

CHAPTER TWO

CORRUPTION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

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In the last Chapter the subject before us was INSPIRATION. In Chapter Two the subject will be the CORRUPTION of the New Testament. One of the meanings Webster's 1828 Dictionary gives for "corrupt" is "To vitiate or deprave; to change from good to bad."

That is exactly what took place almost as soon as the original New Testament writings were finished. As already noted in Chapter One John William Burgon said "THUS IT APPEARS THAT ERRORS CREPT IN AT THE VERY FIRST COMMENCEMENT OF THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH. This is a matter so interesting and so important in the history of corruption, that I must venture to place it again before our readers."¹

Without question the first corrupter of the Words of God was Satan. Satan began his corrupting the Words of God in the Garden of Eden when he stated to Eve, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Genesis 3: 1. That old serpent, the Devil, has been active in this enterprise ever since!

Satan's corrupting the Word of Life is also seen in Jehudi's taking a penknife to the Words that God had given Jeremiah. Without question Jehudi's penknife procedure was the brain-child of Satan and this continues to be one of his favorites performing the task through various individuals and groups.

This old Dragon has utilized various men down through the centuries to slash and cut the Words of the living God through the penknife procedure. This practice has brought us to the place where some men today aren't exactly certain where the Words of God are to be found but they are determined however; to hopefully one day restore those original Words which God somehow allowed to be lost!

Edward Miller, an associate of Dean John William Burgon, agreed with the Dean when he wrote that "Very soon, therefore, after the books of the New Testament were written, corruption began to affect them."²

Before going further into how the corrupters corrupted the Words of God it MUST be understood that "...it can hardly be conceived that the Holy Ghost, after communicating His Inspiration in the composition of books, would in the midst of His overruling care have allowed those books to be varied according to changing winds of human opinion and human action, without the maintenance throughout of a form mainly at least free from error. It can scarcely be but that a succession of copies pure from any great corruption must have existed, and existed too in predominance, all down the Church's history."³ So, in spite of the

¹ John William Burgon, THE CAUSES OF THE CORRUPTION OF THE TRADITIONAL TEXT OF THE HOLY GOSPELS, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/burgon/corruption.html>, pdf. p.12.

² Edward Miller, A GUIDE TO THE TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, pdf. p. 68.

³ Edward Miller, A GUIDE TO THE TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, pdf. p. 66.

corruption that many men intended to impose upon God's Words; the true Words continued to be used and copied.

Let it be known that those Original Words of God were never lost! However, with several Greek texts in existence today it may be asked therefore "WHAT is the genuine Greek—what the true Text of the New Testament? Which are the very words which were written by the Evangelists and Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ under the Inspiration of the Holy Ghost?"⁴ The answer to this IMPORTANT question will become apparent in the Chapter on Preservation.

John Burgon's work THE CAUSES OF THE CORRUPTION OF THE TRADITIONAL TEXT OF THE HOLY GOSPELS⁵ is a classic and invaluable source of information concerning this subject of the corruption of the New Testament. In this book the Dean details in great length how these corruptions came to be in the Text of our New Testament. Brother Burgon states "The discussion on which I now enter is then on the Causes of the various Corruptions of the Text. [The reader shall be shewn with illustrations to what particular source they are to be severally ascribed."⁶ He goes on to tell the reader that "When I take into my hands an ancient copy of the Gospels, I expect that it will exhibit sundry inaccuracies and imperfections: and I am never disappointed in my expectation. The discovery however creates no uneasiness, so long as the phenomena evolved are of a certain kind and range within easily definable limits."⁷ Dean John Burgon knew what to look for so it is to this work we will quote from at length along with other books.

The Chapters in THE CAUSES OF THE CORRUPTION OF THE TRADITIONAL TEST OF THE HOLY GOSPELS are:

[Chapter I. General Corruption.](#)

[Chapter II. Accidental Causes of Corruption. I. Pure Accident.](#)

[Chapter III. Accidental Causes of Corruption. II. Homoeoteleuton.](#)

[Chapter IV. Accidental Causes of Corruption. III. From Writing in Unicals.](#)

[Chapter V. Accidental Causes of Corruption. IV. Itacism.](#)

[Chapter VI. Accidental Causes of Corruption. V. Liturgical Influence.](#)

[Chapter VII. Causes of Corruption Chiefly Intentional. I. Harmonistic Influence.](#)

[Chapter VIII. Causes of Corruption Chiefly Intentional. II. Assimilation.](#)

[Chapter IX. Causes of Corruption Chiefly Intentional. III. Attraction.](#)

[Chapter X. Causes of Corruption Chiefly Intentional. IV. Omission.](#)

[Chapter XI. Causes of Corruption Chiefly Intentional. V. Transposition.](#)

⁴ Ibid., p. 1.

