

The West End Herald

Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC



TESTAMENT

Can We Trust the New Testament?

It can be a disconcerting experience for modern readers of the New Testament to come across verses that are enclosed in brackets and introduced with a phrase such as, “Our earliest manuscripts do not include. . .” For those who have been taught that our New Testaments are reliable and trustworthy, these brackets raise a number of thorny questions: How certain are we about the New Testament text? If these passages are in doubt, then are other passages in doubt too? And if these passages are not original, then why are they still in our English translations? Unless these questions are answered, the existence of these brackets can become, at least for some, the proverbial fly in the ointment of biblical authority.

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As we answer such questions, we need to begin by realizing that book production in the past was different from what we experience in our modern, post-Gutenberg age. In the ancient world, there were (obviously) no laptop computers, spell checks, printing presses, or other modern conveniences to help produce books. If one wanted to write a book, one did it by hand. And if one wanted to see that book “published” and distributed throughout a broad geographical region, copies of that book would have to be made—also by hand. Thus, the New Testament was transmitted the same way every other ancient book was transmitted: it was hand-copied by scribes.

As one might imagine, even the best scribes, from time to time, made mistakes. There’s nothing scandalous about this—it was an inevitable part of copying books, New Testament or otherwise, in the ancient world. Most of these mistakes were run-of-the-mill scribal slips such as spelling errors, word order changes, or the accidental omission of a word. But occasionally, during the copying process, there were larger changes such as the duplication or omission of an entire line, or perhaps a scribe would add words that he thought belonged in the text. In light of such changes, there is an area of scholarly study that examines the multiple hand-copied manuscripts of a book in order to determine what was written by the original author and what may have been a later mistake

committed by a scribe. This area of study is called textual criticism.

Although textual criticism is relevant for all documents of antiquity, it is especially important for New Testament documents. After all, as Christians, we believe that the original words of the New Testament writers were inspired by God. These authors wrote down exactly what God, through the Holy Spirit, led them to say. Thus, it is important that we recover the original text of any New Testament book—or at least the earliest possible text—and separate that text from any later scribal changes.

So, when we apply the principles of textual criticism to the New Testament, do we have a reason to trust, with a reasonable level of certainty, the text of the New Testament? Absolutely. In fact, the textual credentials of the New Testament are excellent.

THE ORIGINAL TEXT HAS BEEN PRESERVED

First, we have good reasons to think the original New Testament text is preserved in the manuscripts at our disposal. Why? For one, because we are blessed with such a remarkable number of manuscripts—around 5,700 and counting. As New Testament scholar Eldon Epp notes, “The point is that we have so many manuscripts of the NT . . . that surely the original reading in every case is somewhere present in our vast store of material.”

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Ben & Melanie Kappers



Pastor Ben Kappers is a native of Hingham, Wisconsin and is married to his wife of fifteen years, Melanie. Pastor Ben and Melanie have six children: Caleb, Grace, Anna, Drew, Luke, and Elizabeth. Melanie is from South Holland, Illinois; she plays the piano and organ and homeschools their children.

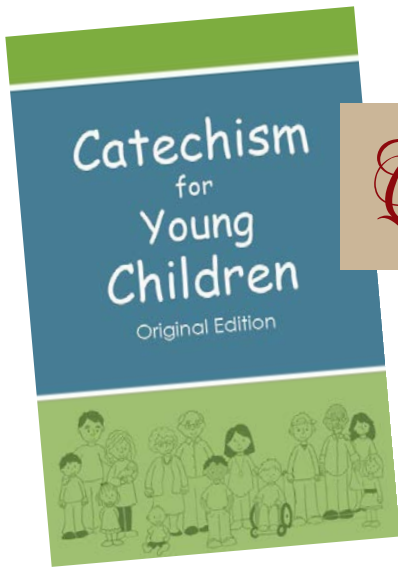
Pastor Ben is a graduate of Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, MS (M.Div.) and Orlando, FL (D.Min.). Ordained in 2011, He has twelve years of senior pastor experience serving churches both in the Reformed Church in America and the Presbyterian Church in America. His call with All Saints is as an evangelist to Southwest Utah under the oversight of the Northern California Presbytery of the PCA.

All Saints Reformed Church is a mission church among the unreached people in Southwest Utah and the Saint George metro area. Our mission is to establish an orthodox, reformed, and evangelical church in the spiritual desert of Southwest Utah. ♦

Fun Facts

Utah is the second-driest state in the United States after Nevada. On average, Utah has about 300 sunny days a year.

According to historical data, January 13 is the golden winter day, perfect for skiing in Utah. This day has the highest likelihood of receiving snowfall.



Question 113:

What do we pray for in the second petition?

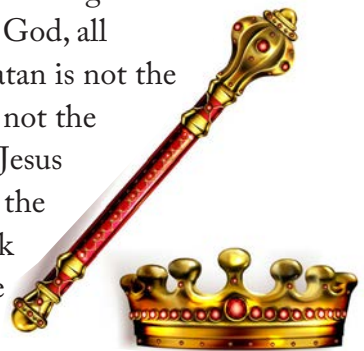
Answer:

That the gospel may be preached in all the world, and believed and obeyed by us and all men.

