

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON LXXIII : UNITY AND DIVERSITY WITHIN THE CONGREGATION OF BELIEVERS (4:1-16)

EXCURSUS: How We Got Our Bibles — After class last week there was a discussion as to the availability of the Scriptures in the early churches. To go along with that discussion, I thought it good to reproduce a Sunday School lesson I gave back in 1999.

Introduction

Last week we were reminded of the doctrine of **inspiration**, the teaching that *the Holy Spirit guided the thoughts and minds of the Bible writers to make their writings a record of God's special revelation*. We believe the Holy Spirit so protected the writings of Paul, Peter, John, Luke and others, to make their final original writings without error, even down to the actual words used (of course, this is not referring to everything these author's wrote but is limited to the writings which God providentially would provide to us as His Word).

We also saw that **God in His wisdom chose not to preserve the actual written original documents**. One possible reason for this is that man would immediately fall into idolatry if we had the original autographs. Another important likelihood is that these writings would now be in the control of Roman Catholicism and the common person would be at their mercy as to what is truth. Human nature being fallen, the original writings would have been altered through the course of time to suit tradition or man's ideas. Consider our present culture: if the average man had his way, what would their new "bible" say concerning homosexuals, marriage, man's sinful nature, the way of redemption, and the like? **Man hates the Word of God and God therefore preserved His Word in a manner in which it would be impossible to alter with any finality.**

We also saw the manner in which God chose to preserve His word was through multiplied thousands of copies of portions of scripture. Without the modern printing presses, fax machines, copiers, computers and scanners, **it was impossible to copy these manuscripts without error**. It is this fact which partially accounts for the multiplicity of today's Bible versions.

(More than usual I am indebted to a couple books for this lesson and will be quoting freely from Bruce M. Metzger's *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible: An Introduction to Palaeography* and Metzger, *The Text of the NT: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*.)

The Materials of Ancient Books

Clay tablets, stone, bone, wood, leather, various metals, potsherds, papyrus and parchment were all materials used in ancient times to receive writing. Of those, **almost all NT mss were written upon papyrus and parchment** with papyrus being by far the more highly regarded. One ancient Roman scholar wrote "Civilization — or at the very least, human history — depends on the use of papyrus." (Pliny the Elder, quoted in Metzger's *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible*)

Papyrus (we get our modern word "paper" from this word) was an aquatic plant growing abundantly in the shallow waters of the Nile, resembling a stalk of corn. It grew to 12-15' tall and was about as thick as a man's wrist. When mature, the plant was harvested and cut into strips about a foot in length. Each section was split open lengthwise and the core removed. The remaining pith was cut into thin strips and laid on a flat wet surface, with another strip laid crossways on top. The two layers were then pressed together firmly until becoming one fabric. Now so brittle it may easily be crumbled into powder, it once had the strength equal to today's good, hand-made paper.

More durable than papyrus, **parchment** was made from the skins of sheep, calves, goats, antelopes, and other animals. The younger the animal, the finer the quality of skin. **Vellum** was the finest quality of extra-thin parchment, sometimes obtained from animals not yet born. The hair was removed by scraping, the skins washed, smoothed with pumice and dressed with chalk. Before used for writing, horizontal lines were scribed onto the material as well as vertical margins (this needed done on only one side since they were visible from the back). In many mss these marks can still be noticed as well as the pin pricks used as the guide to rule the parchment. It is possible to determine the place of origin on some of these mss since different schools of scribes used different methods in marking the parchment. Vellum intended for deluxe purposes (such as for a king) would be dyed a deep purple and written with gold and / or silver ink, while ordinary books were written with black and brown ink.



P52, containing portions of John 18:31-33 (front); John 18:37,38 (back). Generally assigned a date around AD 125, making it quite possibly the oldest existing NT fragment. Measures 3.5 x 2.25".

