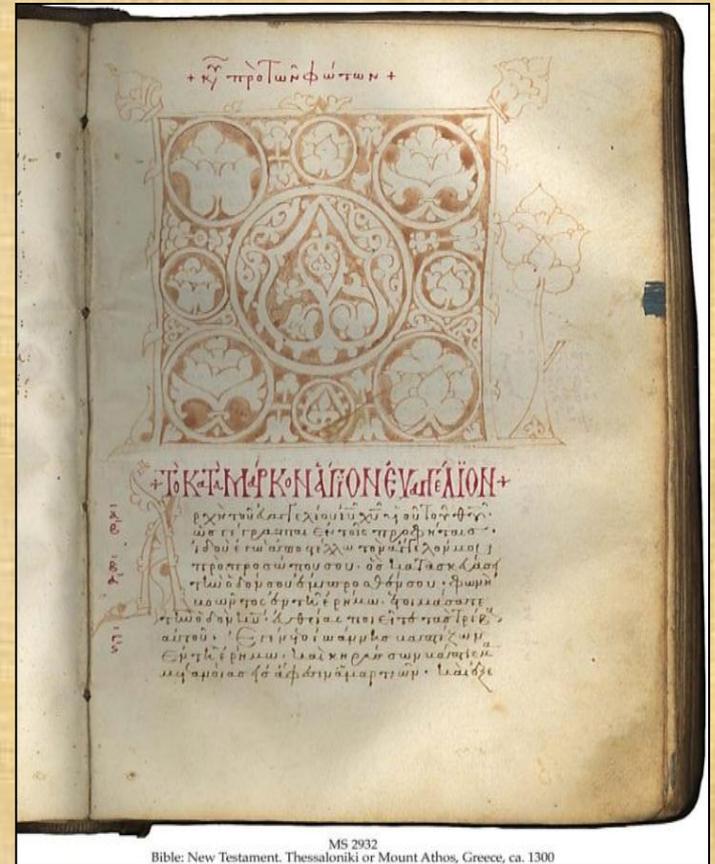
# Textual Criticism

Intentional Scribal Alterations Continued

# Intentional Scribal Alterations

## ➤ Mixed readings (conflation)

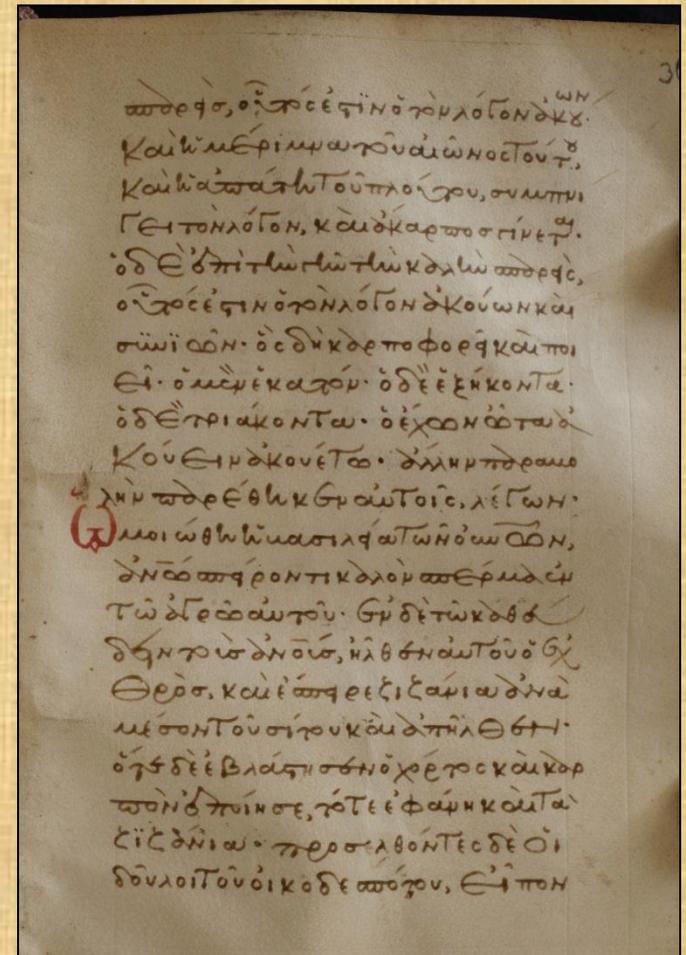
- Sometimes the different wordings of the gospels would be combined.
- If a scribe had two manuscripts which differed, both readings would be included.
- Matthew 13:57
- Colossians 1:12



