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The Manuscripts of the New Testament

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament represented in our English translations is the result of examination of thousands of biblical manuscripts by translators. The process of decision-making resulted in what translators thought most likely represented the original documents. That is, by studying the multitude of Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, textual critics are able to arrive at these original autographs with a high degree of certainty.

Witnesses to the New Testament text may also be contained in ancient translations of the New Testament, called "versions." The Church Fathers also include portions of the Greek New Testament in their numerous quotations in various documents.

Typically, textual critics of the New Testament distinguish manuscripts on the basis of the material out of which they are made. The two most common materials are papyrus, an ancient form of paper made from the papyrus plant; and vellum, a material prepared from cowhide, lambskin, or goatskin, which was usually used for the first codices—ancient books.

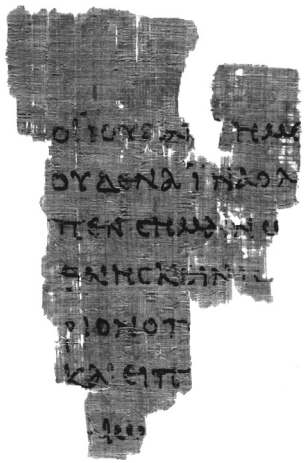
When approaching the New Testament documents, it is important to remember that textual critics group these various manuscripts into different types or families (a grouping of manuscripts based on geographical location and similar textual characteristics, such as having the same readings of particular verses in a given family). Most believe the *Alexandrian text-type* (associated with Alexandria, Egypt) to be the oldest and closest to the original autographs. But distinct textual families also emerged in Caesarea in Israel (the *Caesarean* text-type), Rome (the *Western* text-type), and Syria (the *Syrian* text-type, also known as the *Byzantine* text-type, the *Koine* text-type, or the *majority text*).

In the descriptions below, we mention in which family each papyrus or codex is categorized. Such an assessment actually helps to demonstrate the reliability of the New Testament because it shows that we have representations of the text of the New Testament that are geographically diverse at an early date in the history of the church. In other words, the manuscripts spread across the world so quickly that it is almost impossible that some kind of conspiracy to change the text occurred.

New Testament Papyri

The papyri are widely considered to be the earliest and by some the most significant of the documents of the Greek New Testament. This does not have to do as much with their being written on papyrus as it does their early date. Since papyrus is the earliest form of writing material on which we find the New Testament, scholars typically assume that if the text is written on papyrus it is an earlier text. While this is true the vast majority of the time, we do have New Testament documents written on papyrus as late as the seventh century AD.

The chart on pages 118–122 gives a list of significant New Testament papyri manuscripts and catalog designations, arranged by date. In addition, appendix A provides analysis and description of more than 60 of these manuscripts. Of special note in proving biblical reliability are the two famous papyri discussed below: the John Rylands Fragment and the Chester Beatty II papyri.



The John Rylands Fragment is the oldest New Testament manuscript in the world, dating between AD 117 and 138. The early date of this manuscript confirms that all the original Gospels were written in the first century AD, well within the life spans of eyewitnesses to the events they record. (Photo by Zev Radovan.)

The John Rylands Fragment

The Rylands fragment (P^{52}, Gr.P.457) has the distinct honor of being the oldest copy of any piece of the New Testament. The Alexandrian fragment is of John's Gospel, containing part of the five verses from John 18:31-33,37-38. It was discovered in Egypt among the Oxyrhynchus collection and dates back to the early days of the second century AD, most likely between 117 and 138 or even earlier. It is composed on papyrus and its origin is clearly from a codex, thus indicating to many paleographers that New Testament codices did indeed exist in the first century AD.

The uncovering of this fragment has been significant in supporting the earlier dating of the Gospel of John to within the first century AD. For centuries, the historical antiquity of John was questioned. After Bruno Bauer's influential scholarship on the Gospel of John in the eighteenth century, many (for example, C.K. Barrett and Rudolf Bultmann) located the origin of the Gospel in the second century AD, long after the apostle John had died. With the discovery of the John Rylands fragment, that position is no longer tenable and has been widely rejected.

