

How We Got Our Bible #4

Transmission – Making Copies

Introduction:

1. We have seen that a revelation was necessary
2. God inspired writers to write
3. The original copies eventually wore out and began to fall apart

I. Two Materials for Copies

A. Papyrus

1. Our word “paper” is derived from papyrus
2. Papyrus was the common writing material in ancient times
3. Papyrus in the OT
 - a) *Probably the ark of bulrushes that Moses was put into was the plant from which papyrus was made*
 - b) *Job 8:11 Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water?*
4. Bulrushes grew 12-15 feet tall and as thick as a fist
 - a) *The outer bark was stripped off*
 - b) *The soft center was cut into strips that were laid side by side and cross ways*
 - c) *The layers were pounded together for cohesion*
5. The original NT texts were probably written on papyrus
6. It was very perishable and few sheets survived outside of Egypt

B. Parchment

1. According to Pliny the Elder, Eumenes wanted to build a great library in Mysia that would rival the famous library of Alexandria
 - a) *Ptolemy, king of Egypt, didn't want a rival library so he put an embargo on papyrus exports to Asia Minor*
 - b) *Eumenes was forced to find something else to write on and his workers invented parchment*
2. Making parchment
 - a) *Skins of animals were soaked in limewater*
 - b) *Both sides of the skin were scraped to make them smooth*
 - c) *The skin was stretched on a drying frame*
 - d) *The skin was smoothed with a pumice stone / dressed with chalk*
3. Parchment gave a smooth, long-lasting surface on which to write
4. Eventually parchment replaced papyrus

II. Two Forms of Copies

A. The Scroll (Roll)

1. Pages of papyrus were overlapped and glued together with the two best pages on the ends
2. Rolls with up to 20 sheets have been found – usually written on one side – the inside
3. Problems with rolls
 - a) *They were inconvenient since it took 2 hands to manipulate*
 - b) *The longer books (Acts / Luke) took 2 scrolls*
 - c) *As the NT grew, no one could carry around all the scrolls*
 - d) *Rolls needed to be rewound after reading.*

B. The Book

1. Over about 150-200 yrs the form changed from the scroll to the book
 - a) *In the 2nd century 97% of texts were scrolls*
 - b) *By the 4th century 99 out of 111 texts were books*
2. Narrow columns of the scrolls carried over to the book
3. Parchment was more expensive but both sides of the page could be written on
4. The Gospels and Acts could be bound together as one volume instead of carrying around several scrolls

III. Producing Copies

A. Increased Demand

1. As the number of churches increased, the demand for Bible copies increased
2. New converts and new churches needed a copy of the Bible
3. With the increased demand, there was more emphasis on speed rather than on accuracy
4. Commercial scribes were paid by the copy

B. The Need for More Translations

1. As missionaries spread to other countries, there was a need for translations of the Bible
2. Many people could not read a Greek Bible
 - a) *There was a need for a Latin Bible, a Syriac Bible*
 - b) *Gothic, Coptic etc*
3. An early translation will usually have a high degree of reliability
 - a) *Those who were making a translation from one language to another would presumably use the best texts that they had at their disposal*
 - b) *They might even compare several texts.*
4. The early versions usually agree with the received text
 - a) *Peshitta (Syriac) – 145 ad*
 - b) *The Old Latin – 157ad*

C. The Copying Process

1. The Jews cherished the highest awe and veneration for their sacred writings
 - a) *Every letter on the page was counted to make sure that it matched the original that we being copied*
 - b) *The scribe must use the proper ink, and write on the particular parchment*
 - c) *He had to use so many columns and each column had to have a certain number of lines.*
 - d) *When a copy was completed, it had to be compared with the original within 30 days.*
 - e) *If four errors were found, then the examination went no further, the whole was rejected*

2. Early Christians used their copies of the Bible text so much that it began to deteriorate
 - a) *Since they were dealing with the Word of God, early Christians were careful to make a new copy with a spirit of utmost vigilance.*
 - b) *Careful copying was needed because of the onslaught of cults and false teachers*

3. When Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire scriptoria became plentiful
 - a) *A lector would read and a room full of scribes would copy what he said*
 - b) *Of course there would be problems with this kind of process*
 - c) *A corrector would later check each copy*
 - d) *The scribe was paid 25 denarii for 100 lines of first quality writing or 20 denarii for second quality writing*

4. Later in the Byzantine ear, monks were involved in copying the Bible
 - a) *There was less pressure in this setting*
 - b) *A monk would sit in a cell and copy his text*
 - c) *He would read a verse and remember what he had just read and then dictate it to himself as he wrote it*

5. Problems of copying texts
 - a) *Copying texts involved long hours of concentration*
 - b) *Notes in the margins tell us what scribes thought of their work*
 - (1) *He who doe not know how to write supposes it to be no labor, but though only three fingers write...*

D. Errors Creep In

1. Copying texts by hand led to the introduction of errors because of numerous copying and recopying
2. Although the copying process introduced errors, the copying process also increased the means for finding and correcting errors.
3. By careful study and comparison of the many manuscripts it is possible to closely approximate the original text
4. In the very beginning, Satan cast doubt on God's Word and he did not waste any time causing confusion in the 2nd century
5. Within a hundred years after the death of the apostles the worst corruptions to the NT text occurred
 - a) *"Marcion and his followers have betaken themselves to mutilating the Scriptures, not acknowledging some books at all, and curtailing the gospel of Luke and the Epistles of Paul, they assert that these alone are authentic which they themselves have shortened."*
 - b) *Epiphanius describes no less than 80 heretical groups which furthered their own ends by misuse of the Scriptures*
6. The Gnostics and Ebionites began copying their writings
7. Differences arose in interpretation
 - a) *Alexandria, Egypt pioneered the allegorical method of interpretation*
 - b) *Antioch, Syria maintained a strict literal interpretation*
8. No sooner had the Holy Spirit given the Word of God, than the spirit of darkness settled in to dilute, adulterate and corrupt the texts to render them useless.
9. When Constantine became the "Christian" emperor of the Roman Empire he made Christianity the state religion.
 - a) *To promote the state religion, Bibles needed to be produced*
 - b) *Constantine ordered 50 Bibles to be produced, but they were produced from a corrupted text*
 - c) *This began the spread of the corrupt texts*

E. General Text Agreement

1. Miraculously, 90% of texts generally agree with each other
2. The ten percent that are different often disagree with each other
3. The Holy Spirit guided believers to reject the corrupt copies and to cling to the proper text.
4. The closer a text is to the originals, the more descendants it will have and the further away a text is from the originals, the fewer descendants it will have
5. If a large group of texts generally agree, then one can say that those texts go back close to the originals