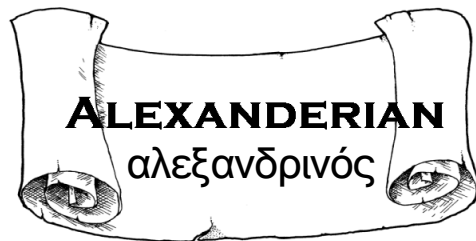




TWO DIFFERING GREEK TEXTS: WHICH IS MORE ACCURATE?



by

Rev. Ron Myers – Bible Translator
Baptist World Missionary Outreach Min
PO Box 3303, Chattanooga, TN 37404

—o0o—

Sunshine Publications
San Diego, California, USA
The Light of the World is Jesus
Copyright © Pending




Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
Two Major Classifications.....	1
THE GREEK MANUSCRIPT CONTROVERSY:	3
Which Best Follows the Original Text, If Any?	3
The Alexandrian Manuscript Proposal:.....	3
Note-1:	3
The Byzantine Manuscript Rebuttal:	3
Modern Version Bible Quiz:	3
PREPONDERANCE OF EVIDENCE <i>and the</i> MAJORITY TEXT:	4
THE MISSING BLOOD: A LOOK AT COLOSSIANS 1:14:	5
CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS:	5
KJV ONLYISM [†] and the NKJV:	6
Is the NKJV a Deceitful Counterfeit?	6
Note-2:	6
END NOTES:.....	7
Other Byzantine/TR Related English Translations:	7
Wycliffe Translator Has Second Thoughts	7
Dr. Wilbur Pickering and the Majority Greek Text:	7
Qumran; Site Of An Ancient Jewish Settlement:	7
Controversial KJV-Only Assertions:	8
Confronting Extremist Types:	8
Note-3:	8
Note-4:	8

Two Differing Greek Texts: Which Is More Accurate?

by

Ron Myers

INTRODUCTION:

Two Major Classifications

Much of the present-day Bible version controversy revolves around which Bible version or underlying Greek manuscript is best. There are **two main classifications** or two streams of Greek manuscripts in focus (extant or presently available) in this ongoing sometimes-heated dispute. They are ^{A)} the **Alexandrian** or *Western* text-type (*also called Egyptian and associated with the Sinaiticus and Vaticanus*). And ^{B)} the **Byzantine** or *Eastern Orthodox* text-type (*also known as Antiochian or Syrian*), of which the *Received Text* or *Textus Receptus (TR)* is associated (though slight variations occur).

My impetus (impulsion) for writing this paper is not to determine which of these two Greek manuscript lines (Alexandrian vs. Byzantine) appears to be better or more accurate. It is, however, *to examine* the dissenting arguments that either side has proposed in defense of their preferred manuscript line. What *cannot* be determined here is which better reflects the original God-breathed (inspired) manuscripts. That would be impossible since the actual inspired originals have either been destroyed or lost to antiquity and are not in existence today, as far as can be determined.

I have attempted here to summarize a multi-faceted subject in a simplified neutral format besides giving an overview of the differences and reasonings surrounding this often emotionally-charged and perplexing subject, written with the layman in mind. I also address the claims of some of the more exclusive or radical KJV-Only elements. Concerning the Byzantine manuscript line, the KJV (*and some older versions*) were translated from the best compilation of manuscripts available at the time. These later became known as the *Textus Receptus (TR)* or Received Text. They are closely associated with the Byzantine line of Greek manuscripts.¹ The NKJV⁺ was purposefully translated using the same Textus Receptus line of Byzantine Greek manuscripts (from which the TR was derived). It was done simply as a grammatical update of the 1611 King James' Elizabethan word style. Furthermore, the NKJV New Testament was *not* derived from the Alexandrian manuscript line, as were other modern versions, which KJV-Only naysayers claim. More on this subject later.

In contrast, both the scholarly NASB and the popular NIV were translated from edited derivatives of the Alexandrian line of Greek manuscripts. Today, these are known as the Westcott & Hort (WH); Critical Text; Nestle-Aland (NA) *and* United Bible Society (NU/UBS) line of Greek texts. Keep in mind that, apart from the NKJV, all modern New

Testament translations are, without exception, based on these derivatives of the Alexandrian text, not just the NASB or NIV... *as well as the older* Revised Standard Version (RSV) and the American Standard Version (ASV)—purported to be an updated revision of the KJV, but used the Alexandrian Greek text and not the original TR Greek text.

