

things after the counsel of his will, has exercised a remarkable care over his Word, has preserved it in all ages in a state of substantial purity, and has enabled it to accomplish the purpose for which he gave it. It is inconceivable that the sovereign God who was pleased to give His Word as a vital and necessary instrument in the salvation of his people would permit his Word to become completely marred in its transmission and unable to accomplish its ordained end. Rather, as surely as that he is God, we would expect to find him exercising a singular care in the preservation of his written revelation. That God has preserved the Scriptures in such a condition of essential purity as we would expect is manifestly the case.⁸

Step Four: Establishing the Best Text

The fourth step in the transmission of God's Word is that of the construction, via textual criticism, of an original-language text which most closely approximates that of the original manuscripts. Here we must ask the question, "Is it possible, via textual criticism, to arrive at a text about which, in a probability sense, we can be morally certain regarding its accurate representation of the autographs?" To this question we may confidently reply that we *have* such a text in our possession. Our confidence of this lies in the agreement of the many manuscripts of the New Testament, together with the connecting link of the early church fathers with the New Testament writers; and the agreement of various lines of witness to the Old Testament text, together with the connecting link of the Jews (to whom was entrusted the keeping and transmission of the Old Testament writings) with the Old Testament writers.

We have already noted some statistics concerning the Old Testament; now let us note some concerning the New. We have about five thousand manuscripts of the Greek New Testament (either the whole New Testament or portions of it). These include approximately: (1) 80 papyrus manuscripts, dating as far back as the second century; (2) 260 parchment manuscripts (uncials), dating as far back as the third century; (3) 2700 cursive manuscripts, dating from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries; (4) 2100 lectionaries, containing selections from the New Testament for use in church services; and (5) a number of ostraca and amulets. In addition