

**THE PURITY AND  
INTEGRITY OF THE HEBREW  
AND GREEK TEXTS OF THE  
OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS**



**JOHN OWEN**

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INTEGRITY OF THE HEBREW AND GREEK  
TEXTS OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS**

**BY  
JOHN OWEN  
1658**

**PUBLISHER'S NOTE ABOUT THE PRINTED BOOK 2024**

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We are thankful for brother Stonier's work on Dr. Owen's important book and for making it available to the public. We have added a section in the back of this work for help in understanding the Latin quotes, which are important, as well as brief explanation of Qere and Ketiv. Furthermore, this work helps inculcate the fallacious LXX, quoted by many today. Many people will not read a book like this one unless they have a printed volume; so, we have accommodated that request. To God be the Glory

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**EDITED AND PUT INTO SIMPLER ENGLISH  
BY  
GEOFFREY STONIER**

All Bible quotations are from the King James Bible, Authorised Version

**A DEFENCE OF THE PURITY AND  
INTEGRITY OF THE HEBREW AND GREEK  
TEXTS OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT**

**WITH SOME CONSIDERATIONS OF THE *PROLEGOMENA*  
AND *APPENDIX* TO THE LATE “BIBLIA POLYGLOTA”**

**BY**

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## ANALYSIS

### BY THE ORIGINAL EDITOR

REV. WILLIAM H. GOOLD, D.D.

1. The occasion of this discourse — The danger of supposing corruptions in the original manuscripts of the Scriptures — The great usefulness of the “Biblia Polyglota” — The grounds of the ensuing animadversions — The assertions proposed to be vindicated laid down — Their weight and importance — Several principles in the Prolegomena, prejudicial to the truth contended for, laid down — Those principles formerly asserted by others — Reasons for the opposition made to them.

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## PREFACE

BY THE ORIGINAL EDITOR

REV. WILLIAM H. GOOLD, D.D.

The Epistle Dedicatory to the three following treatises is full of curious information, and deserves to be read, in order to understand our author's true position in his controversy with Bishop Brian Walton, the learned editor of the London *Polyglot*. Surprise has been expressed that under one general title Owen should have included tracts on subjects so different in their nature as the divine origin of Scripture, the purity of the Hebrew and Greek text of Scripture, and the doctrinal errors of the Society of Friends. The last tract, too, was first written, and on the subordinate title prefixed to it bears the date 1658, whereas the others belong to the succeeding year. The bond of connection among the treatises is, however, sufficiently plain. In refuting the doctrine of the inward light, as held by the Quakers, he was discriminating his own profound and original views of the self-evidencing power of the Word from a dogma with which they might be confounded; and as in the first treatise he had expressed himself in language rather unguarded and too unqualified, about the providential care of God over every letter and syllable of revelation, he was prompted to question some features in Walton's *Polyglot*, which had just been published, and in which thousands of various readings were exhibited. These various readings seemed to refute the position he had taken, that the Scriptures had been providentially kept in their original integrity. How far he erred on this point, and to what extent his views have been misapprehended, are discussed in the prefatory note to the "*Considerations on the Prolegomena and Appendix to the Biblia Polyglota*".

As this *Polyglot* was the occasion of the following Epistle and of the tract to which we have just alluded, it may be necessary to glance at its history and character. It appears that Walton issued the description and prospectus of it in 1852, and before the close of that year nearly £4,000 had been raised by subscription for the work. The Council of State promised to advance £1,000, and the paper to be used for it was exempted from duty.

In May 1653 the subscriptions had risen to £9,000, and in the autumn of that year the impression was begun. Next year the first volume was completed, containing *Prolegomena* which are still a treasure of sacred criticism, and have been thrice republished separately, and the *Pentateuch* in the Hebrew, the Vulgate, the Septuagint, the Syriac, the Targum of Onkelos, the Samaritan, and the Arabic: in 1655 the second volume appeared, comprising the historical books in the same languages and versions, with the exception of the Samaritan: in 1858 the third, comprehending the poetic and prophetic books from Job to Malachi, with the addition of an Ethiopic version of the Book of Psalms: and in 1857 the fourth, containing all the apocryphal books; the fifth, including all the books of the New Testament, in the Greek, Syriac, Persian, Vulgate, Arabic, and Ethiopic; and the sixth, composed of various readings, critical remarks, etc. Walton's assistants in this magnificent work

were Bishop James Ussher, Dr. Edmund Castell, Thomas Hyde, Dr. Edward Pococke, Dr. John Lightfoot, Alexander Huish, Samuel Clarke, the Dutch protestant minister Louis De Dieu, and others.

