



**HOW WE GOT THE BIBLE**

# **OUR OBJECTIVES THIS WEEK**

- To understand how early copies of Scripture were actually generated
- To acknowledge the reality of manuscript disagreements & investigate their nature
- To introduce some basic principles of textual criticism

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# FINDING BIBLICAL TEXTS

- Manuscript fragments
- Complete codices or scrolls
- Lectionaries
- Quotes from early Christian teachers, preachers, and writers
- References in non-biblical historical writings
- Artistic or architectural inscriptions
- Early translations into various languages

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# PROCEDURES IN COPYING

- Materials had to be of a certain type and were prepared according to strict conditions
- There were strict guidelines for size and spacing
- Each individual word was read aloud from an authenticated copy
- Occurrences of “God” or “YHWH” were treated with special (time-consuming) care
- Each page was checked rigorously

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We have given practical proof of our reverence for our own Scriptures. For, although such long ages have now passed, no one has ventured either to add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable; and it is an instinct with every Jew, from the day of his birth, to regard them as the decrees of God, to abide by them, and, if need be, cheerfully to die for them.

— **Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion***

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ΚΑΤΑ ΔΙΑΡΚΟΝ

Α Β  
ΑΡΧΗ ΤΟΥ ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙ  
ΟΥ **ΙΟΥΧΟΥ** ΚΑΘΩΣ Ε  
ΓΡΑΠΤΑΙ ΕΝ ΤΩ Η  
ΙΑΤΩ ΠΡΟΦΗΤΗ  
ΙΔΟΥ ΕΓΩ ΑΠΟΣΤΕ  
ΛΩ ΤΟΝ ΑΓΓΕΛΟΝ ΜΟΥ  
ΠΡΟ ΠΡΟΣΩΠΟΥ ΣΟΥ  
ΟΣ ΚΑΤΑΣΚΕΥΑΣΕΙ  
ΤΗΝ ΟΔΟΝ ΣΟΥ  
Β Δ  
ΦΩΝΗ ΒΟΩΝΤΟΣ Ε  
ΤΗ ΕΡΗΜΩ ΕΤΟΙΜΑ  
ΣΑΤΕ ΤΗΝ ΟΔΟΝ ΚΥ  
ΕΥΘΙΑΣ ΠΟΙΕΙΤΕ ΤΑ  
ΤΡΙΒΟΥΣ ΑΥΤΟΥ ΚΑΙ  
ΓΕΝΕΤΟ ΪΩΑΝΝΗΣ  
Ο ΒΑΠΤΙΖΩΝ ΕΝ ΤΗ

Ω  
Δ ΚΑ  
Α ΝΑ  
ΗΛ  
ΡΕ  
ΚΑ  
ΤΟΙ  
Ε Α  
ΙΩ  
ΑΝ  
ΥΔ  
ΖΟ  
ΟΥ  
Ω  
ΤΑ  
ΝΟ  
ΚΑ

**Detail from  
Sinai Codex,  
showing  
*nomina sacra*  
form of  
“Jesus  
Christ” in  
Mark 1:1**

# **DISAGREEMENTS: A REALITY**

- Understand what the figures actually mean when numbers of discrepancies are cited
- Some variation helps to establish overall reliability
- Mere errors in transcription can be corrected easily with critical thought

# ONE STANDARD YARD



*Brass and wood, made 1836*

*National Museum of American History,  
Smithsonian Institution*



# **DISAGREEMENTS: A REALITY**

- Understand what the figures actually mean when numbers of discrepancies are cited
- Some variation helps to establish overall reliability
- Mere errors in transcription can be corrected easily with critical thought
- Variants are rarely significant
- Most contradictions involve names, dates, and numbers—the easiest and least consequential errors

# BASICS OF LOWER CRITICISM

- Different texts are given different priority
- The reading that best explains the origin of variants should be preferred
- Shorter readings are preferable
- More difficult readings are usually preferable
- Versions that are not harmonized with similar material are preferable
- On infrequent occasions, critics must use conjecture



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