This is a great example of how the discovery of a manuscript can influence critical views of the actual textual content and background of the documents of the New Testament themselves. There is actually a great deal of irony related to this discovery. A papyrus piece of the book of the New Testament said to have been written latest in history—John—is now the earliest fragment of the New

Testament we possess. This small piece of the Gospel of John is no insignificant fragment; it contains Jesus' discussion with Pilate on the nature of truth. It contains parts of both Pilate's question, "What is truth?" and Jesus' remark, "The truth shall set you free." It's almost as if this discovery is a partial answer to that question—at least in response to what used to be a prevailing critical view regarding John's Gospel.

The Chester Beatty II Papyri

The Chester Beatty II Papyri (P^{46}/P.Mich.Inv.6238) are dated to approximately AD 250. This is an excellent papyrus codex, demonstrating the duplication of an early-dated exemplar text. Although portions of this book have been lost (2 Thessalonians and parts of Romans and 1 Thessalonians), it still boasts Hebrews and the Pauline epistles of Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Galatians, Philippians, and Colossians. All of these books are embraced within the surviving 86 leaves of 11 by 6.5 inches, which are gathered in a single quire (collection of leaves, or *signature* in modern terminology). The text is large, with some scribal nuances of style. The original, without its lost pieces, was 104 pages of mostly Alexandrian and some Western text-type. There are 71 agreements and in contrast only 17 disagreements that make up the 88 units of variation in the text. Overall the textual fidelity of the scribal hand is admirable.

This folio from the Chester Beatty Papyri (P^{46}) contains 2 Corinthians 11:33–12:9. (Photo PD-Art.)

This document is extremely important to proving biblical reliability because it provides us not only with one of the earliest copies of the Pauline letters, but also with evidence of a mini-canon of Paul's literature. This indicates that Paul's letters were extant and circulating from an early date, and also that they were being put together very early into a single collection.

As mentioned earlier, more than 60 New Testament papyri manuscripts are described and analyzed in appendix A.

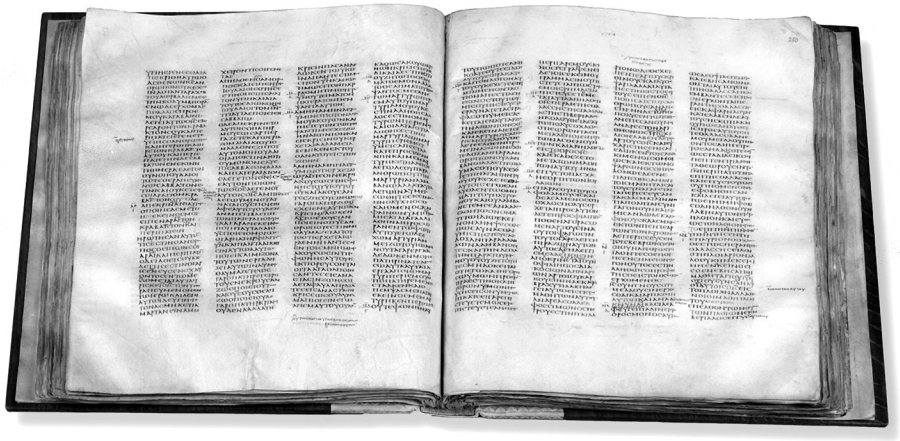
New Testament Codices

Despite the literary culture of their time, early Christians preferred the codex form over the scroll. In fact, it was a preference particular to Christian Scriptures and books. Almost the entire collection of Christian texts from the third and fourth century AD are in the codex form: parchment or vellum bound into a book or pamphlet form rather than a scroll. The codex, likely less expensive than the scroll, allowed for more text, easier reference and transport, and greater accessibility. It is no wonder that it became the preferred choice for the New Testament manuscripts. The codices certainly provide us with the most comprehensive collections of New Testament manuscripts.

New Testament Manuscript Codices

I (01). Codex Sinaiticus (aleph), discovered in the St. Catherine Monastery of Mount Sinai, is debatably the most critical and valuable manuscript of the New Testament. Dating to the middle of the fourth century AD, this vellum codex embodies all of the New Testament with the exception of a few verses (Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53–8:11) and the greater half of the Old Testament, as well as parts of the Apocrypha. The Alexandrian text is remarkably accurate, with limited misspellings and omissions. Large, dignified uncials take up 364½ double-sided pages, mostly in a four-column format. The story of its discovery is most captivating. It is said that 43 of its vellum leaves were rescued from the flames when they were recognized by scholar Constantin von Tischendorf among the waste for kindling the fire lying in a basket. It beautifully displays the hands of three scribes trained in the biblical uncial style.