The terms in which Oliver Cromwell is mentioned in the preface are as follows —

“Primo autem commemorandi, quorum favore chartam a vectigalibus immunem habuimus, quod quinque abhinc annis a Concilio secretiori primo concessum, postea a SERENISSIMO D. PROTECTORE ejusque Concilio, operis promovendi cause, benigne confirmatum et continuatum erat.”

About the time of the Restoration, two leaves of the preface were cancelled, the name of Cromwell was expunged from the list of benefactors, and a dedication to Charles II. prefixed, stigmatising Cromwell as “the great dragon”, and insinuating that he wished to extort from Walton the honour of the dedication —

“Insidiabatur partui nostro draco the magnus, et per tyrannidis suae mancipia hoc agebat, ut in ipso partu opprimeretur, nisi ipsi ut patrone et protectori dicaretur.”.

The change could surely have been effected in a way more honourable to Walton, and without needless reflections on the memory of the Protector, his obligations to whom could not be concealed and should not have been forgotten. He was rewarded in 1660 with the bishopric of Chester, which he enjoyed only for the short space of a year. There are few names on the bright roll of British scholarship and learning to which Biblical literature has been more indebted.

## **PREFATORY NOTE**

**BY THE ORIGINAL EDITOR**

**REV. WILLIAM H. GOOLD, D.D.**

THERE is a tendency to acquiesce in the general verdict against our author for the part he took in the controversy with Walton on the subject of the London Polyglot, without any very careful inquiry into the grounds on which it rests. Dr. Owen, we are convinced, has been the victim of unintentional misrepresentation on this point, partly through the dexterous management of Walton, partly through his own want of caution in properly defining his position, and partly because on some points he was completely in error. Dr. Twells, in his biography of Pococke, accuses Owen of writing against the Polyglot; and Mr. Todd, in his biography of Walton, bitterly re-echoes the charge. Even his friendly biographer, Mr. Orme, intimates that he viewed the Polyglot "With jealousy or disapproval." No statement could be more unfounded. Transparent honesty and perfect truthfulness were leading features of his character; and we cannot think of him as speaking in any other terms but those of warm and unfeigned admiration, when he eulogises the Polyglot as "a noble collection", "a great and useful work", "which he much esteemed"; and when he declares that he "would never fail, on all just occasions, to commend the usefulness of the work, and the learning, diligence, and pains, of the worthy persons that have brought it forth." Dr. Chalmers, also, in reference to this controversy, censures Owen as "illiterate" for the views he expressed in it, and contrasts "the lordly insolence of the bishop" with "the outrageous violence of the puritan." There is more of alliteration than truth in the contrast. Walton's short-lived bishopric did not begin till after his controversy with Owen; and the charge of "outrageous violence" against the latter appears to have been suggested by the misrepresentation of his antagonist. Owen professed a desire to conduct the dispute "with Christian candour and moderation of spirit"; and, on the whole, he redeemed his pledge.

On the minute and multifarious details of biblical literature, our author assuredly must yield the palm to Walton. It was not his province. But the real merits of the controversy between them involve two questions, and, by his opinions on these, it must be judged whether the condemnation so unsparingly heaped on him is altogether well-founded. These questions relate to the various readings in the original text of Scripture, and to the antiquity of Hebrew punctuation.

(1) On the subject of various readings, Owen submitted, in the epistle dedicatory, at the beginning of the former treatise, ample evidence that Papists had resorted on a grand scale to the artifice of magnifying the corruption of the text in order to exalt the Vulgate, and support the claim of their church to infallibility. As critical research multiplied, the various readings by the inspection of the ancient codices, Protestant divines took alarm, and, trembling for the ark of truth, discounted such inquiries.

That Owen was altogether free from the panic cannot be affirmed. We must sympathise, however, with any pious jealousy for the honour of the holy oracles, in an age when sound principles of criticism had not been clearly established. It will be new, moreover, to many readers, who have hitherto assumed as true the charge against Owen of ignorant antipathy to the duties and advantages of sacred criticism, when they are told that he not only admitted the existence of various readings, but held that, if any others could be discovered from a collecting of manuscripts, they “deserved to be considered”, differing in this respect from Dr. Whitby, who, at a later period, in 1710, published his *“Examen Variantium Lectionum”* in opposition to Mill’s edition of the New Testament, taking up ground from which Owen would have recoiled, and insisting that every word in the common text stood as originally written — *“in its omnibus lectionem textus defendi posse.”* (in its all the reading of the text can be defended.”)

Owen acknowledged and proclaimed the fact that, in spite of all the variety in the readings, not a single doctrine was vitally affected by them. In regard to them, he objected to the unnecessary multiplication of very trivial differences — an objection of no moment, stated in a single sentence, and never afterwards pressed. He objected further to the practice of Cappell, in making innovations on the received text by the authority of translations only, on the ground that these translations were made from copies *essentially different* from any now extant. He exonerates Walton from this error, but deems him not sufficiently careful to refrain from admitting into his Polyglot readings gathered from such a source. It was against Cappell’s theory that he chiefly wrote; and some strong expressions used with regard to it are quoted by Walton in his reply to the following treatise, as directed sweepingly against the Polyglot. Few now would ratify the innovations of Cappell.

