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# The Transmission of the New Testament

In the age of classical antiquity, scribes served a crucial function in the production of literary and nonliterary works. They were employed within Mesopotamia, Egypt, Israel, and the Greco-Roman Empire. Professional scribes, who were trained craftsman, were commonly employed in the commercial book trade or for a library or government post. Many of these professional copyists had expertise in fine bookhand or calligraphy. Still other scribes were amateur copyists or even educated slaves. Customarily, scribes were paid not only by the length of the text, but also by the type of hand used, which affected the quality of the product. Thus, the work of professional scribes commanded higher pay but also produced higher-quality work, which became very important in the explicability of historical texts.

Scribes were responsible for copying such items as books, petitions, receipts, letters, and deeds. Nevertheless their greatest achievement of the last 2,000 years is seen in the craftsmanship of the reproduction of the New Testament manuscripts.

## Scribal Function and Practices

A scribe was a skilled copyist. Scribes were responsible for hand-writing both a new copy or first draft of a manuscript, and also a *fair copy*. A new copy was produced from direct oral dictation by an author or lector. As the lector spoke clearly and at a moderate pace, the scribe, sometimes called a secretary, would copy every word until the piece was completed. After that point, communication between the author and the scribe was critical. The author would examine the text and make revisions as needed, and then the scribe would create a new copy called a fair copy, or final draft. In the case of a New Testament manuscript, a fair copy would be made for the author, such as Paul, and also for the congregation to which the letter or book would be read aloud. Finally, a copy would be made available for others to copy; in this way the manuscript was published. The work of scribes would continue as additional copies would be made by various copyists. Since there was no notion of copyright in the ancient world, scribes could even make a copy for themselves.

The practice of the scribe was to sit on the ground or upon a small bench or stool with legs crossed, with the bottom of his tunic extended across his knees. This provided a flat surface on which to lay his scroll, which was held in position with his left hand. These scrolls were most commonly made of papyrus, which was utilized from about 2100 BC, or parchment made from animal skin, which began to be used later in the fourth century AD. Parchment was popular for the creation of codices (ancient books, as opposed to scrolls) and is referenced in Revelation 5:1, 2 John 12, and 2 Timothy 4:13.

After taking up position, the scribe would then take a pen and penknife (3 John 13), dip the pen in ink contained in an inkhorn, and commence writing. The ink used for papyrus was black, carbon-based, and made from soot, water, and gum. The ink used for parchment could be made from nut galls, water, iron, and gum arabic. As the ink on the text aged, it became a brownish-rust color. At the ending of the fourth century AD this kind of ink was also used on papyrus. Other materials employed by scribes included a ruler, a straight edge, a thin lead disk, compasses, a sponge, and a piece of pumice stone. With pen and scroll in hand, the scribe would sit ready under the guiding voice of the lector.

Papyrus stalks are a familiar sight to Egyptians on the Nile River. Manuscripts written on papyrus are rare. (Photo by Zev Radovan.)

The papyrus would be lined (much like our standard notebook paper) by using the horizontal fibers of the sheet as a guide. On parchment, scribes would mark the sheet and then draw both horizontal and two or more vertical lines to signify the margins. One of two types of handwriting, bookhand and ruling hand, was employed. These and many other styles of handwriting can factor in significantly to the dating of a document (see below). Bookhand was a more reformed style, consisting of carefully written upright letters separate from each other, penned in a more fastidious fashion. Ruling hand, or "documentary hand," was executed more quickly and less conscientiously. It was a cursive script and a type of shorthand used mainly for everyday purposes. In this form the use of *ligatures* (joins between letters) was possible, which enabled the scribe to keep his pen to the scroll between letters. Even with ruling hand, the careful penmanship of the scribe allowed for the greater preservation of the text.

In order for a document to be committed to print adequately, the process of dictation to pen had to be done purposefully and slowly. A literary work might have taken a number of days to dictate and then weeks to complete. The time actually used in copying the script might have been between five to six hours a day. In addition to the time

spent writing the script, more time was needed to mix the ink, make ready the papyrus, rest the hand, and sharpen the pen nib from time to time. Then editing and writing of the fair copy (or copies) completed the laborious task. The careful writing of Paul's letter to the Roman church by Tertius (Romans 16:22) may have taken two or three weeks or more from the time of dictation to the completion of the final draft (fair copy).