Of prime importance in understanding this paper, one should keep in mind that *neither* of the Greek text lines discussed here (*Alexandrian or Byzantine*) are the actual originally-inspired (*God-breathed*) autographs. They are two separate compiled collections of Greek manuscripts from fragments of ancient transcripts, originating from two different geographical locations. The Alexandrian, originated in Egypt, and the Byzantine, originated in the Byzantine (*Eastern Roman*) Empire—hence, their names. Therefore, what remains today are separate lines—copies of copies—of the original God-breathed autographs. Having been replicated by Scribes and handed down over the years until lost to antiquity. They were rediscovered later from various locations and meticulously compiled.

The question remains: Which of these two compiled sets of Greek manuscripts (*Alexandrian or Byzantine*) more closely reflects the originally inspired autographs? That is, the original writings, penned by the Apostles (Matthew, John, Paul, Peter, and James), and disciples like John-Mark (Mark) and Dr. Luke (Luke and Acts) under the divine unction and superintendence of the Holy Spirit. We believe that all Scripture enjoys total verbal inerrancy (complete word-for-word accuracy) in the original autographs, not fragments of copies—whether *Byzantine/TR* or *Alexandrian*. Nor translations based on either of these, be it the KJV standby or its NKJV update (*Byzantine/TR*), or the popular NIV or the more-scholarly *Alexandrian-based* NASB. The writer has now included the newer ESV version in a Bible version comparison since it has gained recent popularity.

Among Alexandrian-based translations, the Lockman Foundation's NASB is more accurate or "faithful" grammatically to the Alexandrian-based Greek text than its modern contemporaries. Then, there's the recent Reformed-advocate favorite English Standard Version (ESV), also Alexandrian-based. Alexandrian camp advocates might well consider it their answer to the Byzantine/TR based NKJV which closely reflects its KJV parent.

The NASB owes its scholarly accuracy to its translation team whose goal was to make it grammatically reflective of the Alexandrian text on which it was based. It has a style or philosophy of translation called *formal* or *literal* equivalence, like the KJV and NKJV. The NIV reads more smoothly and is widely popular for that reason (including a brilliant marketing campaign). Yet it tends to be unnecessarily *interpretive* in many of its critical word choices. Although its translators used a *formal* style in many passages, its *dynamic* equivalent style weakens its value as a study Bible. In this writer's opinion, the NIV translation committee could undoubtedly have chosen less-interpretive terms and still maintained its ease of readability while increasing its accuracy.

THE GREEK MANUSCRIPT CONTROVERSY:

Which Best Follows the Original Text, if Any?

"Before we proceed, we should remind ourselves that the antiquity of a document does not prove its worth, nor does the recency of a document make it worthless. Documents may be new, yet reliable, old yet unreliable." (Charles C. Ryrie (retired), Dallas Theological Seminary – adapted).

The Alexandrian Manuscript Proposal:

The theory championed by scholars and intellectuals who advocate the Alexandrian manuscripts is that, since the known extant Byzantine manuscripts were: ^(a) presumably dated later than the known Alexandrian manuscripts, ^(b) thus, there was a greater likelihood of alteration, ^(c) resulting in decreasing reliability. They hypothesized that zealous Scribes *might* have taken opportunity to tamper with the text, adding whole sections to their liking. Alexandrian manuscript proponents consider themselves more knowledgeable, viewing Byzantine/TR devotees as unsophisticated and naïve, which is not entirely without merit in some cases.

Note-1: Concerning the claim of scribal tampering, if one is familiar with a Scribe's absolute reverence for Scripture, attention to detail, and striving for accuracy of ancient Biblical Scribes, the pro-Alexandrian (critical text) argument becomes much weaker. It would have been unthinkable for any Biblical Scribe to consider editing the sacred text, even in a miniscule way. Their goal was to meticulously copy every detail of the ancient Greek (or Hebrew/Aramaic) manuscripts—scrupulously guarding against any error, be it typos, insertion or deletion of text.

