

# Serious Old Testament Textual Problems

I have spent a dozen years exegeting Scripture, and one of the things which I examine carefully is the difference between the Hebrew and Greek text. When this occurs, I often spent a paragraph or so discussing the text. Primarily I do this because there are many believers and unbelievers who believe that the text of the Bible was changed now and again to suit popular theology of the day. Most often, the Catholic Church is seen as the villain. Now, the Catholic Church has done some heinous things in its history—I am not an apologist for the Catholic Church—however, this particular assumption has absolutely no merit. Let me briefly explain why:

1. The Old Testament text was preserved by several, sometimes appositional, groups.
2. The Jews preserved the Hebrew text, call the Masoretic text, after the Masorites, who, for approximately a millennium, sought to accurately preserve the Hebrew text.
3. The early Christians adopted the Septuagint version of the Old Testament (also called the LXX), and they preserved this version for hundreds of years.
4. The Catholic church had Jerome translate the Scriptures into Latin, so that the common people could read them, and the Catholic church preserved the Latin text.
5. Other texts were preserved by other groups of people, including the Syriac text and the Arabic text (which is not the same text which Muslims recognize today).
6. It should be clear that these groups of men were sometimes in conflict with one another. It should be clear that doctrinal differences between these groups arose. Those who disparage Scripture like to think that various groups came in and changed the Bible to reflect their own particular set of doctrines. This is completely incorrect. Christian English Bibles today base their rendering on the Old Testament primarily on the Hebrew text preserved by the Jewish Masorites. A few English Bibles give some credence to the Greek text, and several note any discrepancies. In this computer age, I have access to a number of ancient Bibles—I have chosen to limit myself to the Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Syriac texts; and, when there are differences in the text, I make this quite clear.
7. For anyone who has studied my work at all, you have found that, almost all of the differences in the text are so inconsequential that you may find yourself saying, "This makes no difference! Why do you spend any time at all pointing out these inconsequential differences?" To which, I would answer, when you begin to see the textual differences in the most poorly preserved text (the book of Samuel), and once you recognize that these differences are inconsequential, then you may develop an appreciation for the fact that God the Holy Spirit preserved Biblical text more accurately over several thousand years than we could ever imagine.

## Textual Reading Disparities:

Let me preface that this work is based upon the exegesis of a dozen psalms, the book of 1Samuel, and the first portions of 2Samuel and Judges and a few chapters out of 1Chronicles. Obviously, there are many more chapters for me to cover. However, out of those books and portions of books, I have come up with only **two** meaningful and substantive disparities in the ancient texts. There were many other differences, but these differences had no effect on the overall text or narrative.

1. A book which is known for have a huge number of textual problems is the book of Samuel, the first part of which, I have exegeted word by word. In this, the book with probably more errors or discrepancies than any other book, I have come across only one verse which has the slightest impact on the doctrines which believers hold told: 1Sam. 14:18: **And Saul said unto Ahijah, Bring here the Ark of God. For the Ark of God was at that time with the children of Israel.** Now, when you read this, you may wonder, *what's the big deal? I don't get it.* Here's the background: Saul is in a jam, he expects to face an attack by the Philistines, and he isn't sure what to do, so he calls for the *Ark of God*. Some ancient manuscripts have that he calls for the *Ephod of God*, which makes more sense, as the Ephod was used to determine what action a king or leader should take. The Ark was not used for that reason, and the Ark was not generally taken into battle (the first time it was taken into battle, it was under God's direction; the second time, when Eli was Israel's judge, the result was a catastrophe). In my exegesis of 1Sam. 14:18, I go into this particular subject in great detail.
  
2. The second passage which I have come across in my studies which actually presents a slight doctrinal problem is the inscription to Psalm 24. There is a bit of text—*on the first Sabbath*—which appears to have been dropped from the inscription. The big problem here is, one might even infer that some legalistic scribe actually violated the text and removed this phrase, since much work was performed on that day. Again, I give this more attention within the exegesis of the text.
  
3. The third passage where I have come across some serious problems is Psalm 147. In the Greek, this is two psalms (Psalm 146 and 147), and in the Hebrew, it is simply Psalm 147. There are some differences in the number of *Hallelujah's* found in the Greek and Hebrew, and, more importantly, the final verse is different.
  - a. The Greek: **He has not done so to every nation; and He has not declared to them His judgments.** The second verb in the Greek is different and it is a 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular instead of a 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural. **He [God] did not declare [or, reveal] His judgments [laws, ordinances] to them [to other nations].**
  - b. The literal Hebrew: **He does not do so to every nation and laws they do not see them. Praise Yah!** In context, *they* refers to other nations; what they do not see are the *laws* of God. That is, God did not specifically reveal His laws to a variety of nations, but only to Israel. **...and [His] laws they [other nations] did not see them [God's laws].**
  - c. Now, although v. 20b in the Greek and Hebrew mean something entirely different, neither translation is out of step with accepted doctrine. The gist is similar in both versions, and it appears obvious that no one came along and intentionally tried to change the text in order to get across weird doctrine. What likely occurred was (1) the text became too damaged to read, and a copyist took their best guess. (2) this psalm was probably sung, and a choir director may have made some minor changes for music's sake (a less likely scenario). (3) the text became unreadable at this juncture, and a choir director inserted words which made sense. Although I strongly doubt that 2 or 3 occurred, and that the first explanation is the most reasonable, all I am doing here is making suggestions as to what could have happened.

## Textual Problems:

Textual problems would be those texts in which there are apparent contradictions. This would actually take a lot more time to cover. There are probably a dozen books which deal with contradictions between passages (Archer has a good book to which I refer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*; and Geisler co-authored two texts which deal with these problems *When Critics Ask* and *When Skeptics Ask*). Whereas, these books do not cover each and every problem and contradiction in the Word of God, they cover many of the common and sometimes less common objections.