Codex Sinaiticus is the oldest surviving Greek manuscript of the entire Bible. It is one of the most important texts used to study the Septuagint and the New Testament along with two other early Christian documents it contains, the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas. The highly revered artifact was produced in the southeastern Mediterranean region. Written on parchment, it originally contained 743 leaves, or 1,486 pages. It is the oldest surviving complete New Testament and is one of the two oldest manuscripts of the entire Bible.



The Codex Sinaiticus is the oldest complete New Testament written in Greek and dating to approximately AD 350. (Photo by Zev Radovan.)

The codex was written on animal skin in black and red metallic-based ink. Its text is Greek; several Arabic marginal notes were added later. Of its 1,486 original pages, only approximately 822 remain. As for the structure of the text, there are, as mentioned, four columns per page, though only two columns in the poetic and wisdom literature.

Codex Sinaiticus is currently located in four different locations, with the majority of

the text in London's British Library. The complete New Testament and portions of the Old Testament manuscripts are dispersed among Leipzig University Library, St. Petersburg National Library of Russia, and Sinai Monastery of St. Catherine. The fourth century AD was an important time period for Christianity in terms of its development, the preservation of the Scriptures, and the development of this codex, which serves as a witness to this period in Christianity's history.

The codex was copied, then revised and corrected, by a team of scribes who were very skilled. It is not exactly clear where it was written, but scholars believe it was most likely either Caesarea or Egypt. The Old Testament portion contains the 48 books of the Greek canon of the Septuagint. The New Testament contains the complete 27 books of the canon with the addition of the early Christian writings of the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas. The size of the pages of the codex is the largest of any surviving Greek biblical manuscript, and they employ some of the thinnest parchment that was used.

The text of the Sinaiticus is unique in terms of the variations that are found in it, just as in any other manuscript. The changes found in the text are mostly accidentals, although a very few of them are intentional on the part of the scribes. Study of the manuscript has been very important for the field of textual criticism. Knowledge of the ancient traditions of scribal copying and transmission of ancient texts can be gained through thorough study of it. One can also examine this text in an effort to identify the oldest recoverable wording and gain understanding of how early Christians viewed and interpreted the Scriptures.

At the time Constantin von Tischendorf discovered the Codex Sinaiticus in the mid nineteenth century it was located at St. Catherine's Monastery at the base of Mount Sinai, Egypt. The codex is the oldest surviving Greek manuscript of the entire Bible dating to AD 350.

The codex underwent rigorous corrections for many years, until about AD 600. About 23,000 revisions were made, with the majority made by six correctors, who corrected things like faded letters, spelling, and inserting omitted texts and deleting texts, in addition to making modifications in how the text was broken across lines.

There is a gap in information about the history of Codex Sinaiticus down to the eighteenth century AD. It is not for certain exactly how much the manuscript was used and in what capacity. There is evidence, however, that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century its pages were used for bookbinding.

German scholar Constantin von Tischendorf took portions of the Old Testament home with him and used them for bookbinding in 1844. He eventually went on to publish a complete copy of the codex after obtaining the rest of the surviving manuscript.

One of the editions he published was an imitation of the page layout of the original, reproducing the appearance of the characters around 1844. Shortly after 1859, Tischendorf made a similar edition of the codex, which he presented in 1862 to Tsar Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandra of Russia. In both of these editions notes are included on each of the corrections made, giving information on what was inserted, omitted, or replaced, and who corrected it. A photographic facsimile was produced years afterward and is considered a significant improvement. The New Testament portion of the codex was published in 1911, and the Old Testament was published shortly thereafter, in 1922.

B (03). The Codex Vaticanus is distinct in both its antiquity and composition. Dated between AD 325 and AD 350, this uncial codex contains books of the Old and New Testaments, as well as parts of the Apocrypha. In fact, this parchment/vellum contains all of the New Testament with the exception of the general epistles, Mark 16:9-20, John 7:53–8:11, 1 Timothy through Philemon, and Hebrews 9:14 through the end of Revelation. The 759-leaf codex was catalogued in the Vatican Library in 1475, where it is housed today. It is recognized as one of the greatest collections supporting the reliability of the New Testament.