The Byzantine Manuscript Rebuttal:

The Byzantine proponents offer a multi-fold rebuttal. Discovery dates have little to do with it age. The earliest Byzantine manuscripts may be as old or older than the earliest Alexandrian manuscripts. They also insist that it is likely the more accurate of the two lines, and provably was not "tampered" with by Scribes as advanced by the pro-Alexandrian camp. Ironically, some pro-Alexandrian *textual criticism* scholars have begun to question the scribal-tampering theory. Consequently, some now regard the Byzantine/TR as being more reliable than previously thought, and are taking a second look at the TR, from which the KJV and NKJV versions were derived, as well as older or similar English versions.²

Byzantine/TR proponents point out that many words and phrases are missing in the Alexandrian text, deleted by heretical factions in Alexandria, Egypt; thus, the name. Biblical Archeologists have concluded faithful believers must have set it aside in caves—undestroyed owing to a reverence for Scripture—to be rediscovered later. And yet, it is touted by present-day scholars to be the more accurate text—based on age alone—even though it is comparatively scarce in extant number. Some portions were missing or were undiscernible scraps that needed to be guesstimated and recreated. The same changes and omissions are found in *all* modern Bible translations based on the updated derivatives of Alexandrian Greek text, despite its scarcity of extant manuscript evidence. These differences become strikingly evident when critically compared alongside the KJV and NKJV, both founded on the Byzantine/TR text. *SEE: "Modern Bible Version Quiz" for further proof.*

Note: My followup paper, **A Modern Version Bible Quiz**, shows very revealing variations in Bible versions.

PREPONDERANCE OF EVIDENCE *and the* MAJORITY TEXT:

Opposing camps still disagree concerning which manuscript is more *bona fide* (*Alexandrian or Byzantine*), and both sides of the debate are convinced their position is correct. However, if one considers the greater preponderance of available evidence. Factually, there are only a miniscule amount of Alexandrian manuscript remnants in existence; in comparison to the Byzantine text-type, which has by far the greatest number of surviving manuscripts. That was perhaps the impetus for compiling the *Majority Greek text* prototype, generated from an aggregate of the best extant (*existing or surviving*) Byzantine Greek manuscript remnants.

The first *Majority version prototype* version was compiled by Drs. Arthur Farstad and Zane Hodges, strong proponents of the majority or *preponderance of evidence* textual theory. The theory was, if the most extensive or "majority" of reliable fragments were analyzed, tallied up, and compiled into a prototype version, the result would likely be close to the original autographs. It could also potentially end the longstanding debate as to which Greek manuscript is closer to the original God-breathed New Testament documents (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16).

Dr. W.F. Pickering later proposed questions pertaining to the objectivity of the Farstad and Hodges Majority Greek edition. Upon evaluation, Pickering believed that the compilers of the *original* Majority version (Farstad and Hodges) had not maintained strict neutrality, since certain portions appeared to give credence to the Alexandrian (*or Critical*) Greek manuscripts.

Subsequently, Pickering set about to do an in-depth evaluation and revision, aptly named the *New Majority Greek version (including an English translation)*.³ His work indicated that the Byzantine/TR (*from which the KJV and NKJV were taken*) has a greater probability of consistent alignment to the original inspired autographs—than does the Alexandrian (*from which the NASB and NIV were derived*). Otherwise stated, the compilation of Alexandrian text fragments—which some see as *fraught with "guess-timations" and omissions*—was in all probability the altered or corrupted Greek text. Some conclude this was likely the reason it had initially been set aside to be forgotten—being a corrupted text—and stored in clay pots in the caves at *Qumran* some 20 centuries ago.⁴

Others have suggested that, perhaps the most persuasive evidence supporting which existing Greek text-type more closely reflects the original autographs might be found in first and second century translations, or in the writings of the Apostles and early church fathers. If the research proved definitive, it could provide compelling evidence as to which text was the most accurate: the Alexandrian, the Byzantine/TR, or possibly one of the Majority Greek text prototypes.

Concerning the NIV (*and the other modern translations based on the critical text theory*), many have accepted the claims about these types of translations as being more accurate. I agree that the NIV reads very smoothly, a positive point. It also employs literal translation techniques in places; another plus. However, the major problem is with what many see as missing words, phrases, or verses (*following its Alexandrian source*). The NIV also has the tendency to be "interpretive" in word choice when a more straight-forward

wording would work fine. These, coupled with massive marketing campaigns, has taken the NIV into many hearts, homes, and pulpits, often causing more disarray than depth of understanding.