# Intentional Scribal Alterations

## ➤ Doctrinal concerns

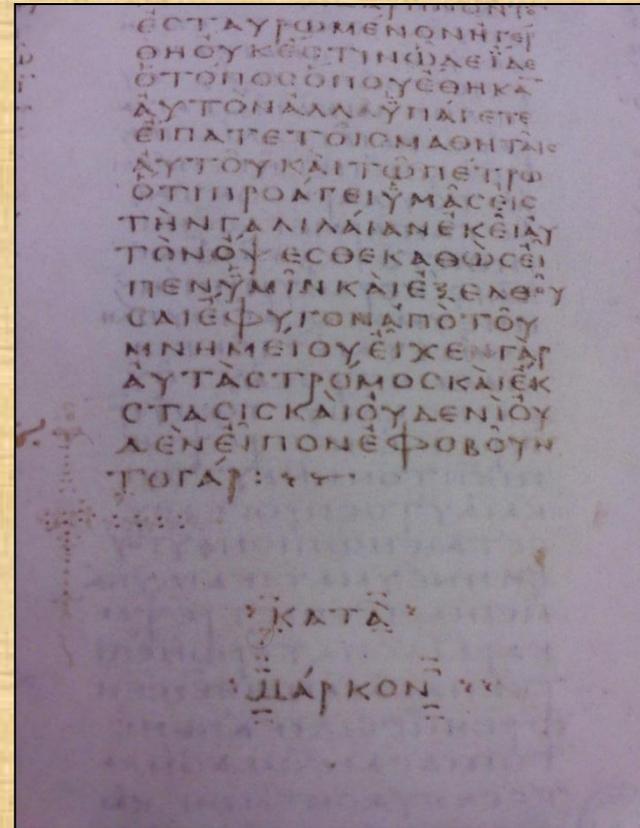
- If a scribe perceived a doctrinal problem, he might add or change something to relieve the concern.
- Matthew 5:22
- To counter heresies the copyist might strengthen the orthodox position by altering the text.
- Luke 2:41, 43



# Intentional Scribal Alterations

## ➤ Disturbed texts

- Several New Testament texts show major differences among the manuscripts.
- Mark 16
- John 7:53 – 8:11



# Textual Criticism

Types of Manuscripts

# The Alexandrian Text

- Scribes associated with or employed by the scriptorium associated with the catechetical school at Alexandria, Egypt, who were trained philologists, grammarians, and textual critics, were the first to attempt to recover the original text in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.
- Exemplars include  $\aleph$  - Sinaiticus and B - Vaticanus (4<sup>th</sup> century), and A - Alexandrinus (5<sup>th</sup> century). Almost all of the early papyrus manuscripts from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries are of this type.

# The Byzantine Text

- This text-type appeared at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and grew in popularity until it was the dominant text type throughout Christendom. According to Jerome (c. 347-420 AD), it originated with Lucian of Antioch (d. 312 AD) as a recension (a purposely created edition).
- It is characterized by smoothness of language achieved by the removal of obscurities and awkward grammatical constructions, and by the conflation of variant readings.

# The Byzantine Text

- The abundance of manuscripts of this type is the result of a combination of several factors:
  1. During the Diocletian persecutions (c. 303 AD) many manuscripts were destroyed.

# The Byzantine Text

- The abundance of manuscripts of this type is the result of a combination of several factors:
  2. The conversion of Constantine and the Edict of Milan (313 AD) produced immediate demand for bishops and Bibles. Antioch in Syria became the source of bishops who brought with them copies of Lucian's text.

# The Byzantine Text

- The abundance of manuscripts of this type is the result of a combination of several factors:
  3. The development of the monastic movement during the 4<sup>th</sup> century provided a place for scholars and scribes to study and copy the scriptures.

# The Byzantine Text

- The abundance of manuscripts of this type is the result of a combination of several factors:
  4. The stability and spread of the Holy Roman Empire during the Middle Ages brought Roman Catholicism to a wide geographical area, and with it the Byzantine text.

# The Byzantine Text

- The abundance of manuscripts of this type is the result of a combination of several factors:
  5. The 9<sup>th</sup> century development of a minuscule (cursive) script was combined with the use of scriptoria, enabling more copies to be produced in a shorter time.

# The Byzantine Text

- These combined factors resulted in the majority of manuscripts being of the Byzantine text type. The oldest exemplars include Q (5<sup>th</sup> century, Luke and John with lacunae), N (6<sup>th</sup> century, gospels with lacunae), and O (6<sup>th</sup> century, Matthew with lacunae).

# The “Western Text”

- A popular or “uncontrolled” text characterized by scribal emendations intended to harmonize accounts, eliminate difficulties, or emphasize a doctrinal perspective.
- Exemplars are few, since its inferiority was apparent: D (5<sup>th</sup> century), and sister manuscripts 614 (13<sup>th</sup>) and 2412 (12<sup>th</sup>).

# Which text type is better?

- Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, most scholars (influenced by Westcott and Hort) have endorsed Alexandrian priority.
- The development and application of principles of textual criticism over the last 200 years has produced what is known as the critical text.
- The critical text is the basis for all modern translations except the NKJV.