Dr. Davidson, in his standard work on biblical criticism, “sighs over the groundless conjectures introduced into parts of the Old Testament text by Cappell.” Owen’s main objection, however, reproduced frequently in the course of his treatise, was against the attempt to amend the text by mere conjecture. There is still a diversity of opinion as to the legitimacy of this source of criticism. Griesbach repudiated the use of it in his edition of the New Testament. Marsh would avail himself of it in regard to the Old Testament, but not in regard to the New. Davidson reckons the cautious use of it lawful in regard to both. At all events, Walton himself professed to discard it as an instrument of criticism; and yet, as Owen shows, he admitted into the Polyglot the conjectural emendations of Grotius. Even Simon, an admirer of Grotius, while commending his notes, complains that he “sometimes multiplies the various readings without necessity.” So far, therefore, as it was a question of principle between them, Walton was not in advance of Owen. So far as it was a question of fact, Owen had rather the best of the dispute.

2. As to Hebrew punctuation, Owen held the pointings to be part of Scripture, and as sacred and ancient as the other elements of the text. Here, he may have erred, but it was in honourable company — with the Buxtorfs, Gerard, Glass, Voet, Flacius Illyricus, Lightfoot, Leusden, and others. Cappell, in 1624, though wrong on the question of criticism, adopted the opinions of a learned Jew, Elias Levita, who wrote in 1520, and of some Jewish and Christian writers even before the days of Levita, and first took strong ground in denying the antiquity of the Hebrew points, and tracing them to the school of the Masoretes. Still, the question was not determined. Schultens, in 1737, followed by Michaelis, adopted an intermediate course,

contending that some points had been in use from the earliest ages of the language, Eichhorn and Gesenius were inclined to believe in the existence of some points before the Talmud and the days of Jerome. It was only in 1830 that Hupfeld is considered to have put the question to rest by proving the Masoretic punctuation to have been unknown both to the authors of the Talmud and to Jerome. It is a question which it has taken the discussion of centuries to settle, and some may even yet be disposed to think that all the difficulties connected with Hupfeld's view are not eliminated from it, and that some apparatus corresponding to the points must have been needed to secure uniformity in Hebrew pronunciation during successive ages, and in all parts of the world, wherever in ancient times there were Jews to speak their own tongue or read their own Scriptures.

Owen erred in various matters of detail; but the same allegation, though not to the same extent, might be made respecting Walton, who advanced opinions in the controversy which no modern scholar would endorse with his sanction. Owen erred also in betraying a nervous sensitivity, lest an imposing array of various readings should invalidate the authority of the sacred text. The spirit in which Walton replied, however, cannot be justified — changing the hypothetical reasonings of his adversary into positive averments, and applying to the Polyglot what he wrote against Bellarmine, Leo Castrius, Morin, and Cappell, whose principles of criticism were notoriously unsound and dangerous. Owen begins the following treatise by stating that, after he had finished, but before he had sent off the manuscript of the preceding treatise "On the Original of Scripture", the London Polyglot had reached him. "A palpable untruth!" exclaimed Walton, "for in that treatise there are two references to the Polyglot" — as if they could not have been inserted after he had seen it, the more especially as, on seeing it, Owen declares that he took time for consideration. It is to be wished that he had taken more time, and been more guarded, and less rash on this occasion. He would have been less open in minor details to the rebukes of his learned and haughty antagonist; with whom, after all, we cannot help feeling some degree of sympathy, in his fears lest the rude breath of jealous criticism should scorch the laurel due to his brow for devising and completing that stupendous monument of enterprise, learning, and industry — the *Biblia Sacra Polyglota Londini*.

## CHAPTER 1

The occasion of this discourse — The danger of supposing corruptions in the original manuscripts of the Scripture — The great usefulness of the *Biblia Polyglota* — The grounds of the following critical remarks — The assertions proposed to be defended laid down — Their weight and importance — Several principles in the *Prolegomena* prejudicial to the truth contended for laid down — Those principles formerly asserted by others — Reasons for the opposition made to them.