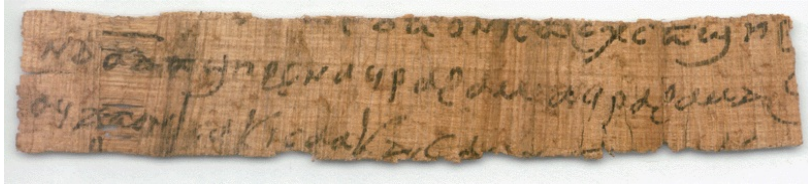
Advantages of parchment:

- parchment was tougher and more durable than papyrus, which deteriorated quickly in a damp climate
- parchment could receive writing on both sides easily, while the back of the papyrus was more difficult to use since they had vertical lines running up and down the paper.
- parchment could be manufactured anywhere

Disadvantages of parchment:

- the edges are liable to become puckered and uneven
- according to the observation of Galen, a Greek physician of 2nd century AD, parchment was shiny and therefore more of a strain on the eyes of those reading

During the Middle Ages the Arabs learned the technique of making paper from rags. While not as strong or durable as parchment, paper was more pliable (easy to bend) and cheaper and by the 12th / 13th century paper manuscripts became more and more numerous.



Papyrus fragment containing Matthew 1:1, not prior to 500 AD.

thus producing a volume (a word derived from the Latin *volumen* meaning ‘something rolled up’). Usually only one side was used for writing, and the writings were placed in 2.5" to 3.5" columns. The maximum length of such a roll was 35', anything longer became too difficult to manage. Ancient writers therefore would divide lengthy works into “books”, each of which would accommodate one roll. The two longest books of the NT, Luke and Acts, would each have filled an ordinary papyrus roll 31 or 32' in length, and was doubtless one of the reasons why Luke-Acts was issued in two volumes instead of one.

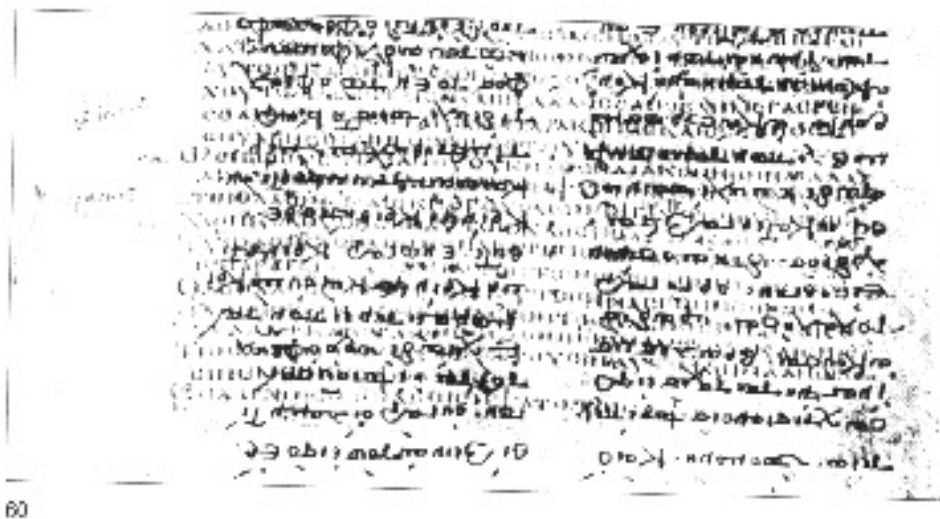
The **leaf-book** (also called a **codex**; plural, **codices**) was also made from either parchment or papyrus and was similar to our modern books. These were manufactured usually from a roll, cutting the sections into the desired codex size. The sheets were cut into a section twice the size of the desired book, then folded in half. Once collected, the leaves would be sewed together. It became a standard to have four full sheets, which when folded in half produced eight sheets or sixteen usable sides of writing space. This early standard was soon replaced by larger “books” made up of smaller folded sheets.

Churches found quickly the codices had advantages: since both sides of the pages may be used, codices were more economical. It was also easier to find passages by thumbing through a book versus unrolling a cumbersome roll. Another possible reason might be to differentiate the external appearance of the Christian scriptures from the Jewish scriptures, as the synagogues still used rolls.

Another important factor in the development of books is called a **palimpsest** (coming from two Gk words meaning “rescaped”). In times of economic problems, manuscripts would sometimes be scraped and washed off, the surface re-smoothed and the older worn-out volume was used again. Several methods have been used recently in an attempt to read the almost totally obliterated underwriting. In the 19th

century certain chemicals were used to bring out the traces of the original writing. More recent, in our century, ultra-violet lights and still more recently, a digital vidicon camera has been used.