### *Practical Adjustments*

New Testament manuscripts were mostly transcribed by Christians themselves. Due to the value they themselves placed upon the Scriptures they were committed to this craft and became faithful stewards of furthering the gospel to the "ends of the earth." In early times, these manuscripts were not commercially produced but rather copied and shared among small Christian communities and congregations. It is conjectured that many of these scribes actually were not professionals because clear bookhand is found infrequently in documents prior to AD 400; small churches may have not had the means to afford professionals.

Although fine bookhand is not evidenced in early Christian texts, Christians were still found to be fastidious in hand. Warnings from the authors, such as Paul himself, encouraged the faithful and accurate hand of the scribe. Galatians 1:6-9 is only one of the examples of such a warning. Here Paul declares accursed by God anyone who would alter his gospel. In fact Christian scribes made their mark upon paleographic history by developing what has been called a type of "reformed documentary" hand of writing. It was a more reformed ruling hand script because it used fewer ligatures and more precise letter formation than a regular documentary hand.

Christian manuscripts were written primarily for practical use and less for aesthetic purposes. They were orally shared and circulated among Christian congregations, in which a limited number of people enjoyed literacy. In fact, to facilitate public reading, copyists of Christian manuscripts would write fewer lines and letters to the line than was normal in practice.

Another practice distinct to Christian scribes was the scribal convention of the *nomina sacra*. The *nomina sacra* convention created a form of contraction out of a religious word. It abated the written form of these words by contracting the letters or syllables found in the middle of the word and connecting the first and last letters or syllables with a line. It is evident that the mostly illiterate audience to which these Christian manuscripts were addressed was considered by the scribes. One common *nomina sacra* was to use the Greek *chi* (which looks like our English *X*), the first letter of the name *Christ* in Greek, with one of the following letters (for example, the Greek letter for *s* or *r*) and placing a line over the top. For example, "X-mas" means *Christmas*, and this form is most likely how the earliest Christians would have written it! They liked to abbreviate, which saved space and costly writing materials.

## The Scriptorium and Other Later Developments

As the church attained sanction from the state in the fourth century AD, the use of the scriptorium became more frequent. The scriptorium was a place used for the

production of documents. Rather than dictating a literary work to one scribe, in a scriptorium a lector could dictate the work from the exemplar text to several scribes simultaneously, thus producing many copies. Scribes would sit around the lector, and each would copy the same text as the author read aloud.

Although the scriptorium satisfied the desire for multiple copies in a short amount of time, it also opened the door to more distractions, which sometimes resulted in technical mistakes. A simple cough or sneeze by one of the scribes could interfere with the dictation of the script. Thus, the *corrector* held the invaluable position of examining the scripts for error. After the work was copied, the corrector of the scriptorium would inspect the finished work. The corrector would then correct these mistakes with different ink or secondary placing as needed. Also, during this time (fourth century) commercial book manufacturers were more commonly used to copy New Testament scripts and would use scriptoria to do so. In the scriptorium, scribes were paid by the number of lines written. In AD 301, scribes could receive between 20 and 25 denarii per 100 lines, depending upon the speed and quality of their handiwork.

The dawning of the Byzantine period brought even greater development in the transcribing of the New Testament manuscripts. It was in this time period that monks became beneficiaries of the scribal practice. Unlike copyists of the earlier days of classical antiquity, these scribes did not need the role of the lector in transcribing documents. Although the scriptoria were still in existence, many monks preferred to work privately in their own cells using the exemplar text as their master copy and archetype. Monks closely adhered to the ideology of Jewish scribes found in Deuteronomy 12:32; they were purposefully diligent not to "add" or "take away" from the text.

Scribal practices among monks included several tasks. They would engage in reading, memorizing, and repeating small portions of the text before actually committing the words to its written form. Colophons were notes written by scribes and found at the end of books, which expressed among other things relief from the laborious task. Sometimes colophons would even attest to the physical discomfort of hand or body experienced by the scribe himself.

Although monks primarily copied only for themselves or a benefactor to the monastery, pressure for quality was not only inward—from the importance they themselves bestowed upon the texts—but also from the outside, with rules and punishments enforced within the monastery. Monks were chastised with various penances for making mistakes in the text or showing even simple signs of negligence, such as not handling writing tools responsibly. Although the task of transcribing could prove to be a laborious one, the work of scribes has proved to be invaluable in the preserving of the New Testament manuscripts.