WHEN the whole of my little preceeding treatise was finished and ready to be given to the printer, there came into my hands the *Prolegomena* and *Appendix* to the *Biblia Polyglota* lately published. Upon the first sight of that volume, I was somewhat startled with that bulky collection of various reading which the appendix puts forward to the view of everyone that casts an eye over it. Within a while after, I found that others also, men of learning and judgement, had understood that work with views not unlike those my own thoughts had suggested to me. Afterwards, considering what I had written about the providence of God in the preservation of the original copies of Scripture in the former discourse, fearing lest, from that great appearance of variations in the original copies, and those of all the translations, published with so great care and diligence, there might arise some unconquerable objections against the truth of what I had asserted, I judged it necessary to stop the progress of those thoughts until I could get time to look through the Appendix and the various lections in that great volume brought to my notice, with the grounds and reasons for them in the *Prolegomena*.

Having now discharged that *task* and (as something I felt) *duty*, I beg leave to deliver my thoughts on some things contained in them, which possibly men of perverse minds might wrest to the prejudice of my former assertions — to the prejudice of the certainty of divine truth brought to us through the providence of God in the original manuscripts of Scripture.

What use has been made, and is as yet made, in the world, of this supposition that corruptions have entered into the original manuscripts of Scripture, which those various lections at first view seem to intimate, I need not go into in great detail. It is, in brief, the foundation of Mohammedanism (*Alcor. Azoar. 5*), the chiefest and principal prop of Popery, the only pretence of fanatical anti-scripturists, and the root of much hidden atheism in the world. At present there was sent to me by a very learned person, on my discourse on this subject, a treatise in English, with the Latin title of "*Fides Divina*" (Divine Faith) where its nameless author, on this very foundation, labours to subvert and utterly render useless the whole Scripture. How far such as he may be strengthened in their infidelity by a consideration of these things, time will tell.

Had there not been, then, a necessity laid upon me either utterly to desist from pursuing any thoughts of publishing the foregoing treatise, or else giving an account of some things contained in the *Prolegomena* and *Appendix*, I should, for many reasons, have abstained from this employment. But the truth is, not only what I had written in the first chapter about the providence of God in the preservation of the Scripture, but also the main arguments afterward insisted on by me concerning the self-evidencing power and light of the Scripture, receiving, in my understanding, a great weakening by the things I shall now speak to, if owned and received as they are proposed to us, I could not excuse myself from missing the hazard of giving my thoughts about them.

The wise man tells us that he considered “all travail, and every right work, and that for this a man is envied of his neighbour”; which, says he, is “vanity and vexation of spirit.” (Eccles. 4:4). It cannot be denied that this often comes about through the corruption of the hearts of men, that when works, rightful works, are with most difficulty brought forth in the world, their authors are repaid with envy for their labour; which mixes all the issues of the best efforts of men with vanity and vexation of spirit. Jerome of old and Erasmus lately are the usual examples of this kind. That I have any of that guilt in a strange manner thrust upon me with reference to this work of publishing the *Biblia Polyglota*, which I much esteem, or the authors and contrivers of it, whom I don’t know, I can, with due consideration, and indeed do, utterly deny. The Searcher of all hearts knows I am not lying. And what could possibly infect me with that leaven? I neither profess any deep skill in the learning used in that work, nor am I ever likely to be engaged in anything that could be set up in competition with it, nor did I ever know that there was such a person in the world as the chief author of this edition of the Bible unless I have read it. I shall, then, never fail, on all just occasions, to commend the usefulness of this work, and the learning, diligence, and pains, of the worthy people that brought it out; nor would I be lacking to their full praise if I produced such a work, and even an entrance into this discourse with their due commendation might be liable to misrepresentation.

But whereas we have not only the Bible published, but also the private opinions of men, and collections of various readings (real or pretendedly, as we shall see later), leading some of them, as I understand, to the disadvantage of a great and important truth that I have been pleading for, returned to us. I hope it will not be grievous to any, nor a matter of offence, if, using the same liberty that they have, whose hands have been most eminent in this work, I do, with, I hope, Christian candour and moderation of spirit, briefly disclose my thoughts about some things proposed by them.

The renowned learned prefacer to the Arabic translation in this edition of it tells us that the work of translating the Pentateuch into that language was performed by a Jew, who took good (?good?) care to give openly his own private opinions, and so render them authentic by importing them into the text of his translation.

It is not of such an attempt that I have any cause to complain of, or shall so do in reference to these *Prolegomena* and *Appendix*. Only I might have wished (with submission to better judgements to be made) that, in the publishing of the Bible, the sacred text, with the translations, and such bare historical accounts of their originals

and preservation as was necessary to lay them fair and square before the judgement of the reader, had not been clogged with disputes and pleas for particular private opinions, imposed on them with too much advantage on the minds of men by their constant straying into canonical truth.