This portion of Codex Vaticanus B contains the ending of 2 Thessalonians and the beginning of Hebrews. (Photo by Zev Radovan.)

A (02). The Codex Alexandrinus contains virtually the entire Old Testament and most of the New Testament with few exceptions. From the original codex of about 820 leaves, 773 are still intact. The scribal work employed the use of two columns with large uncials on thin vellum. This manuscript is surprisingly well preserved in spite of its early date and multiple locations since it was first bestowed upon the Patriarch of Alexandria. It is dated to the mid fifth century AD, clearly revealing the handiwork of the Alexandrian scribes of Egypt. The number of scribes employed for its composition is arguable, as the text displays varying quality in handiwork, independent textual nuances, and multiple exemplars. It has the distinction of being the foremost validation to the original text of Revelation.

C (04). The Ephraemi Rescriptus has a most distinguished history, attesting to the great achievements made in recovering ancient text invisible to the human eye. Text of both the Old and New Testaments was discovered underneath the text of the sermons of Ephraem contained in this *palimpsest rescriptus* (that is, used, erased, and rewritten manuscript). Chemical reactivation revealed portions from every New Testament book

except 2 Thessalonians and 2 John, along with parts of the Old Testament. This text dates back to the fifth century AD and was most likely copied in Alexandria.

D (05). The Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis was discovered in 1562 by the French theologian Theodore de Beze. Most exceptional in its composition is the inclusion of both Greek and Latin texts, making it the oldest discovered bilingual manuscript of the New Testament. The 406 leaves contain the four Gospels, Acts, and 3 John 11-15, transcribed in Western and various other text-types, with Greek on the left page and Latin on the right. To attempt to date this codex is somewhat difficult, as D.C. Parker declares. He argues that way since this kind of text, because of its contextual setting in the oral period, has no fixed form; texts were constantly being reshaped within the churches' context.[1]

W (032). The Codex Washingtonianus is an uncial manuscript containing most of the Gospels (missing are 25 verses in Mark and, from John, a part of chapters 14 and 16 and all of 15) and portions of the epistles of Paul. It represents both Byzantine and Alexandrian text-types and is dated to the early fifth century AD or late fourth century AD. This clearly written codex is transcribed on 187 sheets of vellum and is formatted in one column.

The Codex Washingtonianus is an important majuscule manuscript from the fourth or fifth century AD. This image is of the black-and-white facsimile of the manuscript produced in 1912 by Henry A. Sanders and the University of Michigan. Currently, the manuscript is located at Freer Gallery, Sackler Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. (The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts [www.csntm.org] has granted permission for this image to be used.)

D (06). The Codex Claromontanus was discovered in France and dated to the middle of the sixth century AD. In many ways it completes the New Testament work of Codex Bezae by embodying many of its missing texts. A Western work, it was transcribed on 533 pages of thin vellum. The bilingual manuscript includes Hebrews as well as the entire collection of Pauline epistles in either or both Greek and Latin. The single-column codex reveals an artistic hand; it resides at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris.

L (019). The Codex Regius, although poorly written, is significant in its overall agreement with the Vaticanus. It is composed of the Gospels, with a rather unusual addition making up two endings to Mark's Gospel. It is dated to the eighth century AD.

(044). The Codex Athous Laurae contains the Gospels of Luke, John, and part of Mark; as well as Acts, Hebrews, the Pauline epistles, and general epistles. Overall it

exemplifies a Byzantine text, but does include parts that are Alexandrian and Western. It dates to the eighth or ninth century AD.

F (010). The Codex Augiensis is a bilingual manuscript encompassing parts of the epistles of Paul and Hebrews. Written in a Western text-type, this ninth-century AD text includes both Greek and Latin.

G (012). The Codex Boernerianus, embodying Paul's epistles, may uniquely be of Irish origin. This ninth-century AD codex is bilingual, written in Greek with an interlinear addition of Latin. It is noted for its close affinity to F2, Codex Augiensis.