With all due deference, the same could easily be said about more-recent translations, i.e., HCSB, ESV, ISV, NLB, WEB, *ad infinitum*. How many times do we need to recreate the English version translation wheel, introducing "Lilliputian" alterations along with claims of a "brand new" translation of greater accuracy? This is purposeless waste! Could not time, energy, and the Lord's funds be more-wisely invested by supporting greatly-needed Bible translation projects presently being undertaken on the mission field, among people-groups still without the Scriptures in their own heart language—like Northeast Thailand's *Isanian millions*, for example?

THE MISSING BLOOD: A LOOK AT COLOSSIANS 1:14:

Many (including this writer) dislike the fact that the phrase "through His Blood" is missing from Colossians 1:14 in all modern English versions. Why is it missing? The commonly held notion by conspiracy theorists is that the translators of the NASB, NIV, ESV, and other modern versions, purposefully "denied the Blood," alleging that these versions were *Satanically-inspired*. This allegation is simply untrue—except perhaps the *Satanic Bible* by Satanist Anton LaVey (c. 1969), not that I've ever seen or read it.

The underlying problem with this passage is that this key phrase, "*through His Blood*," is missing from the Alexandrian-based Greek manuscripts. We need to understand that the translators of these modern versions are godly and scholarly individuals who seek to remain faithful to the Greek text they believe (right or wrong) to be the most accurate—the Alexandrian and its various modern derivatives (Westcott and Hort, Nestle-Aland, NU, etc.).

CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS:

Regardless of whichever Bible version or Greek manuscript preferences are held, and with all personal notions, biases, and theories set aside, this writer believes there is *no* conclusively definitive evidence as to which Greek manuscript more-closely aligns with the original autographs—be it *Alexandrian*, *Byzantine/TR*, or *Majority* prototype. This is because the original God-breathed manuscripts are nowhere to be found on earth, yet they remain *settled in Heaven* (Psalms 119:89).

Some might disagree. After decades of comparative Greek textual analysis, Dr. Wilbur Pickering (former WBT/SIL Bible translator in Brazil) is convinced that *Family*³⁵ of the *Byzantine/TR* text-type—*basis for his New Majority Greek and English prototype translations*—is the exact preserved representation of the original Greek autographs. As such, he has nothing positive to say about the Alexandrian text-type or its modern derivative lines of Greek text—Westcott & Hort (WH); Critical Text; Nestle-Aland (NA) and United Bible Society (NU-UBS), or any of the modern translations based on them.

Dr. Pickering is certainly way-more qualified to make this determination than this writer is to refute it. Although I now believe the *Byzantine/TR* text-type—including Dr. Pickering's *New Majority* prototype—are likely closer to the original than the Alexandrian, he maintains that a comparative evaluation would be an impossibility, since the authentic original autographs are lost to antiquity, having become unusable through repeated handling, or destroyed by enemies of the Christian message.

While translating the New Testament into the Isan language, and after years of prayerful reflection and analysis, this translator no longer concurs with the pro-Alexandrian manuscript view. He now *strongly* favors the Byzantine/TR position and translations based on it, namely the KJV and NKJV (*Geneva, Young's, Green's LITV and MKJV, and Pickering's New Majority*) of which I reference while translating and checking, as well as Byzantine/TR-based grammatical lexicons.

KJV ONLYISM[†] and the NKJV:

Is the NKJV a Deceitful Counterfeit?

Speaking strictly from a translator's vantage point, this writer feels compelled to address the bizarre and ludicrous assertions promoted by the most-extreme elements of the KJV-only camp, who:

- (A) Reject the original *God-Breathed* Greek and Hebrew autographs, claiming that God's inspirational blessing now rests solely on the now-sacred 1611 KJV;
- (B) Claim that the NKJV is a "*deceitful and dangerous counterfeit*," worse than other modern translations, because it is *not* the *authentic* KJV/TR as it asserts; and,
- (C) Claim that people can only be saved through reading the KJV. So, missionaries need to teach English to the natives they are trying to reach so they can read the KJV and get genuinely Saved. (*See pg. 8 for complete list.*)