## Dating Scribal Handwriting

The dating of New Testament manuscripts has yielded astonishing results due to the collection of paleographic evidence. Although no original manuscripts (*autographa*) have been preserved, New Testament texts have been dated to within 30 to 300 hundred years of the time the autographs were written. Paleographers are specialized historians

who study ancient texts, including the over 5,800 manuscripts that make up the New Testament. According to these historians, surviving manuscripts of the New Testament date between the early second and the fifteenth centuries AD. This is remarkably close in time to the autographs, considering that the original documents of the New Testament were most likely written between about 50 AD and 95 AD. Some whole Gospels and epistles are preserved in manuscripts that were written within 100 to 150 years from the time of their composition. And the vast majority of the New Testament text was preserved within documents dating less than 200 years from the original.

This find is remarkable when compared to the situation of most other ancient books, which date to from 500 to 1500 years after the autograph (for example, the copies of Homer, Plato, Aristotle, or Livy). Only a very limited number of manuscripts of these secular works actually exist, and only a few date from the second century AD. In a word, the New Testament manuscripts are the most well-attested and well-supported texts from the ancient world, based on their quantity, quality, and early dates.

How have these documents been dated? A closer look at dating methods leads us to a further understanding not only of the reliability of the New Testament documents, but also of the methods themselves.

Several methods are employed by historians to date the handwriting of a script. They include comparing the handwriting in a text with the handwriting in scripts that are already dated. In fact, within the lamentations of various scribes within their colophons at the end of texts, we find actual dates noting the completion of the transcription. Various archaeological finds of both religious and nonreligious works may also include dating that can be used as a reference point for paleographers.

But for many scholars, the examination of the development of script hands is used to clearly distinguish dating. Since scribes for the most part were consistent in their writing style while alive, we can assume that a script in their hand would date to within their working life period of approximately fifty years. As paleographers examine the development of hands, they compare the handwriting style in the text, including how the letters are formed and the angle of the writing. They also analyze the nuances in the handwriting of the edits found abutting the text and their correlations to each other. Organizing the information gained from these observations can denote the handiwork of scribes and allow for a simple chronology.

One can even learn the specificities of individual scribes and their work. This information becomes invaluable; scholars have used the handwriting, theology, and vocabulary of scribes to discern variants in texts. Thus, the dating of the hands of the scribe can prove to be very useful in laying a foundation for the sequencing of scribal trademarks. Historians can attribute common practices of the hands to distinct time periods and places of origin. Perhaps one of the greatest areas of study in early manuscripts exists within the handiwork of the Alexandrian scribes. Alexandrian scriptoral training marks the diligent hand of a scribe who was careful to copy word by word accurately, holding to his belief in the holy inspiration of the text.

The progression of handwriting practices and styles has over time become its own subject of study. Distinguishing time period, skill, and author, it has proved to be a

fundamental tool for dating literary compositions. Since different periods of history bore their own chirographic (handwriting) trademarks, examination of these trademarks within the manuscript assists in determining its chronology. Evolution of handwriting can prove to be gradual in nature, but significant changes within the shapes of letters and the script as a whole are found within general ranges of time. An examination of these changes within their posited periods aids paleographers in matching the handwriting on the manuscript to the appropriate time period.

### *Progression of Styles*

Among the earliest manuscripts are the ancient texts dated within the first and second century AD. These writings show evidence of a style of handwriting used within the second and first centuries BC to the third century AD. This was a decorated style using a book-hand script. In particular, it commanded the use of small details on the ends of lettering, known as serifs. The style of writing in the early centuries of the church was somewhat cumbersome.

Then, extending as far as the fifth century AD, we find a particular style of handwriting known for its emphatic form. This form is referred to as the *biblical majuscule* (or *biblical uncial*) style. It employed the use of elongated letters that were written separate from each other and in capitalized form. Additionally, the horizontal sloping strokes of letters were periodically accompanied by thick dots or completed with serifs. Scribes also employed the use of *scriptio continua*. This script was a connected form that did not provide spaces between words or sentences. Although the name can be deceiving, the biblical uncial style of writing is prevalent in both religious and nonreligious literature.

As the uncial bookhand thrived, an introduction of larger and annular ("forming a ring") letters is found in the sixth and seventh centuries. It is in this time period that one can see the lengthening of the central shaft in the Greek letter *omega* as well. As time went on, circular letters changed to become more oval and narrow, setting the stage for the next succession of forms.

