

What texts form the basis for modern Bible versions?

The Alexandrian Text forms the substance of all modern NT versions with the exception of the AV and NKJV. The Critical Text, originating with BF Westcott's and FJA Hort's (WH) researches, is from this family and first resulted in the 1881 Revised Version NT. This text omits and changes many words found in the Received Text. Passages which are omitted from the Critical Text include: the descent of the angel into the pool of Bethesda (Jn 5:3b-4), the conclusion of the Lord's prayer (Mt 6:13b), the woman taken in adultery (Jn 7:53-8:11), the last 12 verses of Mk 16, and the appearance of the angel to Christ and the sweating of great drops of blood (Lk 22:43-44). The critical text departs from the Received Text in over 5000 places. Although many of the differences are minor, some have big implications; e.g. Isaiah 7:14 requires 'virgin' 'not young woman' since there is no sign in a woman having a child, but there is if that young woman is a virgin. Key texts for WH are the codex Vaticanus (called 'B') and the Sinaitic ('Aleph') both 4th century documents. There is good reason for affirming that the textual basis of the WH text is corrupt, not least in that Aleph and B disagree with each other thousands of times. Modern textual scholars are less indebted to these two manuscripts, relying upon papyri documents, but still follow in the textual guidelines of WH, which are too complex to enter into here.

The AV and NKJV NT is primarily based upon Beza's 1598 edition of the Greek text (as well as his 1589 edition). There are only about 190 deviations from this where other editions were used (such as Stephanus' 1549 & 1551 editions). The Received Text (Textus Receptus) appeared later in 1633. This was a collected edition by Abraham Elzevir of Holland, which formed the basis of Greek NT studies until the 19th century. The title arose from the publisher's description that this text was 'received by all'. The current printed edition of the Received Text is the 1598 edition of Beza. There is no single Greek manuscript which represents the Received Text.

One reason why the traditional (Byzantine) texts are not ancient is because they were authentic and well used; consequently they wore out quickly and required copying. Texts which were poorly thought of were discarded and in some cases were later rediscovered in relatively good condition. The Received Text is very similar to the Majority Text, which is the text formed by 90% general agreement amongst the Greek manuscripts. This is the text that was always used by the Greek Church and is witnessed in the quotes from the fathers and other ancient versions. The Received Text is slightly less reliable since there were fewer good manuscripts available in the mid-16th century.

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