Note-2: In addressing the the thought processes of the ultra-extreme elements of the KJV-only camp, if God has discontinued the sacredness of the original TR manuscripts—along with other trustworthy Byzantine manuscripts—and if God has the replaced them the with 1611 KJV. That would mean the NKJV *is counterfeit*, since it is derived from the same TR manuscripts as the KJV, whose sacredness God had discontinued. However, if God did not discontinue the sacredness of the TR manuscripts, this would mean the NKJV is sacred and genuine along with the 1611 KJV. Does this make sense? This is *perverted* conjecture, a product of *cult-like lunacy*!

I respectfully suggest that those who make these untenable types of doctrinaire and dogmatic statements reevaluate the credibility of their own position. Concerning the NKJV, after a thorough comparative analysis in many key passages against the KJV, I find *no* tenable evidence that the NKJV falls into the *counterfeit* or *deviant* category, i.e., favoring or following the wording in the Alexandrian Greek text.

I find the NKJV favors KJV/TR word choices and phraseology pretty-much throughout. Apart from the KJV's translator's *errant* choice of "Easter" instead of "Passover" in Acts 12:4. I'm amused at the ludicrous arguments devoted KJV-Onlyists defend, wasting realms of paper in so doing. The Greek term for Passover is *Pascha*, translated in all other KJV passages as Passover. It therefore belongs in Acts 12:4 as well, and not the heathen holiday of Easter. Granted, the NKJV updates Elizabethan pronouns and verb forms, and uses more-pertinent synonyms where appropriate, *all* named in KJV/TR based Greek and Hebrew lexicons, as being related alternatives. There is one Old Testament passage I've seen where a newer 1982 version of the NKJV followed an different rendering of Zechariah 13:6: "*What are those wounds in thine hands?*" (KJV), versus "*What are these wounds between your arms?*" (NKJV), both based on the Masoretic Hebrew Text.

I was friends knew the late Dr. Henry Morris as a —co-founder of Institute of Creation Research (ICR) with Dr. Tim LaHaye—and am comfortable with his position regarding the KJV and the NKJV. Dr. Morris is a strong KJV advocate, yet maintains that the NKJV is by far the best of the newer translations, also based on the TR. I am personally fond of my old KJV, and am a firm proponent of the Byzantine/TR's primacy. Yet, I resolutely disagree with KJV-onlyism's ultra-extremists and their outlandish beliefs, claims, and assertions; which, I believe clearly cross the line into heretical idolatry—giving a bad name to the cause of Christ and the masterful and time-honored KJV Bible.⁵ Their hypothetical conclusions are, at best, speculations and conjecture with little or no hard evidence or fact on which to base their allegations and their position.

Nevertheless, I give these people credit for their high regard and reverence for the Word of God, as misdirected and outside the boundary of sound reason as it may be. Yet I doubt that the Holy Spirit—when He inspired the words; "Forever, O LORD, Thy Word is settled in Heaven" through the Psalmist's pen (Psalms 119:89)—was looking down through the centuries in a prophetic sense, referring specifically to the 1611 KJV. The key phrase here being: "settled in heaven," refers to God's eternal Word and not to the 1611 King James Bible, as great a historic and God-honored work as it is.

END NOTES:

Other Byzantine/TR Related English Translations: (*cf. pg. 1*) These include Tyndale (1525); Coverdale (1535); Great Bible (1539); Geneva/Pilgrim's Bible (1560) ... *all of which the translators of the KJV consulted and drew from (1611).* A variety of KJV-based edits and updates include the NKJV (1979) Thomas Nelson Publishers, as well as the Modern KJV and Literal Version (1962, 1976, Dr. Jay Green) along with other less-known modified KJV lookalikes.

Wycliffe Translator Has Second Thoughts: (*cf. pg. 2*) This was learned by the author firsthand from a noted SIL/WBT Bible translator with whom I am friends, and whose father was a member of the NIV editing committee.