In the ninth century a significant change marked paleographic history. Scribal work acquired a drastically new form and changed over its hand from the *majuscule* (uncial) to the cursive *minuscule* script. Its special form of cursive, as seen in its name, was smaller and more compact. It was a style of book hand that allowed scribes to transcribe more speedily while using letters that were well-formed. There was a brief overlapping of majuscule and minuscule writing. Majuscule writing continued on into the tenth and eleventh centuries AD but was primarily used for liturgical books. Minuscule handwriting was so useful that it continued well into the fifteenth century, until it was eventually replaced in the Reformation age by the introduction of the movable-type printing press.

It was also during this time period (900 to 1300) that a greater number and variety of ligatures were employed. (As mentioned, ligatures allowed the scribe to connect letters without lifting the pen, by a simple stroke.) Other noteworthy considerations include the differences in *breathing marks* (dashes used to aid in reading and pronunciation) according to time periods. For example, the breathing marks used prior to the

eleventh century are squarer than the annular breathing marks applied after the fourteenth century AD.

### *Paleographic Categorization of Manuscripts*

A broader and more general categorization of manuscripts according to chronology is made by paleographers as follows:

1. papyri (documents written on material made from papyrus plant)
2. uncial (majuscule) script
3. minuscule script
4. lectionaries

Note that within these broadly accepted time frames, two of the four categories are distinguished entirely by the style of handwriting found in texts. The diligent craftsmanship of the copyists has certainly made its mark in the history of New Testament manuscripts.[1]

**New Testament Manuscript Distribution by Century and Manuscript Type**

| Cent. | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Papyri | 1 | 31 | 20 | 5 | 9 | 13 | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | 85 |
| Uncial | | 3 | 16 | 44 | 60 | 29 | 27 | 47 | 18 | 1 | | | | | | | | | 245 |
| Min. | | | 1 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 22 | 13 | 125 | 436 | 586 | 569 | 535 | 248 | 138 | 44 | 16 | 4 | 2745 |
| Lect. | | | | | | | | 116 | 143 | 241 | 490 | 298 | 313 | 168 | 194 | 73 | 11 | | 2147 |

Chart from Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968, 1986). Used by permission of Moody Press. This arrangement is an adaptation by Darrell L. Bock of material from Kurt and Barbara Aland, *Der Text des Neuen Testaments: Einführung in die wissenschaftlichen Ausgaben sowie in Theorie und Praxis der modernen Textcritik* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1982), 90.*

## Evaluating Variations in Greek Manuscripts

The gathering of New Testament manuscripts has resulted in a quantity of over 5,800 Greek manuscripts that contain part or all of the New Testament. By their numbers alone, copies of the New Testament stand apart from other ancient writings by a

* There is an apparent contradiction in the totals summarized in the Aland list (5,222 items) and the evidence presented by Bruce Metzger (5,366 items). Aland and Aland seem to have excluded from their list manuscripts whose century is uncertain, whereas Metzger, UBS, and Nestle (26th ed.) include all catalogued papyri and uncials but incorporate selected minuscule and lectionary evidence into their lists. More recently, Dr. Daniel Wallace, head of the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts (CSNTM), who is the leading evangelical scholar on the topic, has discovered a number of new manuscripts. According to Dr. Wallace, the total Greek New Testament manuscript count is approximately 5,805; of these about 5,600 can be located and identified.

significant proportion. If it weren't for the rapid multiplication of the New Testament writings within the first century AD, it is highly unlikely that we would have our New Testament today. As discussed, many of these scribes were not only manual laborers but Christians devoted to the proclamation of the gospel message. Though these scribes seem to have been quite devoted to their craft, it is no surprise that mistakes were sometimes made, producing *variants*, or deviations, from the original or accepted text in the manuscripts themselves. Consequently, the more scribes committed themselves to the task of copying the New Testament, the more variants crept into the texts.