# Printed Greek Texts

# Desiderius Erasmus

- The first to produce a Greek New Testament using the printing press in 1516.
- Lived 1466 to 1536
- Called the “Prince of the Humanists”



# Erasmus of Rotterdam

- Educated at University of Paris, an important center of scholasticism
- Influenced by renaissance humanism
- Ordained a priest, took monastic vows as an Augustinian monk
- A critic of the Roman church, but also refused to join the reformers



עומדת ושפת שלם על  
ראש ששורשם חושש  
ונסוגו ונאמה  
החובב ארבע עשרה  
שנה למלך חוקנהו עליה  
סנהיב מלך אשור על כל  
ערי יהודה חבצות ותפסם  
וישלח מלך אשור את  
רבשקה מלכוש ירושלמה  
אל המלך חוקנהו בחולבד  
והגמר סתעבת חסרכה  
העיונה במסדת שדה  
מבס וצנא אלו אלוקים  
פוחל קנהו אשר על חבית  
ושבא הספר וזאח בו  
אסף המוכר ויאמר אלוהים  
רבשקה אמרונא אל  
חוקנהו וכה אמר המלך  
הגדל מלך אשור עה  
הבטחון הנה אשר בטחתי  
אלתי אדבר שפתים  
ענה ונכרה למלכה  
ענה עלימי בטחתי מרת  
בי הנה בטחתי עלי שעת  
הקנה חרצין הנה על  
מצרים אשר וסמך איש  
עליו וקבלתו וקפחה  
כופר עה מלך מצרים לכל

הבטחתי עליו וכו' תאמר  
אלו אלוהו אל הונו  
בטחתי הלו אהוא אשר  
חסיד חוקנהו את כמתו  
ואת מוכחתי ויאמר  
לחנה ויהי שלם לפני  
המזבח הנה תשתחוה  
ועתה תערב נא את  
ארע המלך אשור ואתה  
לך אלפים סנטיס אם  
תוכל לתת לך רכבים  
עליוס וראך תשוב את  
פע פחת אחר עבדו ארע  
הקטעס ותבטח לך על  
מצרים לרכב ולפרשים  
ועתה תמכר ערי ותהו  
עליו על הארץ הזאת  
להשחיתה ותהו אמר  
אלו עליה הארץ הזאת  
ותשחיתה  
ויאמר אלוקים  
ושבנא וזאח ארבע שקח  
דמנא אל עליה ארמית  
מי שמעק אנהו ואל  
תכר אלוע ותורית באע  
העם אשר על החומה  
ויאמר רבשקה תאל  
ארבע ואלך שלחני ארע

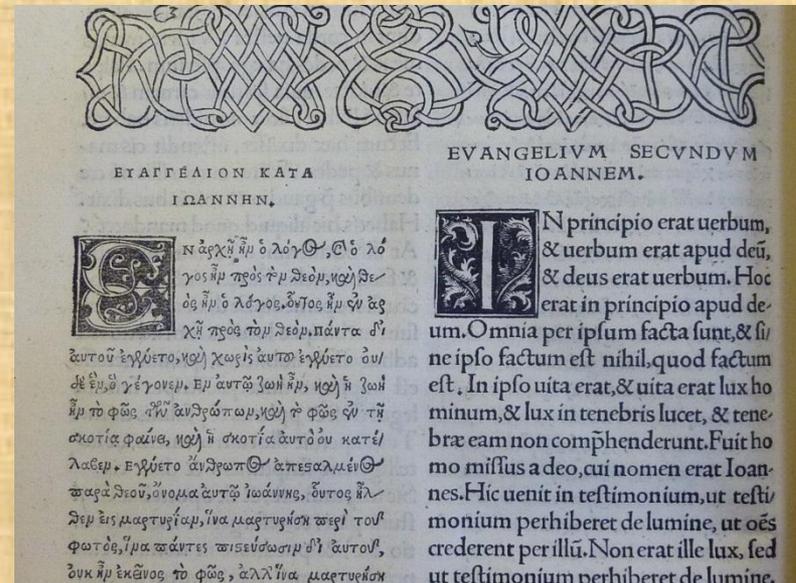
לך אתם זכרים האלה  
הלא על האגשים השמים  
על החומה לאל את  
חראתסו לשתות את  
שינתם עמכם ויעמד  
כפ שקח ויקרא בקול  
גדול ויהודת ויאמר שמעו  
את דברי המלך הגדול  
מלך אשור כה אמר המלך  
אלו שאלכם חוקנהו כי  
לא תוכל להציל אתכם  
ואל תבטח אתכם חוקנהו  
אלוהו לאמר הציל  
יציטו ותהו לא תגתו  
הער הזאת ביד מלך  
אשור אלת שמע אל  
חוקנהו  
לכה אמר המלך אשור  
עשואתי ברכה וצא אל  
ואכלו ארספט ואיש  
תאנתו ושנתו איש מבוה  
עד בא וקחתי אתכם  
אל ארץ בארעם ארץ  
הצוותו איש ארץ לחס  
וכרמים פוסות אתכם  
חוקנהו למי יחנה וצלו  
החצילו אליו הגומס  
איש את ארצו מיד מלך

וי יתן כבוד צדיק וכו' ויחיה  
וי יתן כבוד צדיק וכו' ויחיה  
וי יתן כבוד צדיק וכו' ויחיה