⁵ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/burgon/corruption.toc.html>

⁶ Ibid. p.20

⁷ Ibid. p. 20

[Chapter XI. Causes of Corruption Chiefly Intentional. VI. Substitution.](#)

[Chapter XI. \(continued\). Causes of Corruption Chiefly Intentional. VII. Addition.](#)

[Chapter XII. Causes of Corruption Chiefly Intentional. VIII. Glosses.](#)

[Chapter XIII. Causes of Corruption Chiefly Intentional. IX. Corruption by Heretics.](#)

[Chapter XIV. Causes of Corruption Chiefly Intentional. X. Corruption by the Orthodox.](#)⁸

It may be hard to understand that God allowed some corruption to occur inadvertently but as Burgon writes “It may be regarded as certain that most of the aberrations discoverable in Codexes of the Sacred Text have arisen in the first instance from the merest inadvertency of the scribes.”⁹

Then there is what the Dean refers to on page 24 as PURE ACCIDENT.¹⁰ He writes “[IT often happens that more causes than one are combined in the origin of the corruption in any one passage. In the following history of a blunder and of the fatal consequences that ensued upon it, only the first step was accidental. But much instruction may be derived from the initial blunder, and though the later stages in the history come under another head, they nevertheless illustrate the effects of early accident, besides throwing light upon parts of the discussion which are yet to come.]”¹¹

THE CAUSE WHICH HAS AFFECTED OUR TRANSLATIONS TODAY

The Dean has much more to say on the subject of corruption but we will hurry on to Chapter Thirteen of THE CAUSES OF CORRUPTION CHIEFLY INTENTIONAL. Here John Burgon writes “It has been shewn with sufficient clearness, I trust, in the course of the foregoing chapters, that the number of distinct causes to which various readings may reasonably be attributed is even extraordinary.

But there remains after all an alarmingly large assortment of textual perturbations which absolutely refuse to fall under any of the heads of classification already enumerated. They are not to be accounted for on any ordinary principle. And this residuum of cases it is, which occasions our present embarrassment. They are in truth so exceedingly numerous; they are often so very considerable; they are, as a rule, so very licentious; they transgress to such an extent all regulations; they usurp so persistently the office of truth and faithfulness, that we really know not what to think about them. Sometimes we are presented with gross interpolations,—apocryphal stories: more often with systematic lacerations of the text, or transformations as from an angel of light.

We are constrained to inquire, How all this can possibly have come about?”¹²

On page 149 John Burgon continues by saying “It is found therefore that Satan could not even wait for the grave to close over St. John. ‘Many’ there were already who taught that CHRIST had not come in the flesh. Gnosticism was in the world already. St. Paul denounces it by name⁴⁴¹ and significantly condemns the wild fancies of its professors, their dangerous speculations as well as their absurd figments. Thus he predicts and condemns their pestilential teaching in respect of meats and drinks and concerning matrimony.

In his Epistle to Timothy he relates that Hymeneus and Philetus taught that the Resurrection was

⁸ John William Burgon, The Causes of the Corruption of the Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, pdf, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/burgon/corruption.toc.html>

⁹ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/burgon/corruption.toc.html> pdf, p. 22.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.24

¹¹ Ibid, p. 24

¹² <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/burgon/corruption.toc.html> P. 148.

past already. What wonder if a flood of impious teaching broke loose on the Church when the last of the Apostles had been gathered in, and another generation of men had arisen, and the age of Miracles was found to be departing if it had not already departed, and the loftiest boast which any could make was that they had known those who had [seen and heard the Apostles of the Lord].

The ‘grievous wolves’ whose assaults St. Paul predicted as imminent, and against which he warned the heads of the Ephesian Church, did not long ‘spare the flock.’ Already, while St. John was yet alive, had the Nicolaitans developed their teaching at Ephesus and in the neighbouring Church of Pergamos. Our risen LORD in glory announced to His servant John that in the latter city Satan had established his dwelling-place. Nay, while those awful words were being spoken to the Seer of Patmos, the men were already born who first dared to lay their impious hands on the Gospel of CHRIST.”