New Testament critic Bart Ehrman says,

> Scholars differ significantly in their estimates—some say there are 200,000 variants known, some say 300,000, some say 400,000 or more! We do not know for sure because, despite impressive developments in computer technology, no one has yet been able to count them all…. There are more variations among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament. [2]

But even Ehrman admits that "far and away the most changes are results of mistakes, pure and simple—slips of the pen, accidental omissions, inadvertent additions, misspelled words, blunders of one sort or another."[3]

### *Unintentional Errors*

Variants are typically categorized into two groups: intentional and unintentional errors. Textual critics (those who analyze the text in a scholarly manner) argue that most variants found in the New Testament manuscripts are the result of the latter. We will review these kinds of variants first but only in accordance with the contextual manner to which they were made.

**Errors of the ear.** Historians are careful to recognize that in the early church era, the scribe or scribes would sit, or sometimes stand, at the feet of the lector and copy down word-by-word or phrase-by-phrase an orally delivered message. Obviously, in this process, simple *errors of the ear* will inevitably result. These simple and unintentional errors can be seen in passages like Matthew 19:24 where some manuscripts read *kamilos*—"a rope"—rather than the logical meaning found in other manuscripts: *kamelos*—"a camel."

Much of the confusion is inherent in the similarities in Greek vowels. For example the Greek vowels iota, eta, and epsilon sounded the same or similar when pronounced, as did the vowels omicron and omega. Over time, confusion arose between the long vowel omega and the short vowel omicron, leading to such variants as *echomen* and *echōmen.* A similar mistake in English can be seen in the accidental interchanging of "their" for "there" and "here" for "hear." Many of these errors could have been easily overlooked by a simple scanning of the Greek text, but they become obvious with a closer reading of the script.

**Scribal fatigue.** As mentioned earlier, the ancient scribe worked rather uneasily, hunched over with scroll stretched out between his knees, one hand holding the script in place and the other used for the various tools surrounding him (pen, inkhorn, sponge, and so on). The laborious process combined with the demanding body posture allowed for mental and physical fatigue that could eventually affect the craftsmanship of the copyist. Due to such conditions, *errors of eye*, *writing, memory,* and *judgment* were introduced into the text.

**Errors of the eye.** Variants betraying *errors of the eye* can be seen in the omission of text, repetition of text, transposition (reversing the order of words or letters), and simple misspelling. Sometimes the astigmatic eye would lose its bearings in the text and mistake one group of letters or words for another. This error of the eye would then cause the scribe to skip over the reading and then the writing of text on the manuscript. This mistake is known as *homoeoteleuton*. The repeating of the same word or letter was also a common error of the eye, known as *dittography*. An example of this can be seen in some minuscule scripts that say, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus, Barabbas or Jesus?" In this passage, the word *Jesus* is repeated twice. The technical term for this is *metathesis*. In addition, there are mistakes of transposition. For example, some occurrences within a manuscript will read "Jesus" and others read "Jeuss." Understanding the context of the passages easily solves this problem. Lastly, simple misspellings, abbreviations, or scribal insertions also make up errors of the eye. Such a mistake is seen when the scribe joins words together that should be separated. For example, in English the phrase "Jesus is now here" can easily be written as "Jesus is nowhere."

**Errors of writing.** When the Christian church was being persecuted, attempts may have been made to duplicate the Scriptures more speedily. Simple *errors of writing* occurred as hasty and unintelligible handwriting met the scroll. If a copyist wrote imprecisely, he would lay the foundation for future error of sight or judgment when a future scribe discerned the text. Then, as exhaustion set in upon the mind, *errors of memory* would most often arise. When considering the multistep process of scribal monks, it is surprising that these errors are not more numerous. Occasionally a copyist might forget the exact word in a passage and substitute a synonym. This is exemplified in passages like Ephesians 5:9. Here the Byzantine manuscripts read "the fruit of the Spirit," but $P^{46}$ (from the Chester Beatty papyri) reads "fruit of light."

**Errors of judgment** make up the remainder of the unintentional causes of the variants found in New Testament manuscripts. Marginal notes sometimes made their way into the scriptural text as the scribe misjudged them to be part of the text itself. This could very well have been the case in Romans 8:1 where manuscripts vary in adding or omitting the last part of the verse. Critics conjecture as to whether this ending was actually a marginal annotation. Most of the errors of judgment can be attributed simply to poor eyesight or dim lighting—body posture obstructing the light and weakened vision of

the fatigued eye. Note that such unintentional errors are not necessarily the result of a scribe's lackadaisical approach to his work, but rather stem from the physical and mental frailties of the human faculties. Such errors are common to man, but are especially obvious within their contextual frame. To the textual critic, these simple errors may easily "pop off the page" and take little effort to correct.