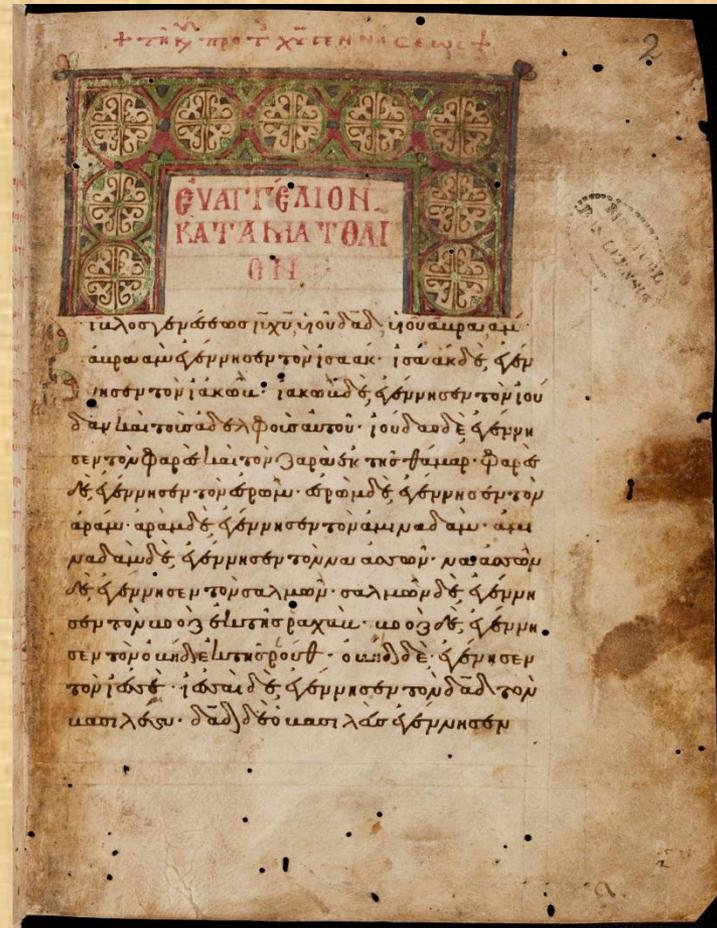
# Textus Receptus

- Erasmus' first edition was edited in only a few months to get it on the market first.
- His haste produced “innumerable errors,” and Erasmus himself later described it as “thrown together rather than edited.”

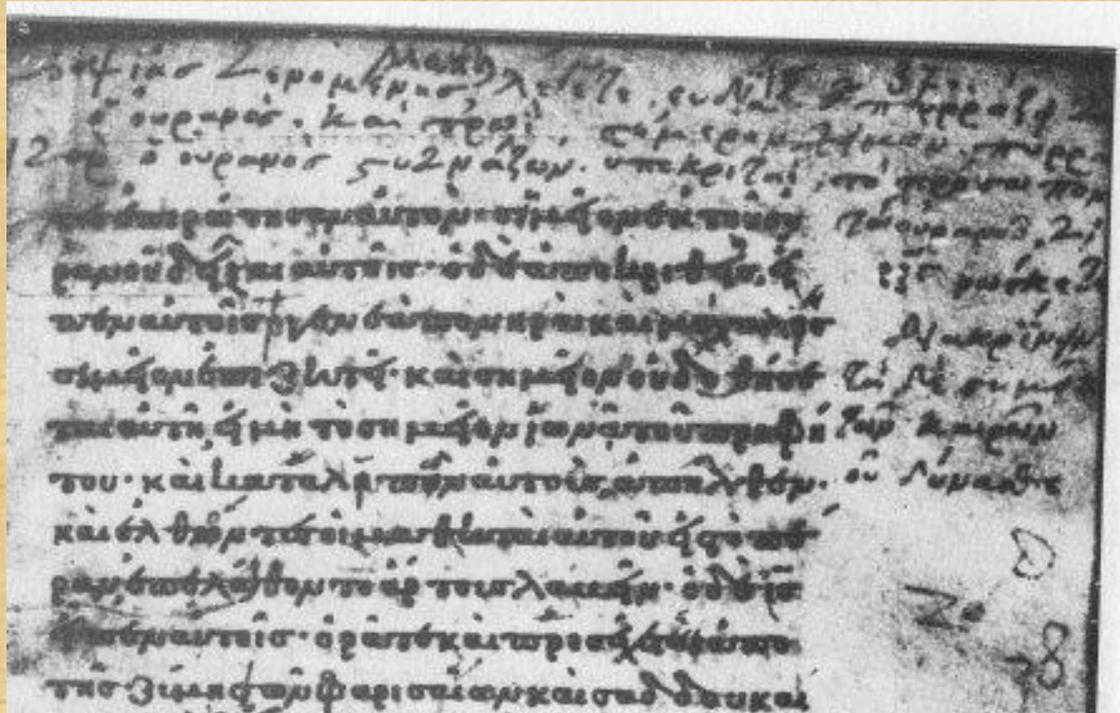


# Textus Receptus

- He used only six mss from the 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- One of these is minuscule 2e, seen here.