But my present considerations being not to be extended beyond the concern of the truth which in this discourse I have pleaded for, I shall first propose a brief abstract of it, as to that part of it which seems to be especially concerned, and then lay down what to me appears prejudicial in the volumes now under debate, not doubting but a fuller account of the whole will by someone or other be speedily offered to their learned and impartial readers. The sum of what I am pleading for, as to the particular head to be defended is —

“That as the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were immediately and entirely given out by God himself, his mind being in them presented to us without the least intervening of such mediums and ways as were capable of giving change or alteration to the least *iota* or syllable; so, by his good and merciful providential dispensation, in his love for his Word and church, his whole Word, as first given out by him, is preserved for us entire in the original languages; where, shining in its own beauty and lustre (as also in all translations, so far as they faithfully represent the original manuscripts), it presents itself to the consciences of men without other foreign help or assistance because of its divine origin and authority.”

Now, the several assertions or propositions contained in this position are to me very important truths, that I should not be blamed in the least by my own spirit, nor, I hope, by any others, in contending for them, judging them to be fundamental parts of the “faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude verse 3); and though some of them may seem to be less weighty than others, yet they are so joined together that, by the removal or destruction of any one of them, our interest in the others is utterly taken away. It will assuredly be granted that the persuasion of the coming forth of the Word immediately from God, which is what I am pleading for, is the foundation of all faith, hope, and obedience. But what, I pray, will it advantage us that God “once” delivered his Word, if we are not assured also that that Word has been, by his special care and providence, preserved entire and uncorrupt to us, or that it does not prove itself to be his Word in being so preserved? May we say that blessed were the ages past, who received the Word of God in its unquestioned power and purity, when it shone brightly in its own glorious native light, and was free from those defects and corruptions which, through the default of men over a long period of time it has contracted. But as for us, finding such defects in some manuscripts, we do not know easily where to lay a sure foundation of believing that this book, rather than any other, contains what is left to us of that Word of his. It is impossible, then, that we should ever come to any certainty about almost any individual word or expression whether it is from God or not.

Far be it from the thoughts of any good man, that God, whose covenant with his church, is that his Word and Spirit shall never depart from it (Is. 59:21; Mat. 5:18; 1 Pet. 1:25; 1 Cor. 11:23; Mat. 28:20), has left us with uncertainties about the things that are the foundation of all that faith and obedience that he requires at our hands.

As, then, I have, in the following treatise, proved, as I hope, the self-evidencing light and power of Scripture, let us now candidly, for the sake, and in pursuit of, the truth — dealing with a mind freed from prejudice and upsetting feelings, save only the trouble that arises from the necessity of dissenting from the authors of so useful a work — and address ourselves to a consideration of what seems in these *Prolegomena* and *Appendix* to impair the truth of the other assertions about the entire preservation of the Word as given out from God in the copies that yet remain with us. And this I shall do, not doubting that the authors themselves will fairly accept and weigh what is conscientiously offered.

As, then, with all thankfulness, I acknowledge that many things are spoken very honourably of the originals in these *Prolegomena*, and that they are in themselves absolutely preferred above any translation whatever, and asserted in general as the authentic rule of all versions, contrary to the thoughts of the publisher Jean Baptiste Morin (Morinus) of the great Parisian Bibles, and his infamous *hyperaspistes* (by Erasmus in 2 parts), so, as they stand in their aspect to the *Appendix* of various lections, there are both opinions and principles, confirmed by suitable practices, that are of the nature and importance mentioned earlier.

1. After a long dispute in this matter, it was determined that the Hebrew points (or vowels and accents) were a *novel invention* of some Jewish Rabbis, about five or six hundred years *after the proclamation of the gospel*.

Hence —

(1) An antiquity is ascribed to some *translations*, two or three at least, above and before the invention of these points, whose agreement with the original cannot, therefore, by just consequence, be tested by the present text, which is now pointed and accented.

(2) The whole credit of our reading and interpretation of the Scripture, as far as it is regulated by the present *punctuation*, depends solely on the faithfulness and skill of those Jews whose invention this work is asserted to be.

2. The sources are more than eight hundred Hebrew Bibles, which are various lections, partly gathered by some Jewish Rabbis out of ancient copies, and partly their critical amendments.

Therefore —

After these various lections, as they are esteemed, are presented to us in their own rightful order, in which they stand in the great Bibles (not surely to increase the bulk of diverse readings, or to present a face of new variety to a less attentive observer), but to prove that they are various lections as above described, and they are given us over a second time, as the method into which they are cast by Cappellus, the great patriarch of these mysteries

3. That there are such alterations of the *original* as we find in many places, they may be rectified by the translations that have been made of old.

And therefore —

Various lections may be observed and gathered out of those translations, by considering how they read in their copies, and in which they differ from those which we now enjoy.

4. It is also declared, that where any *gross faults* or corruptions have appeared in the originals, men may, by their faculty of critical conjecturing, amend them, and restore the native lections that were lost. Though, in general, without the authority of copies, this may not be allowed.

