
SECTION 3

Greek manuscripts and other historical and textual considerations which bear on the Tetragrammaton and the Christian Greek Scriptures.

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Chapter 8: THE GREEK TEXT IN THE FIRST CENTURY

In the previous ••95•• section we evaluated Christian Scriptures which were written in the Hebrew language. In the present section, we will consider evidence dealing with the Tetragrammaton which comes from Greek language sources. The present chapter looks at the Greek text and writing materials of the first century.

Written Greek in the first century

Most readers are familiar with the form of the Greek text used by the early church. However, a brief recapitulation of written Greek and textual materials is pertinent to our discussion of the Tetragrammaton inasmuch as the question at hand is one of textual transmission.

Alexander the Great dreamed of a unified empire under his rule using a common language. Though he died in 323 B.C.E. at the age of 32 with many unfulfilled aspirations, his legacy to the world of his day was the Greek language.¹ Following Alexander's vast military conquests, Greek was widely spoken until about 500 C.E. at the end of the Roman empire.²

Greek in the first century was known in two forms. *Classical* Greek was the language of literature and formality. The everyday street language was called *Koine* (common) Greek. God chose *Koine* Greek as the vehicle of communication for the latter portion of the Bible.

Both vellum (animal skin) and papyrus were used as writing materials during the time of the early church. Though vellum was used prior to the first century, its cost and scarcity prevented its widespread employment. It is not hard to imagine why an impoverished and imprisoned Paul would choose the more readily available and less expensive papyrus reed paper for his epistles.

At the time of the early Christian church, the customary written document was a scroll rather than a codex in leaf or book form. However, by the early part of the second century, the Greek Scriptures ••96•• were collected into codices because it allowed the convenient assembly of a greater quantity of written material.

Up to this point in the book, the reader may have wondered how ancient manuscripts are dated. For example, how can scholars determine that one manuscript "comes from the fourth century" or, in another case, "from about 200 C.E.?" The answer is determined by script style, writing materials, and, in some cases, circumstances surrounding the manuscript.

Greek script style

The simplest classification of Greek manuscripts is by letter style. From the first century until the ninth century, the letters used were a form of upper-case called *uncials*. The uncial script did not separate words and used no accent or punctuation marks. Though this crowded style of writing seems foreign to us today, it was expedient in order to conserve scarce writing materials.

In Chapter 4 we gave the following English-Greek citation at Revelation 4:11 in modern *Koine* Greek with punctuation and accent marks:

"Αξιός	εἶ,	ὁ	κύριος	καὶ	ὁ	θεός	ἡμῶν,		
Worthy	you	are,	the	Lord	and	the	God	of	us,
λαβεῖν	τὴν	δόξαν	καὶ	τὴν	τιμὴν	καὶ	τὴν	δύναμιν,	
to	receive	the	glory	and	the	honor	and	the	power,
ὅτι	σὺ	ἔκτισας	τὰ	πάντα,					
because	you	created	the	all	(things)				

¹ See *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, pp. 70-71 for a more complete description of Alexander the Great. Also see page 9 of the article, "How the Bible Came To Us," in the August 15, 1997 *The Watchtower*.

² Interestingly, even the Roman empire was forced to accept Greek as the international language. Official affairs of state in Rome and all military communication was conducted in Latin. However, Greek was used as the common diplomatic and trade language within the Roman provinces. Nonetheless, indigenous languages were also preserved as evidenced on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 2:711)

When John wrote this passage in uncial script with joined letters, it appeared as,³

ΑΞΙΟΣΕΙΟϞΣΚΑΙΟΘΞΗΜΩΝΛΑΒΕΙΝΤΗΝΛΟΞΑΝΚΑΙΤΗΝΤΙΜΗΝ
ΚΑΙΤΗΝΛΑΥΝΑΜΙΝΟΤΙΣΥΕΚΤΙΣΑΣΤΑΠΑΝΤΑ

In the sixth century, a new writing style called the *cursive* or *minuscule* manuscript was beginning to develop. By the ninth century, this writing style was fully implemented and used what we call lower-
••97•• case script today. The same passage quoted above was written in minuscule Greek letters as,

αξιολσειοϞσκαιοθξημωνλαβειντηνδοξανκαιτηντιμην
καιτηνδυναμινοτισυεκτισασταπαντα

Other features in the writing itself may also give an indication of its date. Not all penmanship changes are as noticeable as that from uncial to minuscule letters. Small changes such as letter formation can often be observed over time and become a means of dating manuscripts. Details such as accents, column arrangement, or capitalization may also give indication of a manuscript's date of writing.