Yes, “No sooner do we find ourselves out of Apostolic lines and among monuments of the primitive age than we are made aware that the sacred text must have been exposed at that very early period to disturbing influences which, on no ordinary principles, can be explained. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origen, Clement of Alexandria,—among the Fathers: some Old Latin MSS.⁴⁵⁰, the Bohairic and Sahidic, and coming later on, the Curetonian and Lewis,—among the Versions: of the copies Codd.

B and à: and above all, coming later down still, Cod. D:—these venerable monuments of a primitive age occasionally present us with deformities which it is worse than useless to extenuate,—quite impossible to overlook. Unauthorized appendixes, —tasteless and stupid amplifications,—plain perversions of the meaning of the Evangelists,—wholly gratuitous assimilations of one Gospel to another,—the unprovoked omission of passages of profound interest and not unfrequently of high doctrinal import:—How are such phenomena as these to be accounted for? Again, in one quarter, we light upon a systematic mutilation of the text so extraordinary that it is as if some one had amused himself by running his pen through every clause which was not absolutely necessary to the intelligibility of what remained. In another quarter we encounter the thrusting in of fabulous stories and apocryphal sayings which disfigure as well as encumber the text.—How will any one explain all this?”¹³

But wait one minute Mr. Burgon, you mentioned B and à; are not these manuscripts two of the oldest manuscripts in existence and are they not the primary Texts relied upon by Westcott and Hort and even by some of today’s scholars?

MANUSCRIPTS B and à ARE THE RESULT OF INTENTIONAL CORRUPTION

Not wanting to weary the reader please allow John Burgon to elucidate more on the subject of manuscript age and corruption. Underlining and emphasis has been added to stress what Brother Burgon writes concerning manuscripts B and à. “Let me however at the risk of repeating what has been already said dispose at once of an uneasy suspicion which is pretty sure to suggest itself to a person of intelligence after reading what goes before. If the most primitive witnesses to our hand are indeed discovered to bear false witness to the text of Scripture,—whither are we to betake ourselves for the Truth? And what security can we hope ever to enjoy that any given exhibition of the text of Scripture is the true one? Are we then to be told that in this subject-matter the maxim ‘*id verius quod prius*’ does not hold? that the stream instead of getting purer as we approach the fountain head, on the contrary grows more and more corrupt?

Nothing of the sort, I answer. The direct reverse is the case. **Our appeal is always made to**

¹³ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/burgon/corruption.toc.html> P. 150.

antiquity; and it is nothing else but a truism to assert that the oldest reading is also the best. A very few words will make this matter clear; because a very few words will suffice to explain a circumstance already adverted to which it is necessary to keep always before the eyes of the reader.

The characteristic note, the one distinguishing feature, of all the monstrous and palpable perversions of the text of Scripture just now under consideration is this:—that they are never vouched for by the oldest documents generally, but only by a few of them,—**two, three, or more of the oldest documents being observed as a rule to yield conflicting testimony**, (which in this subject-matter is **in fact contradictory**). In this way **the oldest witnesses nearly always refute one another, and indeed dispose of one another’s evidence almost as often as that evidence is untrustworthy**. And now I may resume and proceed.

I say then that **it is an adequate, as well as a singularly satisfactory explanation of the greater part of those gross depravations of Scripture which admit of no legitimate excuse, to attribute them, however remotely, to those licentious free-handlers of the text who are declared by their contemporaries to have falsified, mutilated, interpolated, and in whatever other way to have corrupted the Gospel; whose blasphemous productions of necessity must once have obtained a very wide circulation: and indeed will never want some to recommend and uphold them.** What with those who like Basilides and his followers invented a Gospel of their own:—what with those who with the Ebionites and the Valentinians interpolated and otherwise perverted one of the four Gospels until it suited their own purposes:—what with those who like Marcion shamefully maimed and mutilated the inspired text:—**there must have been a large mass of corruption festering in the Church throughout the immediate post-Apostolic age.** But even this is not all. There were those who like Tatian constructed Diatessarons, or attempts to weave the fourfold narrative into one,—‘Lives of CHRIST,’ so to speak;—and productions of this class were multiplied to an extraordinary extent, and as we certainly know, not only found their way into the remotest corners of the Church, but established themselves there. And will any one affect surprise if occasionally a curious scholar of those days was imposed upon by the confident assurance that by no means were those many sources of light to be indiscriminately rejected, but that there must be some truth in what they advanced?