Therefore —

A collection of various readings out of Hugo Grotius, consisting for the most part in such conjectures, is presented to us in the *Appendix*.

5. The *voluminous bulk of various lections*, as nakedly exhibited, seems sufficient to generate scruples and doubts in the minds of men about the truth of what has been thought by many concerning the preservation of Scripture through the care and providence of God.

It is known to all men acquainted with things of this nature that, in all these there is no *new opinion* coined or maintained by the learned prefacer of these Bibles; the several mentioned have been asserted and maintained by several learned men. Had the opinion about them been kept within the sphere of men's private conceptions, in their own private writings, running the risk of men's judgements on their own strength and reputation, I should not, from my former discourse, have esteemed myself bothered with them. Everyone of us must give an account of himself to God. It is well for us if we are found holding to the foundation. If we build hay and stubble on it, though our work perish, we shall be saved. Let everyone in these things be fully persuaded in his own mind; it will bring me offence. It is their being laid as the foundation of the usefulness of these *Biblia Polyglota*, with an effort to make them catholic, not in their own strength, but in their appendage to the authority that, on good grounds, is expected for this work, that calls for a thorough consideration. All who find them stated in these *Prolegomena* may not, perhaps, have had leisure, may not, perhaps, have the ability, to know what is at issue the most in these things.

As I willingly grant, then, that some of these things may, without any great prejudice to the truth, be candidly debated among the learned, so taking them all together, placed in the advantages they now enjoy. I cannot but look upon them as an engine suited for the destruction of the important truth before I pleaded for, and as a fit weapon put into the hands of men of atheistic minds and principles, such as this age abounds with, to oppose the whole evidence of truth revealed in Scripture. I fear, with some, either the pretended *infallible judge* or the *depth of atheism* will be found to lie at the door of these considerations. *Hoc Ithacus vellet*. (Thus would Ithacus!) But the debate of the advantage of either Romanists or Atheists from this belongs to another place and season. Nor is the guilt of any consequences of this nature charged on the workmen, which yet may be feared from the work itself.

## CHAPTER 2

Of the purity of the originals — The AUTOGRAPH of the Scripture lost — That of Moses, how and how long preserved — Of the book found by Hilkiah — Of the AUTOGRAPH of the New Testament — Of the first copies of the originals — The scribes of those copies not THEOPNEUSTOI (inspired by God)— What is ascribed to them — The great and incomparable care of the scribes over it — The whole Word of God, in every tittle of it, preserved entire in the copies of the original extant manuscripts — Heads of arguments to that purpose — What various lections are granted in the origin of the Old and New Testaments — Several considerations concerning them, manifesting them to be of no importance — That the Jews have not corrupted the text — The most probable instances are considered.

HAVING given an account of the *occasion* of this discourse, and mentioned the particulars that are, all or some of them, to be taken into further consideration before I proceed to their discussion, by way of addition and explanation to what has been said in the former treatise, I shall give a brief account of my understanding concerning the purity of the present copies of the Scripture, or rather copies in the original languages, which the church of God now, and has for many ages enjoyed, as her greatest treasure; in which it may more fully appear what it is I am pleading for and defending against the insinuations and pretences of the critics, already mentioned.

**First**, then, it is granted that the individual AUTOGRAPH of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles have, in all probability, and as far as I know, utterly perished and got lost to the world; as also the copies of Ezra. The reports mentioned by some to the contrary are openly fictitious. The individual ink and parchment, the rolls or books that they originally wrote, could not, without a miracle, have been preserved from mouldering into the dust before this time. Nor doe it seem improbable that God was willing by their loss to reduce us to a nearer consideration of his care and providence in the preservation of every tittle contained in them. Had those individual writings been preserved, men would have been ready to adore them, as the Jews do their own *autographa* in their synagogues.

Moses, indeed, delivered his original copy of the Pentateuch in a public assembly to the Levites (that is, the sons of Korah), to be put into the sides of the ark, and there kept as a perpetual monument. (Deut. 31:25-26. That individual book was, I don't doubt, preserved until the destruction of the temple. There is, indeed, no mention

made of the book of the law in particular when the ark was solemnly carried into the holy place after the building of Solomon's temple (2 Chron. 5:4-5); but the tabernacle of the congregation continued until then. That, and all that was in it, were said to be "brought up". (Verse 5) Now, the placing of the book in the sides of the ark being so solemn an ordinance, it was no doubt preserved; nor is there any opinion to the contrary. Some think the book found by Hilkiah in the days of Josiah was this *autographon* of Moses, which was placed in the sides of the ark. But it rather seems to have been some ancient sacred copy used in the service of the temple, and laid up there, as there was in the second temple, which was carried away in triumph to Rome. For besides that, he speaks of his findings in general in the house of the Lord, on the occasion of the work which was then done (2 Chron. 34:15), which was not in or about the holy place, where he, who was high priest, knew full well this book was kept. It does not appear that it was lawful for him to take that sacred *depositum* from its special archive and send it abroad, as he dealt with the book that he found; no, doubtless, it was altogether unlawful for him to have done so, as it was placed there by a special ordinance for a particular or special end.