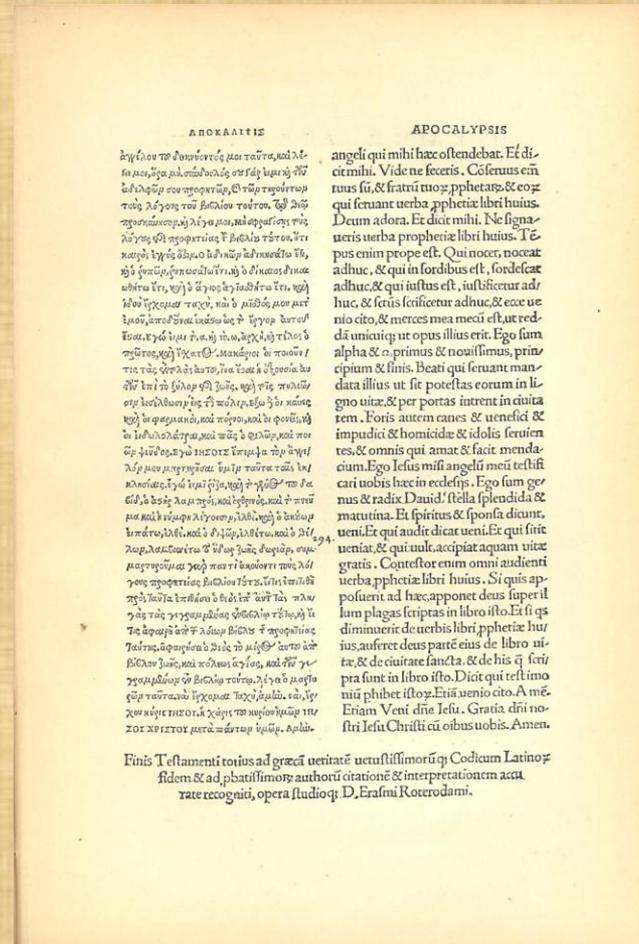
# Textus Receptus



- Top of page of 2e, showing the beginning of Matthew 16, with Erasmus' additions and compositor's marks.

# Textus Receptus

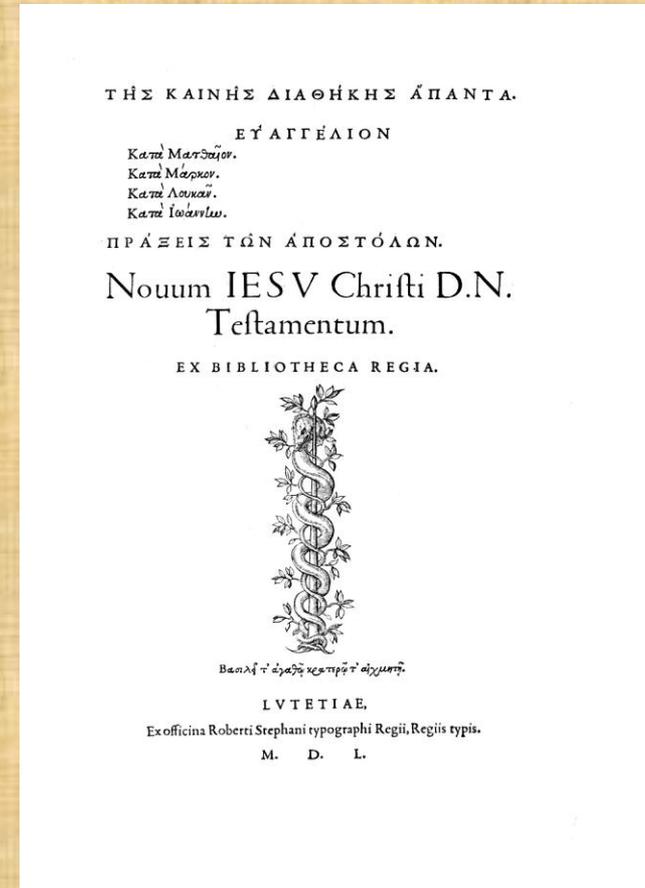
- None of his mss had the last six vv. of Revelation, so he translated them into Greek from the Vulgate.
- He also translated the Latin text into Greek where he preferred the Vulgate's reading.



Finis Testamenti totius ad graeci ueritate uetustissimorumq; Codicum Latinoꝝ fidem & ad pbatisimoz; authoru citatione & interpretationem accu- rate recogniti, opera studioq; D. Erasmi Rotoredami.

# Textus Receptus

- Stephanus (1546, 1549, 1550, 1551) and Theodore de Beza (nine editions between 1565 and 1604) produced multiple editions, all based on Erasmus' work.