This camera acquires an image of very, very faint writing in digital form and deciphers it. One of the most important parchment manuscripts containing portions of both the OT / NT is a palimpsest, the **Codex Ephraemi rescriptus**. This dates from the 5th century and originally contained portions of the Gk NT, but was erased and rewritten with the Gk translation of the Syrian



***Codex Ephraemi rescriptus**, one of the most important parchment mss containing portions of the OT / NT in Greek, dates from around the 5th century. A palimpsest, many of the sheets were over-written in the 12th century with translations of sermons and treatises by Ephraem, a Syrian Church Father (from which the mss derives its name).*

church father Ephraem's sermons and treatises. To prevent the destruction of scripture, the Trullan Synod (AD 592) forbade the selling of old mss of scriptures "to book dealers, perfumers, or to any person whatever."

The Copying of Ancient Books

Until the invention of the movable-type printing press in the 15th century, *the copy of every literary work was produced by hand* — a long, painstaking task, fraught with the possibilities of introducing errors. Books were expensive, taking many weeks or even months to finish a task. Though strange to us today, in antiquity it was not customary to sit at a table or desk while writing. Until the early Middle Ages it was customary for scribes to sit on a stool or bench (or even on the ground), holding their scroll or codex on their knees. Imagine how tiring that posture would be for six hours a day month after month! The drudgery of copying may be understood from the following notes added by scribes in the margins of their work:

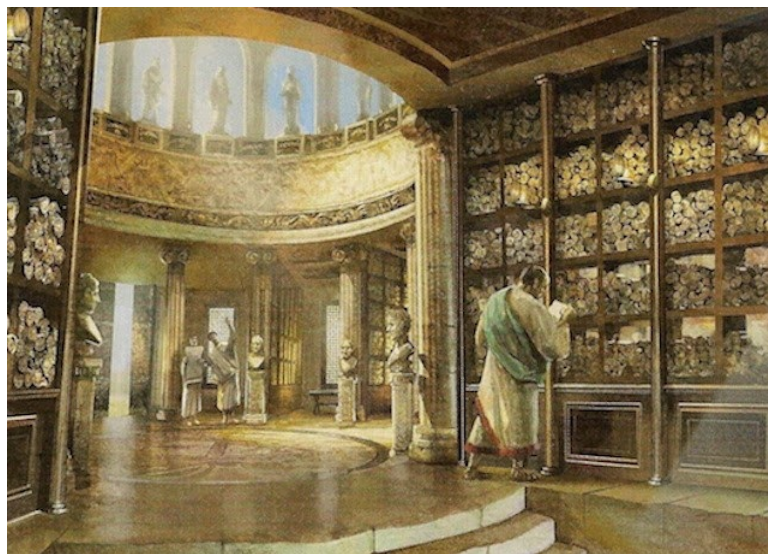
- a typical example found in many non-biblical mss: *"He who does not know how to write supposes it to be no labour; but though only three fingers write, the whole body labours."*
- another typical example expressing relief found in many non-Biblical mss: *"As travelers rejoice to see their home country, so also is the end of a book to those who toil [in writing]."*
- others close the mss with gratitude: *"The end of the book — thanks be to God!"*
- a traditional note found in more than one mss describes the physiological effects of copying: *"Writing bows one's back, thrusts the ribs into one's stomach, and fosters a general debility of the body."*
- one scribe's note in an Armenian mss of the Gospels complained of a heavy snow-storm raging outside, and that the scribe's ink froze, his hand became numb, and the pen fell from his fingers.
- less formal conversational jottings are occasionally found. Though scribes were forbidden to talk while working, the more irresponsible found ways to communicate with each other such as writing in the margin of the text and showing it to his neighbor; e.g.: *"it is cold today"; "the lamp gives a bad light"; "well, this vellum is certainly heavy"; "I feel quite dull today, I don't know what's wrong with me"*.
- other scribal notes reflect the importance of the scribe's work; a frequently occurring note is a couplet: *"The hand that wrote [this] moulders in a tomb, but what is written abides across the years [lit. to fullest times]."*
- Christian scribes (often monks) would write expressions of unworthiness: *"least", "the very least", "poor", "wretched", "thrice wretched", "unprofitable", "the most clumsy of men", "a sinner", "a sinner of all sinners", "the greatest of sinners", etc.* Not infrequently the scribe will add a prayer to God or Christ to have mercy upon him, e.g.: *"Mercy be to him who wrote, O Lord, wisdom to those who read, grace to those who hear, salvation to those who own [this codex]. Amen"*.