After the destruction of the temple, all inquiry after that book was in vain. The author of the Second Book of Maccabees does not mention its being hidden in Nebo by Jeremiah with the ark and altar, or by Josiah, as say some of the Talmudists; nor was any of it of any importance if they had. Of the Scripture preserved in the temple at its last destruction, Josephus gives us a full account. (*De Bell. Jud. lib. 7, cap. 24*)

**Secondly**, regarding the Scriptures of the New Testament, it does not appear that the AUTOGRAPHIA of the several writers of it were ever gathered into one volume, there being now not one church to keep them for the rest. The epistles, though immediately transcribed for the use of other churches (Col. 4:16), were doubtless kept in the several churches to which they were directed. From those original manuscripts, there were quickly made "transcribed copies", given out to "faithful men" (2 Tim. 2:1), while the infallible Spirit yet continued his guidance in an extraordinary way.

For the first transcribers of the original copies, and those who in succeeding ages have taken over this work from them, by which they have been propagated and continued down to us, in subservience to the providence and promise of God, we cannot say, as is vainly charged by Morinus and Cappellus, that they were all, or any of them "infallible and divinely inspired", so that it was impossible for them in anything to make a mistake. It is known, it is granted, that failings have been found amongst them, and that various lections have risen from them; of which more later.

Religious care and diligence in their work, with a due reverence for him with whom they had to do, is all we can ascribe to them. Not to acknowledge this freely in them, without clear and unquestionable evidence to the contrary, is highly uncharitable, impious, and ungracious. This care and diligence, I say, in subservience to the promise and providence of God, has produced the effect I am contending for; nor is anything further necessary to say. On this account, to argue, as some do, from the faults and mistakes of men, their obstinancy and negligence in transcribing the old heathen authors, such as Homer, Aristotle, Tully, we think it not tolerable in a Christian, or anyone that has the least sense of the nature and importance of the Word, or the care of God towards his church.

Shall we think that those who wrote out books in which they themselves and others were no more concerned than it is possible for men to be in the writings of the authors mentioned, and others like them, had as much reason to be careful and diligent in that they made sure, as those who knew and considered, that every letter and tittle that they were transcribing was part of the Word of the great God, in which the eternal concern of their own souls, and the souls of others, lay? Certainly, whatever may be looked for from the sacred care and diligence of men lying under a loving and careful respect from the promise and providence of God, may be rightly expected from those who undertook that work. However, we are ready to own all their failings whenever it can be proved. To assert such a thing in this case without proof is dangerous.

The Jews had a common saying among them — that to *alter one letter of the law is no less sin than to set the whole world on fire*. And shall we think that in writing it they took no more care than a man would do in writing out Aristotle or Plato, who for a very little portion of the world would willingly have done his best to get both their works out correctly?

Considering that the word to be transcribed was, every iota and tittle of it, the Word of the great God; that what was written, and as written, was proposed as his, as from him; that if any mistakes were made, innumerable eyes of men, owning their eternal concern to lie in that word, were open to discover it, and thousands of copies were extant to test it by; and all this known to, and confessed by, everyone that undertook this work — it is no hard matter to prove their care and diligence to have outdone that of other common scribes of heathen authors. The truth is, they are prodigious things that are related to the exact diligence and reverential care of the ancient Jews in this work, especially when they entrusted a copy to be a rule for the testing and standard of other private copies. Maimonides in his writing (chap. 8:3-4), tells us that Ben Asher spent many years in the careful, exact writing out of the Bible. Let anyone consider the twenty things they affirm that profane a book or copy, and this will further appear. They are repeated by Rabbi Moses (*Tractat. de Libro Legis. cap. 10*) One of them is: “If but one letter be wanting”, and another, “If but one letter is redundant”. Of which more shall be spoken as the occasion arises.

Even among the heathen, I can scarcely think that the Roman pontifices, going solemnly to transcribe the Sibyls’ verses, would do it either negligently or treacherously, or alter one tittle from what they found written. And shall we entertain such thoughts of those who knew they were dealing with the living God, and that in and about what is dearer to him than all the world beside? Let men, then, clamour as much as they like, and decry all men as ignorant and stupid who will not grant the corruptions of the Old Testament which they plead for, which is the way of Morinus; or let them propose their own conjectures of the ways of the coming of the mistakes that they pretend have crept into the original copies, with their remedies, which is the way of Cappellus; we shall acknowledge nothing of this nature but what they can prove by undeniable and undoubted instances — which, as to anything as yet done by them, or those that follow in their footsteps, appears upon the matter to add up to nothing at all.

