

# The History of the Bible

## MANUSCRIPT FAMILIES

**Manuscript Family** – a grouping or classification system which identifies ancient manuscripts by age, geographical location and textual similarities.



### ***Byzantine Family – about 85% of manuscripts***

- Sometimes called Majority Text
- Found mostly in concentration close to Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire.
- The oldest Byzantine manuscripts date to about 450AD.
- They range in production date from 5<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries.
- These are possibly the majority of manuscripts because they are from an area which retained the Greek language and was predominantly Christian (although, Catholic) until Byzantium was conquered by the Ottoman Empire in 1453.
- This text type is the most uniform and contains the “smoothest” readings.

### ***Alexandrian Family – about 10% of manuscripts***

- Found through Northern Africa in or around Alexandria, Egypt
- The oldest Alexandrian manuscripts date to about 125AD.
- They range in production date from 2<sup>nd</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> Centuries.
- Newer manuscripts from this area are possibly unavailable due to the progress of Islam in Northern Africa in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century.
- These manuscripts tend to contain more variant readings from one another.
- These manuscripts tend to display less-skilled scribesmanship.
- The variants in this type sometimes include more abrupt/difficult readings.

### ***Western Family – about 5% of manuscripts***

- They come from the Western Mediterranean (primarily Italy).
- The oldest Western manuscripts date to about 250AD.
- They range in production date from the 3<sup>rd</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> Centuries.
- There are fewer of these because the Western church (Roman Catholicism) switched to primarily Latin and neglected the Greek.
- The variants in this type sometimes have more wordy readings as they tend to gloss (paraphrase) difficult passages and harmonize parallel passages.

# Why Do I Prefer the Byzantine Manuscripts?

## 1) Proof of Antiquity

In "The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism," Harry Sturz identifies 150 distinctly Byzantine readings within the papyrus manuscripts (before about 300 AD). Additionally, Scripture quotes from the early church fathers demonstrate both Byzantine and Alexandrian readings.

## 3) Scribal Quality

Alexandrian readings were possibly produced by layman scribes, working in fear of Roman persecution. This may be why the scribesmanship of the Alexandrian family is not as strong as the Byzantine. Of all the text families, the Alexandrian contains, on average, a higher percentage of variants between its own manuscripts.

## 2) The Argument from Quantity

We should ask ourselves "why are there more Byzantine manuscripts than others?" We know Textual Criticism of some kind has always taken place. As a result, the majority reading represents the informed decision of Christian scribes through the centuries.

## 4) The Role of Geography

The letters and Gospels of the New Testament were clearly written and distributed early in the areas that would become the Byzantine Empire. As manuscripts multiplied over time and distance, there would have been fewer opportunities for cross-comparison and correction - as well as less accessibility of other manuscript evidence.



### Translations Based on Byzantine Texts

In 1516, a Catholic priest named Desiderius Erasmus, collected 6-10 Byzantine manuscripts and combined them – using Textual Criticism – into one document representing a Byzantine reading in most cases. The commonly available English translations using a Byzantine text include:

- King James Version (KJV)
- New King James Version (NKJV)
- Modern English Version (MEV)
- World English Bible (WEB)

### Translations Based on Alexandrian Texts

In 1881, two men – Brooke Wescott and Fenton Hort – published "The New Testament in the Original Greek" to promote the Alexandrian text family, especially the Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus. The commonly available English translations using an Alexandrian text include:

- American Standard Version (ASV)
- English Revised Version (ERV)
- Good News Bible (GNT)

### Translations Based on 'Reasoned Eclecticism'

Reasoned Eclecticism uses logical rules to determine each variant on a case-by-case basis. The publication is known as the Nestle-Aland (NA) or United Bible Society (UBS) text. Common English translations with this text include:

- English Standard Version (ESV)
- New International Version (NIV)
- New American Standard (NASB)
- Christian Standard Bible (CSB)
- Revised Standard Version (RSV)
- New Living Translation (NLT)