Dr. Wilbur Pickering and the Majority Greek Text: (*cf. pg. 3*) This compilation was done by Dr. Wilbur Pickering, ThM, PhD., formerly with SIL/WBT in Brazil. His findings were that the original majority compilation was, in fact, not impartial, but unduly weighted towards a more-sparse *minority* aggregate of manuscript fragments, which comprise the Alexandrian Greek text with all of its omissions. Dr. Pickering undertook a new rendering, a more-accurate New Majority Greek text, with accompanying New Majority English version (*with copious footnotes*). Pickering also defends the absolute inerrancy and authority of Scripture, including precise preservation today, which he believes is found exclusively in *Family*³⁵ of the Byzantine/TR Greek manuscript set.

Qumran; Site Of An Ancient Jewish Settlement: (*cf. pg. 3*) Possibly of the Essenes sect, it's located on a dry plateau about a mile from the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. It is best known as the location of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were stored in the caves of the nearby sheer desert cliffs. Extensive excavations of the settlement have been undertaken since the discovery, in 1947, of nearly 900 scroll fragments in various states of completeness—written on parchment (*sheepskin*) or papyrus.

Controversial KJV-Only Assertions: (*cf. pg. 6*) These fit in the category of flawed logic and unprovable fabrications, including:

- ✓ That God abandoned the original Hebrew and Greek autographs in favor of the 1611 KJV, which corrected any mistakes in the originals;
- ✓ That the 1611 KJV is supernaturally inspired (*God-breathed*) and therefore inerrant.
Note: This writer suggests that these ultra KJV-Only proponents reread the KJV translators' notes, which may or may not be "inspired." Deductive reasoning says the older translations they copied would also need to have been inspired according to their theory. If they weren't, then the 1611 KJV would contain corrupted text and therefore capable of error.
- ✓ That no one can be saved by reading other versions, as they are all "Satanically inspired," including the NKJV.
- ✓ That missionaries need to teach remote, heathen tribal natives English so they can read the KJV and get genuinely saved.
- ✓ That using any "man-made" study resources—*Vines dictionary, Strong's lexicon, etc.*—usurps the KJV's final authority.

Confronting Extremist Types: (*cf. pg. 6*) Confronting them with the error of their ways brings little constructive results and often gets one scorned and labeled. Like all cultish-like sects, they're fully convinced they are right and refuse to listen, feeding off each other's self-propagating peer pressure to maintain their doctrinaire zeal. Their position is typically based on judgmental peer-pressure and naiveté—not reason, knowledge, or fact.

Note-3: As a church planting missionary and Bible translator, I have been quizzed and even lost much-needed support from former supporting churches whose pastors later adopted the KJV-only position ... even after assuring them I always referred to the trusted KJV while doing translation and that I don't use or advocate the NIV or other modern translations—their favorite *hobbyhorse*. One (a sold-out Peter Ruckmanite) threatened to drop my support because I mentioned in passing that I consulted the Greek. I knew the man previously as he had been called to pastor the fledgling church my mother helped start as organist. Personally, I am a *Byzantine/TR-Only* advocate, not a *KJV-Only* advocate, which is essentially the same thing from a translator's point of view.

Note-4: Once, when I was on a deputation tour hoping to increase our waning support, I stopped in on a few pastors in what turned out to be staunch KJV-Only territory. Telling them I was a church-planter and Bible translator, they would usually ask what translation I used. I usually said I had seen many of them, but felt the old KJV standby was at the top—which is what I had when I trusted Christ. It was true since I wasn't trying to deceive anyone, merely hoping to avoid unnecessary arguments. I know what they believe, how they think, and the questions they typically ask. One pastor, a more-friendly fellow—presumably a staunch KJV-Onlyite—asked me later in our conversation what I thought of the NASB, admitting that he read from it. I said it was known to be accurate grammatically, and that I had once carried one before I had studied the differences in Greek texts. (Personally, I'm a Byzantine/TR-only advocate, *not* a KJV-only adherent.) Here's a purportedly staunch KJV-Onlyite that admitted "jumping ship" in his private reading time. An impressive admission given his surroundings! I give that pastor credit for being forthright with me. I also wonder how many others read other versions as well, but would never admit it to anyone—especially their KJV-Only peers for fear of being ostracized.

—o0o—

Rev. Ron Myers - Bible Translator
Baptist World Missionary Outreach Ministries
PO Box 3303, Chattanooga, TN 37404

Sunshine Publications • San Diego, California
The Light of the World is Jesus
Copyright © Pending