
Preface

Today, as in the past, the average Christian who loves and reads the New Testament is sadly uninformed about the background and history of this most important book. He or she tends to think of it as an English book. He or she also tends to think of it as speaking a special form of English; many Christians still feel a bit uneasy about a Bible that does not sound a bit ancient. Indeed, the King James Version of the Bible (KJV), surely one of the masterpieces of English literature, was the Bible for English readers for so many generations that this translation is often regarded as the “real” Bible, to which any other version should be compared for approval.

Yet the New Testament is a Greek book—or rather a collection of books—written by several authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit over nineteen hundred years ago, and written in the kind of Greek that ordinary people spoke every day. Well over a thousand years passed before it was translated into English; it had been translated into many other languages before John Wycliffe first put it into the language of the British peasant. Several subsequent English translations were made before the version authorized by King James of England was published less than four hundred years ago.

Of course, the most important thing is to believe and obey the New Testament, not merely to know the story of

its origin. Yet this lack of acquaintance with the history of the New Testament as we have it today has led to misunderstanding and confusion. Some voices are proclaiming that many or all of the recent English translations of the New Testament are corrupted, or are translated from corrupted and heretical ancient manuscripts (MSS), and that the KJV and the Greek MSS from which it was translated are the only pure and reliable forms of the New Testament.

How were the books of the New Testament originally written? Can we be sure that the true text of the New Testament has survived in any form after all these centuries? What must we think about the multitude of differences between the ancient MSS? Did some ancient scribes intentionally “water down” or corrupt the New Testament text as they were copying it? Do modern English translations adequately preserve the message of the ancient writers? These are questions that should be of concern to the sincere Christian; these are some of the questions this book attempts to answer in layman’s language but with scholarly accuracy.

It is my hope and prayer that this little volume will bring illumination to many people concerning God’s word to people and encouragement to believe that this message has been preserved in the versions of the New Testament we read today.

A previous edition of this book was published under the title *Scribes, Scrolls, and Scripture*. The present edition has been updated to reflect some of the most recent developments related to the New Testament text and expanded to include important discussions among textual critics since the previous edition was published. I am grateful to Hendrickson Publishers for offering this new edition to the public, and specifically to Dr. Mark House for his work in updating the work, expanding the sixth through eighth chapters, and contributing a new ninth chapter. I also wish to thank Dr. Daniel Wallace for suggesting several corrections and additions to the manuscript prior to publication.