### *Intentional Errors*

Finally, we come to the second category of variants: errors committed intentionally or knowingly by the scribe. Intentional errors demand greater effort upon the part of the textual critic. These errors make up the minority of the variant readings. Although natural to do so, it is wrong to assume such errors are the product of bad intentions. Taking into account that most of the New Testament scribes were Christians who valued the Scriptures as of supreme importance, it is more likely to assume that many intentional variants are the result of a scribe trying to emphasize the meaning of a word or words rather than its syntax (grammatical structure). The intentional changes can be categorized into 1) harmonizational, 2) historical or factual, 3) grammatical or linguistical, 4) doctrinal, 5) conflational, and 6) liturgical.

**Harmonizational changes** were made by scribes who sought to bring "harmony" to various scriptures by "correcting" them to match each other. It is possible that such harmonization could often be a result of the scribe mistakenly assuming the text to be in error when actually it was not. Many of the harmonizational changes made can be observed in the synoptic Gospels, as scribes attempted to harmonize accounts that were portrayed differently by each author. For example, the Luke 11:2-4 version of the Lord's Prayer was transcribed to the more accepted version found in Matthew 6:9-13.

**Historical or factual changes** also make up some of the intentional changes. Scribes thought they were actually correcting the mistake of a previous copyist. It is obvious that this is the case in Revelation 1:5, where a copyist changed *lusanti* to *lousanti,* thus changing the word from "loosed" to "washed" in regards to our sins. Other scribes may have attempted to change a word to update a name of a city in order to eliminate confusion of history or geography. For example, variants of the geographical terms *Gergesenes, Gadarenes, Gerasenes* are found in three of the Gospels (Luke 8:26; Matthew 8:28; Mark 5:1) describing the place where Jesus healed the demoniac. These were altered to read "near the Sea of Galilee with tombs and a steep bank nearby" for fear of writing a wrong location.

**Grammatical or linguistic changes.** As time and tradition impeded upon the linguistic nuances or stylistic idiosyncrasies of the scribe or his culture, again, modifications were made. These grammatical and linguistic changes included the spelling of proper names, verb forms, and other syntactical "corrections." Similar examples can be seen in "old" English literature, where modern versions may replace "shall" with "will" or "which" with "whom."

**Doctrinal changes.** The most intentional of all changes have been the result of the scribes' pursuit of orthodoxy, which resulted in doctrinal changes. The interchanging of "son" and "God" in the variant readings of John 1:18 is an example of such. Here, there is "only begotten son" rather than "only begotten God." Mark 9:29 is an example of such a doctrinal change as well. The addition of "fasting" to "prayer" reflects a change on the part of the scribe that may not have been so intentionally influenced by orthodoxy. It must be emphasized here, though, that making doctrinal changes was a very rare practice by a small group of scribes and was no way mainstream. In discerning the motivation or cause of a change, *intentional* doctrinal alterations of the text should only be considered when nothing else makes sense.

**Conflational changes.** Christian scribes devoted to the task of copying the Scriptures in their entirety may have sometimes been too fastidious in their inclusion of material. Critics point out that, for fear of omission, sometimes they included too much. Conflational changes may be among the prime examples of this overzealousness. Conflation occurs when two or more variants are joined into one reading. A good example is seen in Mark 9:49, where some texts include "And every sacrifice will be salted with salt." It is quite probable that the words "salted with salt" are the result of a conflational error, but they do not actually change the meaning of the text.

**Liturgical changes** make up the last group of intentional changes. These include minor changes that were made to follow ecclesiastical usage. An example may be seen in the doxology of the Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:13. Liturgical changes are widely exemplified in the lectionaries. Such changes occurred in places like Luke 2:41, where the names "Joseph and Mary" were likely inserted in place of "his parents." These minor changes were made in order to establish or summarize the earlier context.

Considering the vast collection of New Testament manuscripts, one is overcome by the lofty credibility this mass of evidence demonstrates. The preservation of so great a mass of bibliographical material has ensured that even the book of Revelation is supported by over 300 Greek manuscripts. The greater the amount of documentation, the greater degree to which variants are exposed and errors expunged. Though most of the variants found within the New Testament documents comprise insignificant grammatical errors, textual critics have worked relentlessly over the centuries to correct all error and have successfully provided us with the Bible we possess today.