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

1 John 3:8

God created man to serve Him as Lord and King. When the first man chose to obey Satan rather than God, all mankind came under the rule of Satan. Satan is not the rightful king over God's people, and he is not the rightful king over God's world. The Lord Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. In the second request of the Lord's Prayer, we ask God to destroy the kingdom of Satan. We ask Him to destroy it in the hearts of His people now and to destroy it completely and forever at the end of time. We ask God to replace the kingdom of Satan with the kingdom of Christ. ♦



from *Training Hearts, Teaching Minds*, Starr Meade



at the corner of

River & Rhett

Please pray for these upcoming Mission Trips in 2025:

OKINAWA

January 3–13

COSTA RICA

January 9–15

HONDURAS

January 31–February 5

PERU

July 11–18

Sunday, January 5, 2025

Harrison Knox Brown Baptism New Deacon Installation/ Ordination



JANUARY

birthdays



- 12 Stella Kooyman
- 13 Bill Watkins
- 14 Bob Anderson
- 15 Gwyn DuBose-Schmitt, Margaret Pomerlyan
- 16 Colin Leang, Esther Thompson
- 17 Joffre Swait
- 18 Ellen Musco

Preparation for the Lord's Supper on January 19:

How hath Christ appointed bread and wine to be given and received in the sacrament of the Lord's supper?

Christ hath appointed the ministers of his word, in the administration of this sacrament of the Lord's supper, to set apart the bread and wine from common use, by the word of institution, thanksgiving, and prayer; to take and break the bread, and to give both the bread and the wine to the communicants: who are, by the same appointment, to take and eat the bread, and to drink the wine, in thankful remembrance that the body of Christ was broken and given, and his blood shed, for them.

This Week

MORNING SERMON

Dr. Richard D. Phillips

FAITH LOOKING TO JESUS

Hebrews 12:1-3

EVENING SERMON

Rev. Jeffrey M. Early

OUR AWFUL, AWESOME GOD

Nahum 1:1-6

Sunday, January 12

- 8:30 A.M. MORNING WORSHIP
9:55 A.M. Children's Chapel (*Sanctuary*)
10:00 A.M. Sunday School
11:00 A.M. MORNING WORSHIP
5:00 P.M. Finance Committee (*Conference Room*)
5:30 P.M. Season of Prayer (*Chapel*)
6:00 P.M. EVENING WORSHIP
7:30 P.M. Worship & Music Committee (*Conference Room*)

Monday, January 13

- 6:30 A.M. Men's Bible Study (*Fellowship Hall*)
9:30 A.M. Rafiki Bible Study (*Conference Room*)
6:30 P.M. Joint Diaconate/Session Meeting (*Chapel*)

Tuesday, January 14

- 10:00 A.M. WIC Circle 3 (*Fellowship Hall*)
1:30 P.M. WIC Circle 5 (*Fellowship Hall*)
7:00 P.M. WIC Circle 2 (*T. Looper Home*)
7:00 P.M. WIC Circle 4 (*L. Martin Home*)
7:00 P.M. WIC Circle 6 (*T. King Home*)

Wednesday, January 15

- 12:00 P.M. Winsome Widows (*Fellowship Hall*)
5:30 P.M. Peru Mission Trip Interest Meeting (*Conference Room*)
5:30 P.M. FAMILY NIGHT FELLOWSHIP SUPPER (*Gym*)
6:15 P.M. Hope Choir (K4-K5); Covenant Choir (Grades 1-6);
Youth Choir (Grades 7-12)
6:30 P.M. Administration Committee (*Conference Room*)
6:45 P.M. Missions Moment (*Gym*)
7:00 P.M. CAT Kids (Ages 3-Grade 4); Covenant Kids (Grades 5-8)
7:00 P.M. Jr. & Sr. High Bible Studies
7:00 P.M. Adult Prayer Meeting & Bible Study (*Gym*)
7:30 P.M. Chancel Choir

Friday, January 17

- 12:00 P.M. Men's Luncheon and Bible Study (*Gym*)
1:30 P.M. Mission to Main

Saturday, January 18

- 2:00 P.M. Anna Shaw Baby Shower (*Fellowship Hall*)

Upcoming Events

spcgreenville.org/calendar

- January 13** Joint Diaconate and Session Meeting
- January 18** Masculine Mandate Seminar
- January 19** Communion in the Morning Services
- January 24–26** Missions Conference
- January 25** Missions Conference Ladies Tea
- February 9** Baptism Sunday

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But it is not just the number of manuscripts that matters. Our confidence that we possess the original text in our manuscripts is due to what's called the *tenacity* of the text. Once a particular reading enters the manuscript tradition, it doesn't leave. Instead, it stubbornly persists. Kurt and Barbara Aland comment:

The transmission of the New Testament textual tradition is characterized by an extremely impressive degree of tenacity. Once a reading occurs it will persist with obstinacy. . . . It is precisely the overwhelming mass of the New Testament textual tradition which provides an assurance of certainty in establishing the original text.