In a singularly uncritical age, the seductive simplicity of one reading,—the interesting fullness of another,—the plausibility of a third,—was quite sure to recommend its acceptance amongst those **many eclectic recensions which were constructed by long since forgotten Critics, from which the most depraved and worthless of our existing texts and versions have been derived. Emphatically condemned by Ecclesiastical authority, and hopelessly outvoted by the universal voice of Christendom, buried under fifteen centuries, the corruptions I speak of survive at the present day chiefly in that little handful of copies which, calamitous to relate, the school of Lachmann and Tischendorf and Tregelles look upon as oracular: and in conformity with which many scholars are for refashioning the Evangelical text under the mistaken title of ‘Old Readings.’** And now to proceed with my argument.”¹⁴

Burton’s argument is that as “Numerous as were the heresies of the first two or three centuries of the Christian era, they almost all agreed in this;—that they involved a denial of the eternal Godhead of the SON of Man: denied that He is essentially very and eternal GOD. This fundamental heresy found itself hopelessly confuted by the whole tenor of the Gospel, which nevertheless it assailed with restless ingenuity: and many are the traces alike of its impotence and of its malice which have survived to our own times. It is a memorable circumstance that it is precisely those very texts which relate either to the eternal

¹⁴ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/burton/corruption.toc.html> , pdf, PP 150, 151.

generation of the SON,—to His Incarnation,—or to the circumstances of His Nativity, —which have suffered most severely, and retain to this hour traces of having been in various ways tampered with.”¹⁵ **This is a very important point and that is that in the days immediately after the Gospels were written and in the early days of the churches there were those who denied the eternal Son-ship and deity of the Lord Jesus Christ!**

There is so much to mull over in what has just been quoted from John Burgon on the corruption of Scripture but only two things will be noted here and they are; Origen and Codex B. Burgon says “Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, Alford, Westcott and Hort, have all in turn bowed to the authority of Cod. B and Origen.”¹⁶ This is very important to know in the Text issue and its corruption.

ORIGEN AND CORRUPTION OF THE TEXT

As to Origen Burgon writes “Above all, it is to be inferred that **licentious and rash Editors of Scripture,—among whom Origen may be regarded as a prime offender,**—must have deliberately introduced into their recensions many an unauthorized gloss, and so given it an extended circulation. (Emphasis added)”¹⁷

Edward Miller writes that “though Origen was no Arian, yet a later offshoot of the same great stock was found in Arianism. And no one can wonder if a line of inferior texts can be traced—with a class of readings which were afterwards thrown aside in the Church—from Origen onwards till the time of the close of the Arian heresy. Debased doctrine, and readings of Holy Scripture afterwards to be rejected, would naturally go hand in hand.”¹⁸ In fact “The employment of corrupt manuscripts has been detected in the writings of Clement of Alexandria, the immediate predecessor of Origen in the Catechetical School, by Dean Burgon (Emphasis added).”¹⁹ It is often true that as goes teacher so goes student!

As for Codex B Burgon writes “The prejudice which would erect Codexes B and à into an authority for the text of the New Testament from which there shall be no appeal:—the superstitious reverence which has grown up for one little cluster of authorities, to the disparagement of all other evidence wheresoever found; this, which is for ever landing critics in results which are simply irrational and untenable, must be unconditionally abandoned, if any real progress is to be made in this department of inquiry.”²⁰

Burgon goes on to say “What are we to think of guides like \aleph BCD, which are proved to be utterly untrustworthy?”²¹ The answer to this of course would be “not much” after reading more of what John Burgon has to say about them. So let’s see what Brother Burgon has further to say about these two corrupters.

Of Matthew 5: 44 he says “One more indication has been obtained of the corruptness of the text which Origen employed,—concerning which he is so strangely communicative,—and of which B are the chief surviving examples; and the probability has been strengthened that when these are the sole, or even the principal witnesses, for any particular reading, that reading will prove to be corrupt.”²² Burgon again

¹⁵ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/burgon/corruption.toc.html>, pdf, PP 151, 152.

¹⁶ Ibid, Page 84.

¹⁷ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/burgon/corruption.toc.html>, Page 76.

¹⁸ Edward Miller, A GUIDE TO THE TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, pdf. p.78.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ LINK" <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/burgon/corruption.toc.html>"
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/burgon/corruption.toc.html>, pdf, PP 76, 77.

²¹ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/burgon/corruption.toc.html>, pdf, p.86.

²² Ibid, Page 114.

writes that "...Origen, who was but too well acquainted with Codexes of the same depraved character as the archetype of B and \aleph ..."²³ CORRUPT AND **DEPRAVED** is what Burgon thought of Westcott and Hort's favorite manuscript!