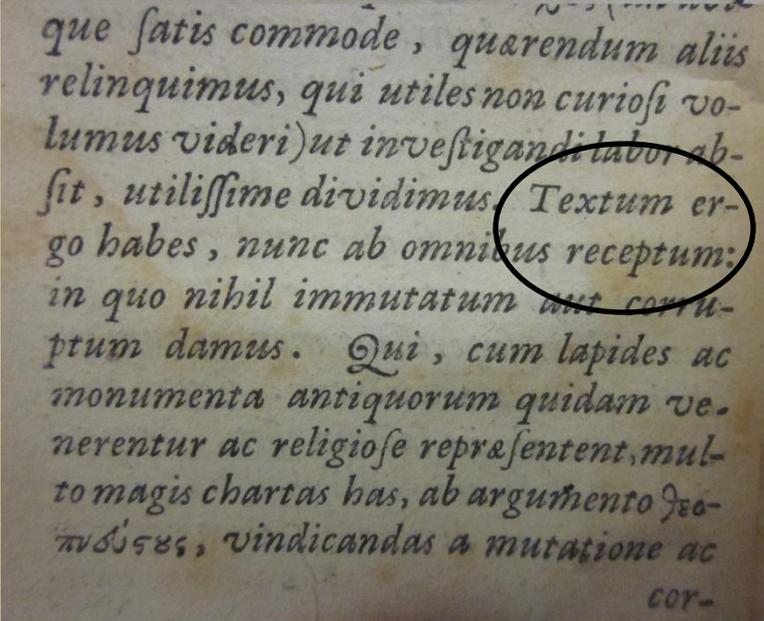
# Textus Receptus

- The Elzevir Brothers produced seven editions between 1624 and 1678.
- This is the title page from the 1633 edition.



# Textus Receptus

- The preface of the Elzevir 1633 edition contained the words in Latin which translate as: “The text which is now received by all, in which we give nothing changed or corrupted.” This is the source of the common title *Textus Receptus*, abbreviated as *TR*.



que satis commode, quarendum aliis  
relinquimus, qui utiles non curiosi vo-  
lumus videri) ut investigandi labor ab-  
sit, utilissime dividimus. **Textum er-  
go habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum:**  
in quo nihil immutatum aut corru-  
ptum damus. Qui, cum lapides ac  
monumenta antiquorum quidam ve-  
nerentur ac religiose representent, mul-  
to magis chartas has, ab argumento Θε-  
ου, vindicandas a mutatione ac  
cor-

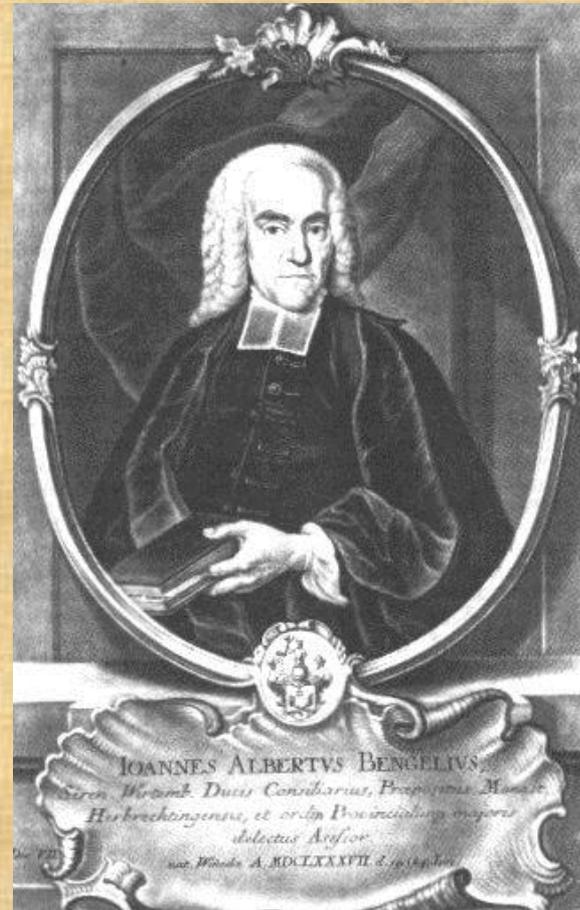
# Textus Receptus

- The primary texts behind the KJV (and the NKJV) were Beza's editions of 1588-89 and 1598. By this time, many of Erasmus' errors had been corrected, but the text was still essentially 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine.