Ancient Christian Scripture manuscripts do not give a calendar date indicating when the manuscript was copied, though in some later manuscripts scribes added a footnote giving the copy date and even the location where the copy was made. Nonetheless, a particular Greek Scripture manuscript may use unique letter formations which are identifiable in secular documents. If a comparison with secular documents can be made which shows the same writing style, a date may be established if historically verifiable contemporary events are mentioned.

Writing materials

A second aid in classifying early Greek manuscripts is the type of writing materials used. This generally involves the material on which the manuscript was written. The sheet material used was either papyrus or vellum (animal skins). In the first century, reed papyrus from Egypt was commonly used because of its lower cost. Knowing the source and method of papyrus manufacture for a given period of time may lead to the assignment of a manuscript date which is written on an identifiable papyrus material. Vellum also evidenced variation over time in its manufacturing process and the manner in which sections were joined. (Vellum scrolls consisted of smaller sections of skin laced together, whereas parchment scrolls could be manufactured in continuous lengths.)

In some cases, the type of ink used can also be identified. Though more difficult to determine, ink composition or a determination of its permanence may also give an indication of date and manuscript origin.⁴

Circumstances surrounding the manuscript

••98•• This third step used for dating manuscripts is simply a catch-all category. Many manuscripts may have unique circumstances associated with their discovery which help identify them chronologically. Relative dating techniques are often used whereby an archaeological find may be assigned a date based on its close proximity to a feature or strata with a known date. For example, a coin may be found *in situ* (at the same location) with a manuscript. Generally, coins have inscriptions or an emperor's image which establish a precise range of possible minting dates for the coin. The close proximity will give the manuscript some chronological identification.

The same may be true in the study of ancient manuscripts. For example, the Dead Sea Scrolls can be

³ This illustration was generated by removing the spaces and accents from the Greek text and substituting an uncial font. In all likelihood, the orthography is extremely close to that which John used. However, this illustration was not copied from a reproduction of an early uncial manuscript. The following illustration showing minuscule script was again done on the computer by using font substitution rather than consulting an actual ancient Greek manuscript. We do not have any indication that the original writers used surrogates. However, by the second century both *Kyrios* (Κύριος) and *Theos* (θεός) were written in their surrogate forms as Ϟς and θς. See the Glossary for a definition of surrogates.

⁴ The bulk of the material regarding the form of the Greek text has come from *Aid to Bible Understanding*, pp. 1106-110, with supplementary information from *The Text of the New Testament* by Bruce Metzger and *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* by J. Harold Greenlee.

dated, in part, because it is known that the entire area was conquered by the Romans in 69 and 70 C.E. These scrolls, of necessity, were hidden prior to that time. (For other reasons, they could not have been hidden *after* the Roman destruction.)

Manuscripts may also be dated on the basis of non-biblical margin comments or art accompanying the text. The form of the document may also give indication of its date. Though there is a significant overlap between scrolls and codices, a manuscript in codex form (bound leaves) would date from the early second century or later. As the codex became more common, its binding presumably also changed.

In all of the above mentioned means of dating manuscripts, it must also be borne in mind that geographical differences also existed. For example, the Greek penmanship in Africa may have exhibited unique characteristics as against the penmanship in Europe during the same period of time. It is these types of evidences which also help establish the geographical source of a manuscript.

Assigning dates to manuscripts, however, is never highly precise. For that reason, we generally see dates given for ancient manuscripts by century. That is, it is impossible to date a manuscript with any higher precision than somewhere within a 100 year span of time. In a few rare cases, some identifiable feature allows a manuscript to be dated more precisely, and for this reason a date such as "circa 200 C.E." may occasionally be given.

