

We are coming to consider section 8 of the opening chapter of the WCF. It reads: *The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them. But, because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.*

Proofs: *Matt. 5:18; Isa. 8:20; Acts 15:15; John 5:39, 46; 1 Cor. 14:6,9,11,12,24,27,28; Col. 3:16; Rom. 15:4.*

This eighth section of chapter one teaches:

1. The originals sacred text has come down to us in a state of essential purity.
2. The original Scriptures are the final court of appeal in all controversies of religion.
3. That the Scriptures should be translated into the common language of all people.

1. The originals sacred text has come down to us in a state of essential purity. The Old Testament was mainly written in Hebrew. A few passages were written in Chaldee, cf. *Jeremiah 10:11; Daniel 4:2-7:28; Ezra chs 4-6.* Hebrew was the language of the people to whom the Old Testament Scriptures were committed, *Romans 3:1,2 What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.* This is an important point to notice with respect to the preservation of the Old Testament Scriptures. God committed the physical keeping of the Old Testament Scriptures collectively to the Jews as a people. He providentially watched over and cared for both the Scriptures and the people. How little do those people who criticise the Bible really know about the manner in which the Bible has been preserved down through the centuries.

Jewish scribes were always very meticulous about the accuracy of their copies of the Hebrew Scriptures.

This was essential in a day with no printing presses and manual copying. Strict rules governed the Scribe as they made a copy of the Holy Scriptures:

1. They could only use clean animal skins, both to write on, and even to bind manuscripts. The ink used must be black, and made according to a special recipe.
2. Each column in the new manuscript could be no less than 48 lines, and no more than 60 lines in depth. Sentence structure, letter composition, and column lines were all scrupulously standardised.
3. Only authentic copies were used to make other copies. The scribe must vocally pronounce each word before copying it. Writing anything from memory was expressly forbidden.
4. Each scribe reverently wiped his quill before writing the word 'Elohim' [Hebrew word for God] and ceremonially washed his entire body before copying the divine name 'Jehovah', no matter how often the word appeared on a page.
5. A single error made in copying resulted in the destruction of the entire page. If three or more mistakes were later discovered on any page, then the entire manuscript was condemned.
6. There had to be a review of the new copy within 30 days, and if as many as three pages required corrections, the entire manuscript had to be redone.
7. The lines, words, and even the individual letters were methodically counted as a means of double-checking the accuracy of the copy made. The document became invalid if two letters touched each other. The middle paragraph, word and letter must correspond exactly to those of the original document. If not, this highlighted a mistake.
8. All the documents were stored in the synagogues or Temple.
9. As no document containing God's Word could ever be thrown away or destroyed. Worn out copies were stored, or buried.

Until 1947, the earliest Hebrew manuscripts available to serve as the basis for Old Testament study and translation were the Massoretic Texts of eastern European Jews. These texts of the Hebrew Scriptures date from around 900 AD and had additional symbols to indicate the vowels of each word. The translators of the Authorised Version used these texts as the basis for their Old Testament translation.

Besides the Massoretic texts, there was the Latin Vulgate translation, made in the late 4th century AD, and the Septuagint, which is a Greek translation of the Old Testament made around 200 BC. Because it was the oldest significant translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Septuagint was used to compare with Hebrew Massoretic Texts to check their meaning and accuracy.

However, in 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. These Hebrew and Aramaic scrolls date from the early part of the 3rd century BC to the 2nd century AD and included every book of the Old Testament except Esther, as well as other writings.

These scrolls have since been compared with the Massoretic Text, the Septuagint and other manuscripts to discover how much the text of the Hebrew Scriptures may have changed over time as manuscripts were copied. Little or no significant variation occurred in more than 1,000 years of copying from 200 BC to 900 AD.

The only major differences in the texts were the Massoretic creation of Hebrew vowel points as a refinement over the mainly consonantal biblical Hebrew. So, the practice of the Jewish scribes using extreme care in copying the Scriptures proved to be correct and we can have supreme confidence on the OT text.

It should also be remembered that although the Lord Jesus frequently reproved the Jewish rulers and scribes for their erroneous and false doctrines, He never accused them of corrupting the sacred text. Neither does Paul in highlighting their greatest privilege in *Rom 3:1,2* suggest that they were unfaithful to their trust.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek, which was the common language of the New Testament era. The influence of the Grecian Empire had spread over the then known world.

We have heard of the concerted attempt by false teachers to corrupt the text of the New Testament. The Alexandrian text, characterised by its omissions, although initially set aside, was brought back to prominence by Westcott & Hort. The claim that this text was based upon the oldest manuscripts is not a reason to accept it but reject it. These manuscripts survived for so long because they were set aside as being untrustworthy.

The Greek text can also be compared with the writings of the early Christians and the Church Fathers to determine their accuracy. These writings are so numerous that the whole New Testament might be gathered from these writings dating from before the 7th century AD.

It cannot be the case that the Church of Jesus Christ existed for centuries with a flawed text for the New Testament as claimed by the supporters of the Westcott & Hort text.

This is a plain denial of this truth stated in the Westminster Confession about the text that God: *by His singular care and providence kept [them] pure in all ages...: Matt 5:18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*

2. The original Scriptures are the final court of appeal in all controversies of religion. God having kept pure the original manuscripts, they are *therefore authentic*. This is an important point to emphasise.

There are those who today place the Authorised Version on the same level as the Hebrew and Greek originals. They are known as Ruckmanites. Peter Ruckman, a Baptist pastor and founder of Pensacola Bible Institute, claimed that the Authorised Version constituted '*advanced revelation*' beyond that discernible in the underlying Greek text. He argued that the Authorised Version, or KJV as he always called it, is more authoritative for English speakers than the Greek and Hebrew texts. He taught that the Authorised Version represents the final authority for modern disputes about the content and meaning of the original manuscripts and that it is the final, preserved word of God for the English speaking world and there is no need to refer to the Hebrew or Greek originals. [By the way Jack Chick is also a Ruckmanite]

This is wrong. While we hold fast to the Authorised Version we do not believe it to be inerrant. Only the inspired originals are. As good as the Authorised Version is, it is a version at best. It is not on a par with the inspired originals. Let us make sure we do not fall into that trap.

3. That the Scriptures should be translated into the common language of all people. Romanism is against the translation of Scripture into the common language, Protestantism is not.