Two methods were commonly used in producing ancient books: one was direct copying by an individual; the other was to use a lector which enabled several books to be written at once.

DIRECT COPYING — one would obtain writing material and copy a work word for word, letter for letter. As anyone knows who's tried copying in this manner, errors are easily introduced. *Any mss with accidental changes would then be transmitted by successive generations of scribes.*

The accuracy would of course depend upon the scribe's knowledge of the original language and content of the mss, as well as upon the care exercised in performing the task. In early church history, with Christianity quickly expanding and often under persecution, the demands for copies of scripture was great. Unfortunately speedy multiplication of copies (even by non-professional scribes) often took precedence over strict accuracy and detail.

LECTOR READING — Once Christianity received official sanction of the state, it became usual to reproduce mss by having a group of scribes listen to a lector who would read aloud, slowly and distinctly. These texts were then proof-read by a corrector, some of who's corrections are still distinguishable today by different handwriting, different ink, or the addition of the correction to the side. While increasing productivity, it also introduced its own errors; some of which were caught and without doubt, some which missed being discovered. For example, perhaps one coughing or other noise would distract the scribe, or perhaps he was just inattentive momentarily. Furthermore consider the English words "great" and "grate", "there" and "their", etc. (Greek has similar occurrences; see below).



Human Error or Conspiracy?

Even for the best trained and most conscientious scribe, certain features of ancient writing would lend itself to error. Many variants in the Gk NT could be explained in part by the following:

- in uncial Greek script (all capital letters) certain letters resemble other letters, and if the master being used was worn and the condition of the ink poor, one can understand a scribe confusing the letters E and Σ, Θ and O, Π and T (“e” and “s”, “th” and “o”, “p” and “t”).
- in some (all?) mss the scribes abbreviated certain sacred words; for example θεός (theos = “God”) was abbreviated ΘΣ (capital letters) which could easily be confused with ὅς (hos = “who”, masculine singular; in capitals: ΟΣ). This explains the mss differences in 1 Tim 3:16 where the KJV has “*God* was manifest in the flesh” while many newer versions read “*He* who was revealed in the flesh” (NASV).
- several mss vary from the accepted text of 1 Cor 12:13 where Paul says “and all were made to drink of one Spirit”. Instead of Spirit, ΠΙΜΑ (pma, the accepted abbreviation for pneuma = “spirit”), some texts read ΠΙΟΜΑ (poma = “drink”) and is translated “all were made to drink of one drink”.
- since the word ΚΑΙ (kai = “and”) was sometimes abbreviated Κ (with a heavy dot at the end), one variant has occurred in Rom 12:11 where a scribe took the contraction Κω (kō, abbreviation for kuirō = “lord”) as ΚΡω (kairō = “time, season”). *An interesting observation concerning this variant: even though the Stephen’s Gk text of 1550 which is used as a basis for the KJV reads “serving in season”, the KJV goes along with the Alexandrian readings of “serving the Lord”. This suggests that the KJV 1611 translators did not consider the Alexandrian text-type as “Satanic” but rather used the mss available to them at the time in producing their translation.*
- in 2 Pet 2:13, the originals ΑΠΑΤΑΙΣ (apatais = “deceits”) and ΑΓΑΠΑΙΣ (agapais = “love feasts”) are easily mistaken, and while not causing as much controversy as the first example, does provide variant readings. In this instance the KJV and NASV read similar (“sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you” — KJV; “reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you” — NASV), while the NIV reads “reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you” with the following footnote: “some mss: ‘in their love feasts’ ”
- if two “l’s” are written too close together, they may be mistaken for an “m” (ΛΛ and Μ), which accounts for the variant reading in Rom 6:5 between ΑΜΑ (hama = “with, together with”) and ΑΛΛΑ (alla = “but, however”).
- if an “l” was followed by an “i”, it might look like an “n” (ΛΙ compared with Ν). This may account for the variant reading in 2 Pet 2:18, ΟΛΙΓΩΣ (oligōs = “scarcely”) and ΟΝΤΩΣ (ontōs = “really, indeed”). Thus the NASV reads “those who barely escape from the one who live in error”.
- sometimes Δ (“d”) and Λ (“l”) were mistaken, as in Acts 15:40 where one mss has ΕΠΙΔΕΞΑΜΕΝΟΣ (epidezamenos = “having received”) instead of ΕΠΙΛΕΞΑΜΕΝΟΣ (epilezamenos = “having chosen”).
- as texts became copied by a lector reading, similar sounding words began being substituted accidentally. For example, the confusion between ω and ο (both “o” in English) might account for variant readings in Rom 5:1 (ἔκομεν — ekōmen = “we should have” and ἔκομεν — ekomen = “we have”). Another example is found in Luke 16:25 which reads ὧδε (hōde = “here”) and ὅδε (hōde = “he”). Again, in Rev 1:5 there are variants which read λούσαντι (lousanti = “washed”) and λύσαντι (lusanti = “freed”). The KJV reads “Unto Him that loved us, and *washed* us from our sins in His own blood” while newer versions read “To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood” (NASV) and “To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood” (NIV). Sometimes the mistakes are so obvious from the context that it is easy to determine the correct reading; other times when both readings make sense and the texts are varied, it is more difficult to determine which is the original.
- another possible source of error is when two lines end with the same word or sequence of words, which might cause a scribe looking back at a mss to omit a line or portion of a line. This accounts for the KJV omission in 1 Jn 2:23: “whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father” — KJV, while newer versions read “No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also” — NIV. *Note that even the KJV recognizes this omission; my bible has the latter part of the verse in italics.* Another example is found in John 17:15 in which the sentences read as follows:

..... αὐτοὺς ἐκ τοῦ
κόσμου.....
..... αὐτοὺς ἐκ τοῦ
πονηροῦ.....

If a scribe would copy one line, then look back at the same words at the end of the lines, he could have easily missed an entire line which accounts for the curious reading in the Vaticanus “I do not pray that thou shouldst take them from the [world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the] evil one” (the words in the brackets are missing from the Vaticanus). *Examples of this may be found in many mss, including the ones used as a basis for the KJV.*

The most striking thing I glean from these examples (and there are many others which might be given) is *the attack from those who claim textual variations are due to a conspiracy by apostate Christians is inaccurate*. Are there those who hate the Word of God? — of course. Are there those who have a low regard for inspiration and who's critical evaluation of the texts might be classified attacks? — of course. *But without a doubt, many (most?) of the variants we see in all the text families (including the Gk text on which the KJV is based) may be explained by pure human error*. It is also important to recognize *the texts upon which the KJV is based has errors common to those on which the newer versions are based*, with the KJV sometimes taking the reading from the same mss on which the newer versions are based!

Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, and that seek Him with the whole heart.

Psalms 119:2

THOUGHTS ON THIS MORNING'S LESSON

- I am not attacking anyone who is KJV only / Textus Receptus (Latin for the 'Received Text') only, nor am I attacking those who accept the new versions. I hope when we get through with this, we will at least respect those with differing opinions concerning Bible versions.
- My purpose is not to make anyone question their confidence in the Word of God; rather my hope is that this should widen one's understanding on the miracle of God's Word and actually bolster one's confidence in the Word of God.
- What is being taught here today does not go against any doctrinal statement of the vast majority of evangelical churches. Almost without exception these churches state they believe in the *infallible inspired original documents* and that is being strongly affirmed this morning.
- It must be remembered that Textual Criticism is not a question of 'what do I want it to say?' but rather, 'what was originally written?' Do we believe the original documents was inspired of God? *Do we?!? Then our task should be to go with the evidence whether it agrees with any pre-conceived desire we might have!* Example: 1 John 5:7.
- Question: *why did the Lord choose to preserve His Word in the manner in which He did?* Of course that is impossible to answer without God giving direct revelation but I do have a couple ideas:
 - if we had the original manuscripts, it would become an idol
 - if there were such a thing as one complete original manuscript bible, where would that bible be? (Hint: one of the oldest, most complete manuscripts is called the Codex *Vaticanus*) If the Catholics did have the one single authoritative Bible, we would be at their mercy as to what it says (and without doubt that would always be changing). But the way the Lord chose to preserve His Word, it is impossible to make changes without it being checked / compared to the thousand of other manuscripts (abbreviated mss.).
- While we understand the Lord chose not to preserve the original manuscripts themselves, we do have copies of those original writings:
 - there are at least 5,686 Greek manuscripts in existence today. Most of those Greek manuscripts are small and partial, but there are complete NT Greek **minuscule** manuscripts dating from the 9th ~ 15th century (minuscules are manuscripts written in small Greek cursive-style letters). There are fewer **uncial codices** (manuscripts in capital Greek letters bound together in book form) but are more complete and much older (Codex Sinaiticus is dated 340 AD; Codex Vaticanus is dated 325-350 AD; Codex Alexandrinus dates from the late 4th century ~ early 5th century and contains the complete OT and nearly complete NT). All-in-all there are about 50 manuscripts that contain the entire NT and many of the other manuscripts contain the four gospels.
 - there are over 19,000 copies of ancient manuscripts in different languages:
 - Latin (10,000+ copies)
 - Ethiopic (2,000+ copies)
 - Slavic (4,100+ copies)
 - Armenian (2,580+ copies)
 - Syriac Pashetta (350+ copies)
 - Bohairic (100 copies)
 - Arabic (75 copies)
 - Old Latin (50 copies)
 - Anglo Saxon (7 copies)
 - Gothic (6 copies)
 - Sogdian (3 copies)
 - Old Syriac (2 copies)
 - Frankish (1 copy)
 - there are over 36,000 quotes from the early church fathers
 - Justin Martyr — 330 NT quotes
 - Irenaeus — 1,819 NT quotes
 - Clement of Alexandria — 2,406 NT quotes

Origen — 17,992 NT quotes

Tertullian — 7,258 NT quotes

Hippolytus — 1,378 NT quotes

Eusebius — 5,176 NT quotes

While the claim that we would be able to re-construct the NT just from the Church Fathers' quotations alone may or may not be true, the Church Fathers' quotes are an excellent 'supplementary and corroborative' source of information and has even been used to determine some of the early questionable verbiage in some instances.

- while there are a large number of variants in these texts, by far the greatest majority of these involve things as simple as word order ("*Christ Jesus*" vs. "*Jesus Christ*"), the absence of one or more words ("*Jesus Christ our Lord*" vs. "*Jesus Christ*"), spelling, tenses, missing / inserted definite articles, and the like.
- the number of variants which are more significant vary according to the scholars but according to the well-known manuscript scholar Bruce Metzger: the NT has 20,000 lines of which about 40 are in doubt (about 400 words) and none of these questionable lines effect any doctrine.
- the accuracy of these different manuscripts again differs according to which scholar is being quoted but the number most-often quoted is from Norman Geisler and William Nix's work '*A General Introduction to the Bible*' which gives the percentage of the NT being 99.5% pure of truly questionable words (again, no doctrine being effected).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS — The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) declares:

"The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them. But, because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated in to the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that, the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope."

THE ANVIL OF GOD'S WORD

*Last eve I paused beside the blacksmith's door,
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime;
Then looking in, I saw upon the floor,
Old hammers, worn with beating years of time.*

*"How many anvils have you had," said I,
"To wear and batter all these hammers so?"
"Just one," said he, and then with twinkling eye,
"The anvil wears the hammers out, you know."*

*And so, I thought, the Anvil of God's Word
For ages skeptic blows have beat upon;
Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard,
The Anvil is unharmed, the hammers gone.*

<https://evidencetobelieve.net/reliability-of-the-bible/>; 10/5/2016

<http://carm.org/manuscript-evidence>; 10/5/2016

<http://www.str.org/articles/is-the-new-testament-text-reliable>; 10/5/2016