Unchanged wording

We must make a brief comment in order to avoid misunderstanding. Penmanship most certainly has changed from the time the apostolic writers recorded their gospels and epistles. However, *the words themselves have not been altered.*

The modern writing of *Koine* Greek as found in the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* has separated words and has added accent ••99•• marks, punctuation, and upper-case letters at the beginning of quotations. However, the text exactly reproduces the spelling of the Greek words as recorded by the apostles themselves.⁵

The abundance of extant Greek manuscripts

The intent of this brief section is to emphasize the large number of Greek manuscripts which are available today. First, however, we need to offer this brief explanation. In reference works such as "*All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial*," and *Insight on the Scriptures*, abundant recognition is given to this large quantity of extant Greek manuscripts. The limited footnote references to Greek manuscripts in the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* are not in any way disparaging of this manuscript evidence. Rather, the Westcott and Hort Greek text primarily concerned itself with two reliable manuscripts and did not frequently cite other textual evidence.⁶

Nonetheless, when using the footnote materials in the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation*, a reader will often gain a first impression that there is scant Greek manuscript evidence for the use of *Kyrios* in

⁵ Recovering the *exact* text as written is, of course, the objective of textual criticism. Only in this way can the reader today know the precise tenses of verbs, subjects and objects of sentences, and the like. Unlike contemporary language study, the student involved in biblical Hebrew or Greek study is attempting to retrogress in time to the actual language of the Bible characters themselves.

⁶ There is a reason why these two Greek manuscripts justifiably receive such prominent attention. The Greek text of the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* is the work of two textual critics: Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901) and Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828-92). In 1881 they published their work, the most noteworthy critical edition of the Greek Scriptures ever produced by British scholarship. It was the opinion of Westcott and Hort that the two complete Greek manuscripts *codex Vaticanus* (identified as "B") and *codex Sinaiticus* (identified as "Ⲛ") represented the available texts which were the most similar to the original apostolic writings. Their own commendation of these two texts states:

It is our belief (1) that the readings of ⲚB should be accepted as the true reading until strong internal evidence is found to the contrary, and (2) that no readings of ⲚB can safely be rejected absolutely, though it is sometimes right to place them only on an alternative footing, especially where they receive no support from Versions or Fathers.

For obvious reasons, the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation's* footnotes will strongly reflect these two Greek manuscripts at the exclusion of others. (Both the information and quotation are from *The Text of the New Testament*, Bruce Metzger, pp. 129-133.)

the 237 Christian Scripture *Jehovah* references. A typical footnote may list five to ten Hebrew translations supporting *Jehovah*, and only two Greek ••100•• manuscript sources (with two supplementary Latin or Syriac translations) supporting *Lord*.

At first glance, this will often indicate that there is substantially more support for the Tetragrammaton in the early texts than there is for the Greek equivalent of *Lord*.

It is not the intent of this section to review earlier statements substantiating the fact that the original authors did not use the Tetragrammaton in their writings. However, we must emphasize the abundant early Greek manuscript evidence which is available today. On page 443, Volume 1 of *Insight on the Scriptures* says,

There are available for comparative study more than 13,000 papyrus and vellum manuscripts containing the whole or a part of the Christian Greek Scriptures, dating from the 2nd to the 16th century. Of these, some 5,000 are in Greek, and the remainder in various other languages. More than 2,000 of the ancient copies contain the Gospels and more than 700, the letters of Paul. While the original writings themselves are not currently extant, copies date back to the second century, which is very close to the time the originals were written. This vast number of manuscripts has enabled Greek scholars in the course of years to produce a highly refined Greek text of the Scriptures, confirming in many respects the dependability and integrity of our present-day translations of the Christian Greek Scriptures.

Appendix I (A Catalog of Greek Manuscripts) has been included in the back of the book to show the reader the massive amounts of textual evidence on which the present Christian Greek Scriptures rest. Carefully review the information given in that appendix. The reader should not neglect to scan this voluminous list of early Greek manuscripts. The *New World Translation* cites only a total of 12 Greek manuscripts and eight early versions to substantiate the Greek word *Kyrios* (Κύριος), whereas there are 754 Greek manuscripts, 86 versions, and 149 lectionaries cited in Appendix I alone.

For understandable reasons, the Westcott and Hort text of the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* does not make abundant reference to many extant Greek manuscripts beyond *Vatican Manuscript No. 1209* (B) and *Sinaitic MS* (Ⲙ). However, *there is massive early textual evidence available today which substantiates the entire Greek Christian Scriptures. Included in these Greek manuscripts is unanimous evidence supporting the use of the Greek word Kyrios (Κύριος) for 223 instances wherein Jehovah is used in the New World Translation Christian Scriptures.*

Unorchestrated distribution of manuscripts

••101•• We now encounter an interesting question in our study of the Tetragrammaton in the Christian Greek Scriptures. That question is simply, "Why did some ancient manuscripts survive while others were lost?" If we have thought to ask this first question, then it would occur to us to ask a second question with the Tetragrammaton manuscripts in mind. "Is it probable that *none* of the Tetragrammaton manuscript copies survived, while 5,000 *Kyrios* manuscript copies remain?"