(038). The Codex Koridethi is a manuscript of the Gospels dating to the ninth century AD. Mark resembles the earlier text (third or fourth century AD) employed by Eusebius and Origen, whereas Matthew, Luke, and John clearly resemble the Byzantine text.

Papyrus and Codex Manuscripts of the New Testament: Summary Listing of Key Early Witnesses to the New Testament's Reliability

Name	Date of copy	Date of original	Biblical book(s)
John Rylands fragment (P^{52})	AD 117-138	1st century AD	John 18:31-33,37-38; considered the oldest New Testament fragment known
Chester Beatty II/ P.Mich.Inv.6238 (P^{46})	2nd century AD	1st century AD	Hebrews and all of the Pauline epistles, except for the pastorals
P.Bodmer II/ Inv. Nr. 4274/ 4298 (P^{66})	2nd century AD	1st century AD	Most of John
Inv. Nr. 12 (P^{87})	2nd century AD	1st century AD	Philemon 13-15,24-25
Chester Beatty II (P^{4}; P^{64}/P^{67})	2nd century AD	1st century AD	Portions of Luke 1–6 (P^{4}) and Matthew 3, 5, and 26 (P^{64}/P^{67})
P.IFAO Inv. 237[+a] (P^{98})	2nd century AD	1st century AD	Revelation 1:13–2:1
P.Oxy. 3523 (P^{90})	2nd century AD	1st century AD	John 18:36–19:37
P.Oxy. 2683 + 4405 (P^{77})	2nd century AD	1st century AD	Matthew 23:30-39
P.Oxy. 4403 (P^{103})	2nd century AD	1st century AD	Matthew 13:55-57; 14:3-5
P.Rylands 5 (P^{32})	2nd century AD	1st century AD	Titus 1:11-15; 2:3-8

Name	Date of copy	Date of original	Biblical book(s)
P.Oxy. 4448 (P^{109})	2nd century AD	1st century AD	John 21:18-20,23-25
P.Oxy. 4447 (P^{108})	2nd century AD	1st century AD	John 17:23-24; 18:1-5
P.Oxy. 2 (P^{1})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Matthew 1:1-9,12,14-20
P.Oxy. 208+1781 (P^{5})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Portions of John 1, 16, and 20
P.Oxy. 657 + PSI 1292 (P^{13})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Portions of Hebrews 2–5 and 10–12
P.Oxy. 1229 (P^{23})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	James 1:10-12,15-18
P.Oxy. 1228 (P^{22})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	John 15:25–16:2,21-32
P.Oxy. 1598 (P^{30})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Portions of 1 Thessalonians 4–5 and 2 Thessalonians 1–2
P.Mich.Inv. 1571 (P^{38})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Acts 18:27–19:6,12-16
P.Chester Beatty 1 (P^{45})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Large portions of all four Gospels and Acts
P.Oxy. 4445 (P^{106})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	John 1:29-35,40-46
P.Oxy. 4446 (P^{107})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	John 17:1-2,11
P.Oxy. 1780 (P^{39})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	John 8:14-22
P.Oxy. 1597 (P^{29})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Acts 26:7-8,20
P.Oxy. 4495 (P^{111})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Luke 17:11-13,22-23
P.Mich.Inv. 1570 (P^{37})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Matthew 26:19-52
P.Yale 415 + 531 (P^{49})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Ephesians 4:16-29; 4:31–5:13
PSI XIV 1373 (P^{65})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	1 Thessalonians 1:3–2:1,6-13
P.Mich.Inv. 6652 (P^{53})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Matthew 26:29-40; Acts 9:33–10:1
P.Oxy. 2383 (P^{69})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Luke 22:40,45-48,58-61
P.Barcelona 83 (P^{80})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	John 3:34