In other words, the high number of New Testament manuscripts and the tenacity of the text together give us

assurance that the original text hasn't been lost.

If so, the challenge of recovering the original text is different from what some might think. It's not so much that we lack the original text but that we have the original text plus some variations in the manuscript tradition. In short, we have too much material.

MOST TEXTUAL VARIANTS ARE OBVIOUSLY UNORIGINAL

If we have good reasons to think the original text is preserved in our many manuscripts, the next step is separating it from any later variations. And this leads to a second observation: the vast majority of textual variations do not have a legitimate claim to originality. Most variations simply aren't viable contenders for being part of the

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PLANTING & REVITALIZING CHURCHES



JANUARY 2025

Missions Conference

Friday 1/24

- 12:00 P.M. Men's Luncheon \$7 (*Gym*)
- 6:00 P.M. Banquet \$10/adult, children eat free (*Gym*)
(*Registration required*)
- 7:00 P.M. Rev. Ben Kappers (*Gym*)
- 7:30 P.M. Rev. Zachary Groff (*Gym*)

Saturday 1/25

- 2:00 P.M. Ladies Tea (*Fellowship Hall*)
(*Registration required*)

Sunday 1/26

- 8:30 A.M. Rev. Ben Kappers (*Sanctuary*)
- 10:00 A.M. Rev. Zachary Groff (*Gym*)
- 11:00 A.M. Rev. Ben Kappers (*Sanctuary*)
- 5:00 P.M. Missionary Prayer Band (*Chapel*)
- 6:00 P.M. Rev. Zachary Groff (*Sanctuary*)

REGISTER for the Friday Banquet and the Saturday Ladies Tea at spcgreenville.org/signup.

Announcements

Baby Shower

All ladies are invited to a baby shower for Anna Phillips Shaw on Saturday, January 18, at 2:00 P.M. in the Fellowship Hall. Anna is registered at Babylist.

Missions Conference

Plan now to attend our annual Missions Conference, January 24–26. See page 9 of this newsletter. Be sure to sign up for the Friday Banquet and the Saturday Ladies Tea at spcgreenville.org/signup.

Check out the new Missionary Bulletin Board in the breezeway outside the Gym! There are activity sheets for the kids and information for everyone!



Baptism Sunday

The next Baptism Sunday will be February 9. If you would like to schedule your child's baptism, please contact the church office.

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original text written by the biblical authors. This can be due to a number of factors. Some readings appear only once in the manuscript tradition (and therefore are unlikely to be original). Others are obvious scribal blunders or “nonsense” readings. Still others lack meaningful manuscript support.

These sorts of considerations are relevant for addressing the most commonly discussed bracketed words in our Bibles: Mark 16:9–20 (known as the long ending of Mark) and John 7:53–8:11 (the story of Jesus and

the adulterous woman). When we examine these two disputed passages, we have good reasons to doubt their originality. In the case of the long ending of Mark, it is missing from our earliest copies of Mark (found in codices *Vaticanus* and *Sinaiticus*) and from the testimony of the early church fathers (particularly Eusebius and Jerome). This indicates that most early copies of Mark lacked the longer ending. Similarly, we don't find the story of Jesus and the adulterous woman in any of our early copies

of John (papyri 66 and 75, codices *Vaticanus* and *Sinaiticus*), again suggesting it was a later addition.

So, while these two bracketed texts may raise concerns for the average reader—particularly given their length and popularity—they do not present the threat we might suppose. If we know they are not original, then we cannot say the text is unreliable at these points. The text would only be unreliable in these passages if we did not know what the original text was.

Of course, it needs to be acknowledged that for the average English reader, it feels like a problem to say these texts are not original. Given that these passages have been part of our English Bible tradition for generations—largely due to the influence of the King James translation—it can seem like they are being unduly kicked to the curb. And such a response is understandable. But if we step outside of our English Bible tradition for a moment and just ask what was originally in the Greek text of Mark and John, then we realize that these texts are not getting “kicked out” of the New Testament. Instead, we realize that they were likely never there to begin with.

NO UNRESOLVED TEXTUAL VARIANT AFFECTS A KEY DOCTRINE

Of course, it needs to be acknowledged that decisions about the originality of variants is not always clear cut. There

are a number of places where we have competing variants that seem to be equally viable—though, on the whole, this is relatively rare. But this leads to a third and final observation about New Testament textual criticism, namely, that no unresolved textual variant places a significant doctrine in jeopardy. Whichever variant is chosen in such unresolved cases, no core Christian belief is changed.

Of course, some will be frustrated that we don't have absolute, 100 percent assurance about every last textual variant. But we don't need assurance about every textual variant to be certain about the message of the New Testament. God has sufficiently preserved His Word so that the glorious good news of the gospel is intact.

It is here that we come to the nub of the matter. When all the dust settles in these debates about the New Testament text, the essential message of the New Testament remains the same. It has not changed. As Jesus promised, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Matt. 24:35). ♦

Dr. Michael J. Kruger is president and Samuel C. Patterson Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, N.C. He is author of several books, including *Canon Revisited*.