The history of manuscript transmission to successive generations is a portrayal of two unorchestrated processes. One is the process of *copying* manuscripts. The other is the process of *distributing and preserving* these same manuscripts. Each of these two processes is so unsupervised and uncontrollable that they take on the appearance of random events.

Most of us have had some contact with the notion of random events or *probability*. It is helpful to understand that we are actually talking about an application of probability when we compare variant readings within extant ancient Greek manuscripts. Of the total copies made in the early centuries, only a small percentage of these copies survived. Surviving copies of ancient Christian Scripture manuscripts represent a *random selection* of the original number of manuscripts.⁷

There was most likely a random distribution of manuscript accuracy when the first copies of the original Greek Scripture documents were made. While making the very first copies, most scribes paid close attention to detail and made nearly flawless copies. On the other hand, there were undoubtedly

⁷ We are fully confident that Jehovah God has carefully guarded his written word and did not allow its destruction outside of his control. This does not mean that *random probability* is not operative, but it means that God is in control of the process. It is interesting, however, to realize that a statement saying that *all copies of the correct text were lost is a direct affront to the ability of God to care for the Christian Greek Scriptures through time.*

some scribes who carelessly made early copies which had more than an average number of copying mistakes. These copies, from the most accurately copied to the most carelessly copied were potentially recopied and carried to remote locations of the Roman empire.

What kind of copies have survived to our day? Again, we would expect a random distribution of the most accurate to the most carelessly reproduced copies. Preservation was not particularly conditioned by the precision exercised by scribes or copyists. Preservation was determined by factors such as the absence of early invading armies, a warm, dry climate, or preservation in a forgotten monastery.⁸

••102•• We do not discount Jehovah's supervision in the preservation of the Greek manuscripts. However, we are suggesting that there are at least two types of random processes which have produced the copies of early Greek manuscripts which we possess today. The first random process dealt with the factors which reproduced either good or poor *copies* of the original Greek Scriptures. The second random process concerns factors which caused certain manuscripts to *survive* while the rest were lost or destroyed.

We can state the problem in a slightly different way. We can only conjecture as to some unknown number representing the total number of Christian Greek Scripture portions produced in the first ten centuries of the Christian era. (Most certainly the actual number would be in the hundreds of thousands, inasmuch as copying Scripture was an ongoing process.) Of this number, some manuscripts were destroyed soon after they were copied. Some had a long and useful life and were copied many times, producing further generations of copies duplicating their unique idiosyncrasies. A small number of these copies were carried to geographical locations whose climatic conditions aided in their preservation. Of the huge number of possible early Greek manuscripts, only a small number of the total would eventually be preserved and located so that they could come to light for scholarly research in the period of time between the 16th century and today.⁹

In order to explain the Tetragrammaton's removal from the Christian Greek Scriptures, we must superimpose over this first set of random probabilities a second condition requiring a very carefully planned, non-random series of events. What would be required in order to obliterate the presence of the Tetragrammaton from the original writings of the Christian Greek Scriptures? The entire train of events would need to be altered. No longer could we allow a random process of copying and preserving documents. We would be forced to believe that in all other aspects concerning the preservation of Greek Scripture ••103•• documents, a true random distribution took place.¹⁰ Yet, only in this one area concerning the removal of the Tetragrammaton, would we accept the fact that both the copy process and the preservation of the text became completely uniform. Though we see no evidence of that fact today, we are asked to believe that *all* inspired Christian writers used the Tetragrammaton. Then we would need to acknowledge that *all* third century copyists used only *Kurios*. We would next need to believe that *all* copies containing the Tetragrammaton were subsequently lost at a precise point in time so that they were never again copied. Finally, we would need to believe that there was *total* agreement among *all* church fathers from the second century on that this new corrupted text represented the true apostolic writings.