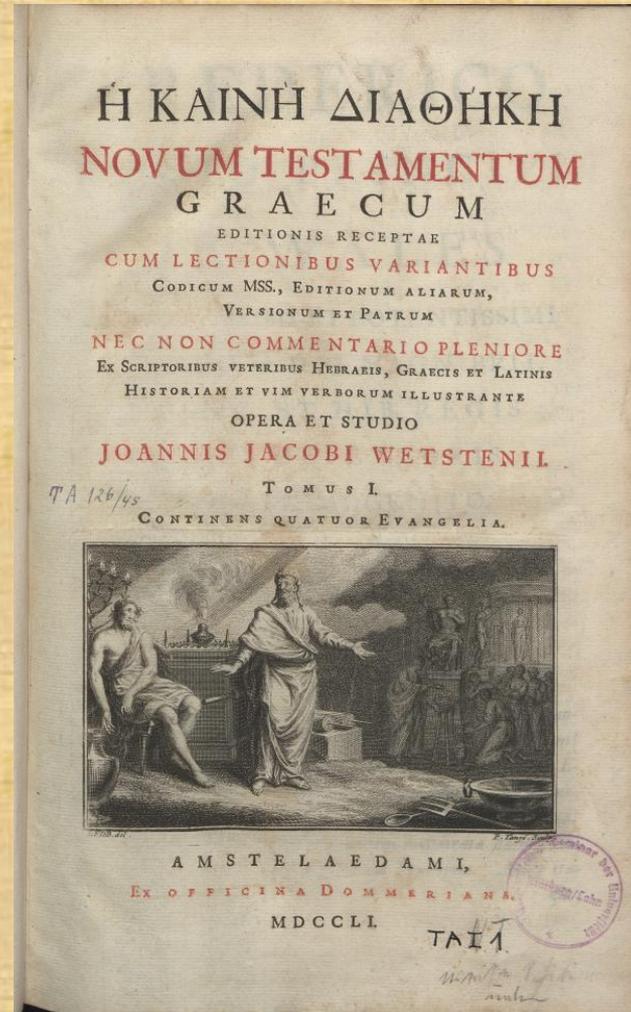
# The Critical Text

- Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687 – 1752)
- Lutheran pietist and Greek scholar
- Produced a 1734 edition of the TR, but re-edited Revelation paying special attention to Alexandrinus, a ms now known to be excellent in that book.



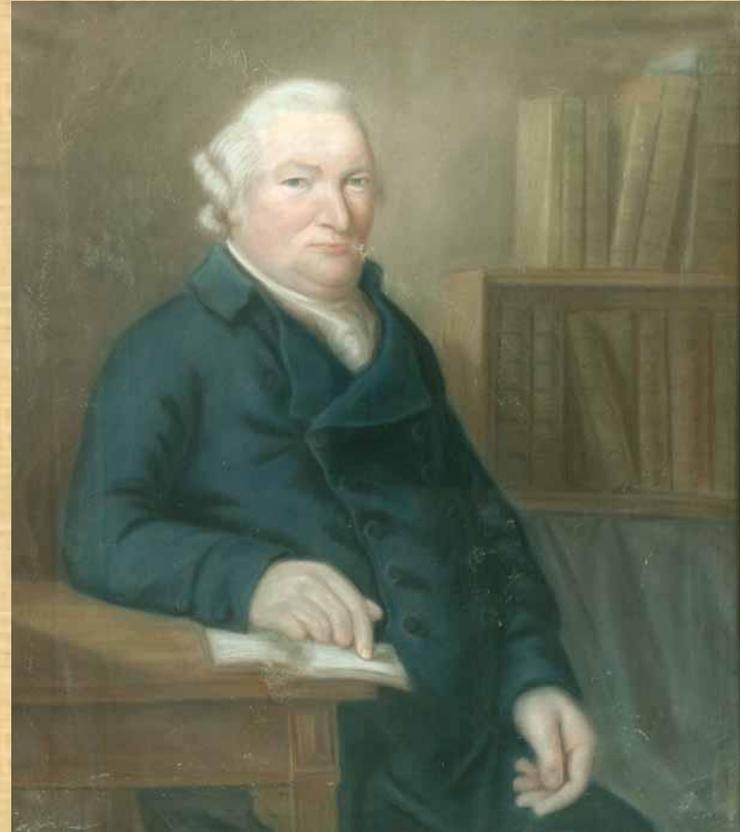
# The Critical Text

- Johann Jakob Wettstein (1693 – 1754)
- Swiss theologian and Greek scholar
- Produced a 1751 Greek New Testament using more than twice as many mss. as Erasmus.



# The Critical Text

- Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745 – 1812)
- German biblical textual critic
- Produced a 1775 – 1777 Greek New Testament reprinted most recently in 2011!



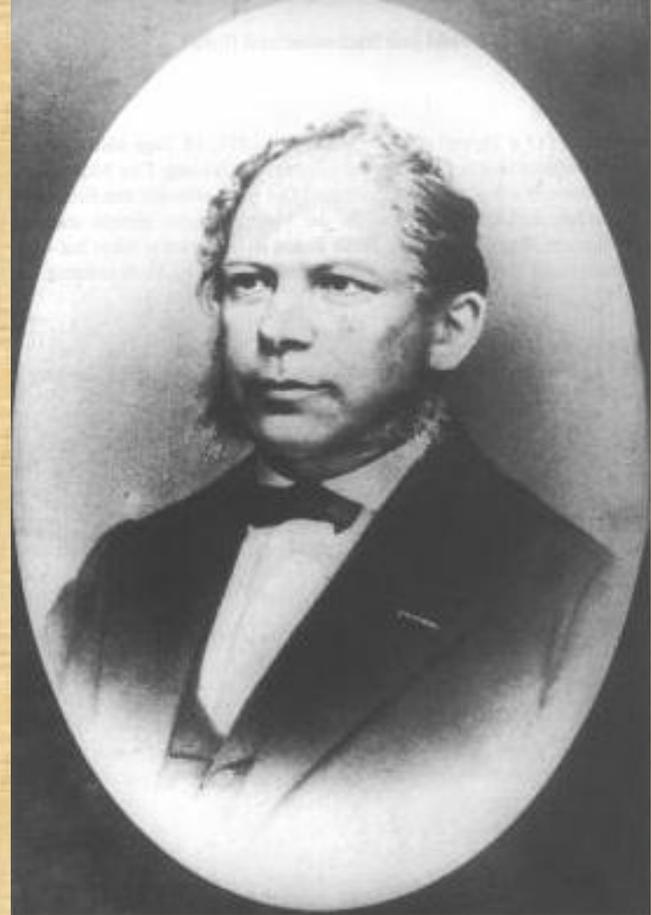
# The Critical Text

- Karl Lachmann (1793 – 1851)
- The first major editor to break completely from the TR.
- Recognized the primacy of the Alexandrian text type.
- Tried to reconstruct the 4<sup>th</sup> century text of the NT.