For this purpose, take our meaning in the words of a very learned man —

“Ut in iis libris qui sine vocalibus conscripti sunt, certum constantemque exemplarium omnium, tum excusarnm scriptionem similemque omnino comperimus, sic in omnibus etiam iis quibus puncta sunt addita, non aliam cuiuspiam nec discrepantem aliis punctationem observavimus; nec quisquam est qui ullo in loco diversa lectionis Hebraicae exemplaria ab iis quae circumferuntur, vidisse se asserat, modo grammaticam rationem observatam dicat. Et quidem Dei consilio ac voluntate factum putamus, ut cum magna Graecorum Latinorumque fere omnium ejusdem auctoris exemplarium, ac praesertim manuscriptorum pluribus in locis varietas deprehendatur, magna tamen in omnibus Hebraicis, quaecunque nostro saeculo inveniuntur, Bibliis, scriptionis aequalitas, similitudo atque constantia servetur quocunque modo scripta illa sint, sive solis consonantibus constant, sive punctis etiam instructa visantur.” (Benito Arias Montano, praefat, ad Biblia Interlin. *De Varia Hebraicorum Librorum Scriptione et Lectione*.)

It can, then, with no degree of probability be asserted (which yet I find some learned men too free in granting), namely, that the same fate has attended the Scriptures in its transcription as has done other books. Let me say without offence, this imagination, asserted after deliberation, seems to me to border on atheism. Surely, the promise of God for the preservation of his Word, with his love and care of his church, of whose faith and obedience that Word of his is the only rule, requires other thoughts from our hands.

**Thirdly,** we add, that *the whole Scripture*, entirely as given out from God, without any loss, is preserved in the *copies of the originals* yet remaining. What varieties there are among the copies themselves shall be afterwards declared. In them all, we say, is every letter and tittle of the Word. These copies, we say, are the rule, standard, and touchstone of all translations, ancient or modern, by which they are, in all things, to be examined, tested, corrected, and amended; and themselves only by themselves. Translations contain the Word of God, and are the Word of God, perfectly or imperfectly, according as they express the words, sense, and meaning of those originals. To advance any, all translations concurring to an equality with the originals — so as to set them by it as to set them up with it on even terms — much more to propose and use them as a means of criticising, amending, altering anything in them, gathering various lections by them, is to set up an altar of our own beside the altar of God, and make equal the wisdom, care, skill, and diligence of men, with the wisdom, care, and providence of God himself. It is a foolish conjecture of Morinus, from some words of Epiphanius, that Origen, in his *Octapla*, placed the translation of the LXX in the midst to be the rule of all the rest, even of the Hebrew itself, that was to be regulated and amended by it —

“Media igitur omnium catholica editio collocata erat, ut ad eam Hebraea caeteraeque editiones exigenter et emendarentur.” (*Exercit. lib. 1, cap. 3, p. 15*)

The truth is, he placed the Hebrew, in Hebrew characters, in the first place, as the rule and standard of all the rest; the same in Greek characters in the next place; then that of Aquila; then that of Symmachus; after which, in the fifth place, he followed that of the LXX, mixed with that of Theodotion.



John Owen (1616 – 24 August 1683) was an English Puritan Nonconformist church leader, theologian, and vice-chancellor of the University of Oxford. One of the most prominent theologians in England during his lifetime, Owen was a prolific author who wrote articles, treatises, Biblical commentaries, poetry, and children's catechisms. He was a staunch defender of the inspiration and preservation of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek text of the Scriptures.

## THE PURPOSE FOR REPUBLISHING THIS BOOK:

Throughout the centuries, God's Words have been under attack. We see it in the book of Genesis when Satan attacked and changed what God said (Genesis 3). Furthermore, the Apostle Paul in the first century A.D. reported the attack on the recorded, inspired Words of God: 2 Corinthians 2:17 (KJV) *"For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ."* Competent, saved brothers in Christ such as John Owen reported this continuing travesty in the 1600s.

## THE AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK:

John Owen was a very competent theologian who defended the inspiration and preservation of Scripture in the same century the King James Bible was translated. For that reason, and many others, it is good for present day scoffers to hear the continued cry through the years that believers need to be careful what Bible they are studying and reading.

## THE NEED FOR THIS BOOK:

It appears obvious that we are nearing the end of this age, and the return of Christ is near. Because the attacks on God's Words are continuing, the reader needs to recall the last Words of Jesus Christ: Revelation 22:18-21 (KJV) *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: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.* John Owen's book will encourage you to study, read, listen, and apply the truths found in God's preserved Words in English, the King James Bible.



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