All the while, we would need to ignore the countless early Christians who suffered daily for their

⁸ This is exactly the fascinating story behind the Greek manuscript X (*Aleph*) cited so frequently in the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation*. As mentioned earlier, it was found in 1859 by the German textual critic Friedrich von Tischendorf at the monastery of St. Catharine on Mount Sinai.

⁹ Interest in preserving the Scripture text is in no way confined to the 16th century and later. Before the time of Christ, Jewish scholars had developed extremely precise means of insuring faithful transmission of the Scriptures. Later Jewish Masoretic scholars devoted their entire lives to this primary pursuit. Again, Origen gives us an outstanding example of textual work done in the third century. (See Appendix J.) Countless other examples throughout early history can also be given. Nonetheless, from the time of Erasmus (during the 16th century) until the present time, there has been a concerted effort to identify the most reliable biblical texts. The invention of the printing press and the discovery of numerous important manuscripts in this later period of history have contributed much to a renewed effort in the study of textual criticism.

¹⁰ This is not a hypothetical model. A study of textual criticism will show exactly this random distribution of textual variants in the history of the text. In fact, it is this discernible randomness which makes the entire study of textual criticism viable.

faith, many to the point of martyrdom. We would need to believe that they would give their lives to protect their precious Scriptures from the Romans, but when heretics forcefully acquired all scrolls containing the Tetragrammaton, they willingly acquiesced with such unanimity and silence that no protest was ever recorded!

This would be a most unprecedented event within the history of the early church. For a heresy of this magnitude to take place so soon after the Apostles' deaths is most difficult to believe. That it could be so well controlled that not a single reference to its existence has been preserved is beyond reasonable belief.¹¹ That all traces of the ••104•• supposed early documents which contained the Tetragrammaton could be completely expunged in the short interval required, however, becomes a statistical impossibility.



CHAPTER SUMMARY. This chapter has evaluated the Greek text of the first century church.

1. The Greek text of the early church was written in joined letters without word separation called an uncial text. No punctuation or accent marks were used. Nonetheless, as both writing itself and the form of the text changed through time, the actual words of the Greek Scriptures have survived without alteration.
2. The *New World Translation* cites only 12 Greek manuscripts and eight early versions in support of the Greek word *Kyrios* (Κύριος) in the 237 *Jehovah* passages. On the other hand, the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament* actually cites 754 Greek manuscripts, 86 versions, and 149 lectionaries in support of the *Kyrios* passages within the Christian Greek Scriptures. In all, there are a total of over 5,000 extant Christian Greek manuscripts.
3. We fully acknowledge that the transmission of the Sacred Scriptures was under the careful plan and supervision of Jehovah. Nonetheless, there was an apparent randomness in the method he used to preserve these texts. The accuracy of the various texts which have been safeguarded, and their geographical location which made preservation possible, were *random* events. On the other hand, removal of all traces of the Tetragrammaton would, of necessity, have been a deliberate and planned undertaking. It would represent a statistically impossible series of events for the Tetragrammaton to have been removed from copies of the original writings, leaving no trace of that heresy today.

¹¹ In truth, it is even *more* difficult to imagine because of the fourth century controversy over the person of Christ. (The controversy is generally known in history as *Arianism*, named after Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria who died in 336 C.E.) It is not our intent to evaluate the theological position of either group in that debate. Nonetheless, this event of history most certainly gives us an insight into the presumed presence of the Tetragrammaton in the Christian Greek Scriptures. One group maintained that the Son was not of the same substance as the Father, understanding him to be a created being, though preexistent to the created world. There is considerable writing of the early church fathers dealing with this controversy from both sides of the argument. We must ask ourselves a very important question. If, as is claimed, there was evidence of any kind that the Tetragrammaton was used 237 times in the Christian Greek Scriptures by the original authors, why did those advocating a created Jesus never bolster their argument with this information? No single logical argument would have supported their cause more eloquently than the citation of the Tetragrammaton from within the Greek Scriptures' texts. Or are we to believe that men living in 350 C.E. had never read Greek Scripture manuscripts which still existed from the apostolic times? In fact, Origen contributed substance to this controversy by his teaching that the Father and the Son possess a separate essence, calling Jesus "a secondary God," and the Father "*the God*" (*Schaff-Herzog*, Vol. 1, p. 278). Most certainly, the writings of Origen himself would have provided the textual evidence necessary to substantiate the presence of the Tetragrammaton, had it been available.