On page 150 Burgon says "No sooner do we find ourselves out of Apostolic lines and among monuments of the primitive age than we are made aware that the sacred text must have been exposed at that very early period to disturbing influences which, on no ordinary principles, can be explained. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origen...among the Fathers: some Old Latin MSS.450, the Bohairic and Sahidic, and coming later on, the Curetonian and Lewis,—among the Versions: of the copies Codd. B and \aleph : and above all, coming later down still, Cod. D:—these venerable monuments of a primitive age occasionally present us with deformities which it is worse than useless to extenuate,—quite impossible to overlook." Note he says the favorite manuscripts of Westcott, Hort and many others; have "DEFORMITIES"! This is not a good recommendation!!

However, these deformities did not keep Westcott, Hort and others from following B and \aleph when the majority of other manuscripts disagreed. In a footnote on page 76 Burgon says "What enabled the Revisers, with Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, Westcott and Hort, to recognize in a reading, which is the peculiar property of B, the genuine language of the HOLY GHOST? Is not a superstitious reverence for B and \aleph betraying for ever people into error?" There it is, a "superstitious reverence" which has led others since into translation error! If the base of the translation is corrupt the translation itself will be corrupt!!!

Then we read that because Codex δ BCDL all omit $\kappa\alpha\iota\ \eta\ \lambda\alpha\lambda\acute{\iota}\alpha\ \sigma\upsilon\varsigma\ \omicron\ \mu\omicron\iota\acute{\alpha}\zeta\epsilon\iota$ from Mark 14: 70 "...Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, Alford, Westcott and Hort entirely eject these five precious words from St. Mark's Gospel..."²⁴ John Burgon then defends why these words were in the Original Words that God breathed.

There is much more that could be written and quoted supporting the fact that very soon after the New Testament was finished there were those who began an INTENTIONAL CORRUPTION of the Words of God. Edward Miller gives seven passages affected by the INTENTIONAL CORRUPTERS. Those passages are²⁵:

- I. The Last Twelve Verses of St. Mark's Gospel.
- II. The First Word from the Cross. St. Luke 23: 34
- III. The Record of the Strengthening Angel, the Agony, and the Bloody Sweat. Luke 22: 43, 44
- IV. The Angelic Hymn. Luke 2: 14
- V. The Doxology in the Lord's Prayer. Matthew 6: 13
- VI. The Son of God's Eternal Existence in Heaven. John 3: 13
- VII. God Manifested in the Flesh. 1 Timothy 3: 16

So in conclusion, it was very soon after the writing of the Gospels the corrupters were busy about their work! Their work was adding to and subtracting from the Words of God which God Himself had warned men not to do; "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book" Revelation 22: 18.

The result of these corrupters was manuscripts B, Aleph and a few others. It was mainly B and Aleph that Westcott and Hort used to establish their Greek text and unfortunately it is basically this text used for all modern English and foreign translations of the Scriptures.

²³ Ibid, Page 116.

²⁴ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/burgon/corruption.toc.html>, pdf, Page 91.

²⁵ Edward Miller, A GUIDE TO THE TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, pdf. PP. 125 – 137.

However in spite of the corrupters and their corrupted manuscripts, “the position of the Holy Scriptures as inspired by God the Holy Ghost must never be allowed to pass out of recollection. The great Inspirer of the Writings is also Himself the great Guide of the Church. Accordingly, **the overruling care exercised by Him** according to promise is a factor all through the history which must ever be borne in mind. Not of course that evil has been excluded from coexisting along with the good—such is the universal experience: but nevertheless the Church, as the

'Witness and Keeper of Holy Writ,' has, under His direction, cast out the evil from time to time, and has kept to a generally defined course. Serious errors might have been committed in the transmission of the works of Homer, or of Thucydides, or of Aristotle: and indeed many of the books of the last of these are supposed to have perished. But it can hardly be conceived that the Holy Ghost, after communicating His Inspiration in the composition of books, would in the midst of **His overruling care** have allowed those books to be varied according to changing winds of human opinion and human action, without **the maintenance throughout of a form mainly at least free from error. It can scarcely be but that a succession of copies pure from any great corruption must have existed, and existed too in predominance, all down the Church's history** (Emphasis added).²⁶

In spite of the corruption performed on God's Words God PRESERVED HIS WORDS. That is the subject of the next Chapter and because of that Divine superintending over the **PRESERVATION** of God's inspired Words we today may hold “...forth **the word of life...**” Philippians 2:16.

²⁶ Edward Miller, A GUIDE TO THE TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, pdf. p. 66.