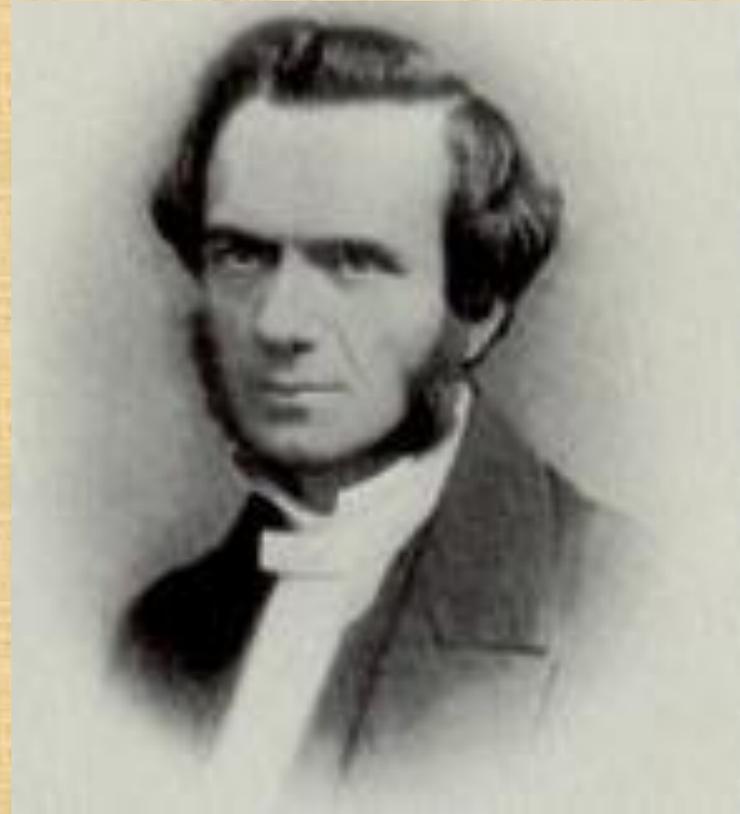
# The Critical Text

- Constantin von Tischendorf (1815 – 1874)
- Deciphered Codex Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus (C), a 5<sup>th</sup> cent. *palimpsest*.
- Discovered Codex Sinaiticus (א) and 21 other uncial mss.
- His edition was reprinted as recently as 1965.



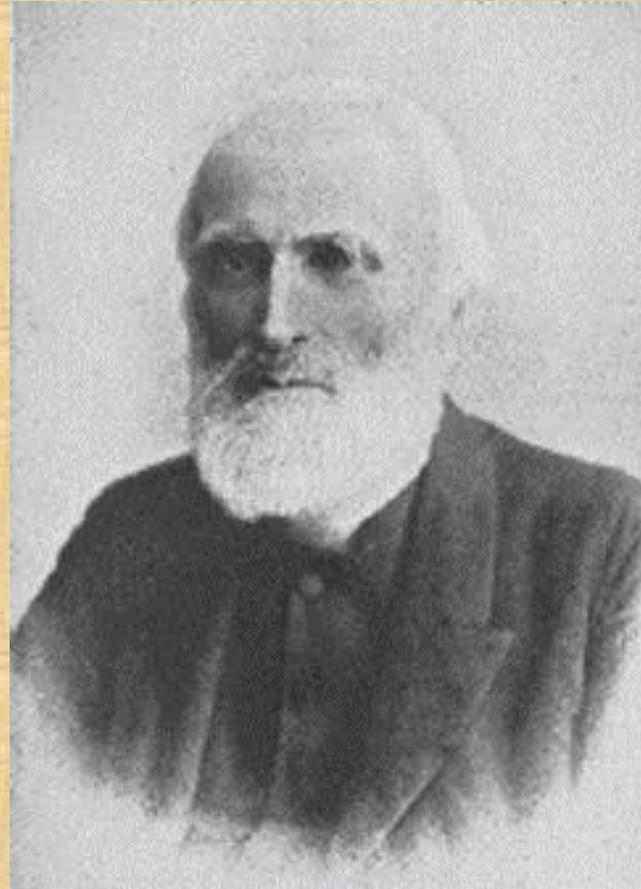
# The Critical Text

- Brooke Foss Westcott  
(1825 – 1901)
- Professor at Cambridge,  
Bishop of Dunham



# The Critical Text

- Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828 – 1892)
- Professor at Cambridge
- Together with Westcott produced an edition of the NT in 1881.
- Further developed principles of textual criticism.



# The Critical Text

- Eberhard Nestle (1851 – 1913)
- Built upon the work of Tischendorf and Westcott & Hort, eliminating their biases.
- His work was taken up by Kurt Aland (1915 – 1994) and has been printed in 27 editions to date.