Name	Date of copy	Date of original	Biblical book(s)
P.Mil. Vogl. Inv. 1224 + P.Macquarie Inv. 360 (P^{91})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Acts 2:30-37; 2:46–3:2
P.Oxy. 402 (P^{9})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	1 John 4:11-12,14-17
P.Oxy. 1171 (P^{20})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	James 2:19–3:9
P.Oxy. 1355 (P^{24})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Portions of Romans 8–9
PSI 1 (P^{35})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Matthew 25:12-15,20-23
P.Heidelberg G. 645 (P^{40})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Portions of Romans 1–4, 6, and 9
P.Oxy. 402 (P^{9})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	1 John 4:11-12,14-17
PSI 1165 (P^{48})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Acts 23:11-17,25-29
PL II/31 (P^{95})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	John 5:26-29,36-38
P.Oxy. 4401 (P^{101})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Matthew 3:10-12; 3:16–4:3
P.Oxy. 4497 (P^{113})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Romans 2:12-13,19
P.Oxy. 4498 (P^{114})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Hebrews 1:7-12
P. Antinoopolis 2.54	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Matthew 6:10-12
P.Oxy. 1079 (P^{18})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Revelation 1:4-7
P. Chester Beatty III (P^{47})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Portions of Revelation 9–17
P.Oxy. 4499 (P^{115})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Large portions of Revelation
P.Oxy. 108 +109 (P^{15}/P^{16})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	1 Corinthians 7:18–8:4 and Philippians 3:10-17; 4:2-8
P.Oxy. 1078 (P^{17})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Hebrews 9:12-19
P.Oxy. 1230 (P^{24})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Revelation 5:5-8; 6:5-8
P.Oxy. 1596 (P^{28})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	John 6:8-12,17-22
P.Yale 1543 (P^{50})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Acts 8:26-32; 10:26-31
P.Oxy. 2384 + PSI Inv. CNR 419, 420 (P^{70})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Luke 22:40,45-48,58-61
P.Oxy. 4494 (P^{110})	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Matthew 10:13-15,25-27

Name	Date of copy	Date of original	Biblical book(s)
MS 113 (0220)	3rd century AD	1st century AD	Romans 4:23–5:3,8-13
P.Bodmer VII and VIII (P^{72})	3rd-4th century AD	1st century AD	1 and 2 Peter and Jude
P.Oxy. 2684 (P^{78})	3rd-4th century AD	1st century AD	Jude 4-5,7-8
P.Narmuthis 69.39a + 69.229a (P^{92})	3rd-4th century AD	1st century AD	Ephesians 1:11-13,19-21; 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5,11-12
P.Oxy. 4449 (P^{100})	3rd-4th century AD	1st century AD	Portions of James 3–5
P.Oxy. 4402 (P^{102})	3rd-4th century AD	1st century AD	Matthew 4:11-12,22-23
P.Oxy. 847 (0162)	3rd-4th century AD	1st century AD	John 2:11-22
PSI 2.124 (0171)	3rd-4th century AD	1st century AD	Portions of Matthew 10 and Luke 22
P.Amherst 3b (P^{12})	285-300 AD	1st century AD	Hebrews 1:1
Inv. Nr. 5516 (P^{86})	300 AD	1st century AD	Matthew 5:13-16,22-25
Codex Sinaiticus (aleph)	4th century AD	1st century AD	The entire New Testament
Codex Vaticanus B (03)	4th century AD	1st century AD	Most of the New Testament except Hebrews 9:14ff, the pastoral epistles, Philemon, Revelation
Codex Alexandrinus A (02)	5th century AD	1st century AD	Most of the New Testament
Ephraemi Rescriptus C (04)	5th century AD	1st century AD	Portions of every book except 2 Thessalonians and 2 John
Bezae Cantabrigiensis D (05)	5th century AD	1st century AD	The Gospels and Acts
Washingtonianus W (032)	5th century AD	1st century AD	The Gospels
Claromontanus D (06)	6th century AD	1st century AD	The Pauline epistles and Hebrews

Name	Date of copy	Date of original	Biblical book(s)
Regius L (019)	8th century AD	1st century AD	The Gospels
Athous Laurae PSI (044)	8th/ 9th century AD	1st century AD	The Gospels; Acts; Paul's epistles; general epistles
Augiensis F (010)	9th century AD	1st century AD	Pauline epistles
Boernerianus G (012)	9th century AD	1st century AD	Pauline epistles
Koridethi—THETA (038)	9th century AD	1st century AD	The Gospels

Early New Testament Translations in Various Languages

In addition to the nearly 6,000 Greek manuscripts, there are over 19,000 manuscripts of early translations of the Bible into languages like Syriac, Latin, Coptic, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, Arabic, Slavonic, Nestorian, and Gothic. That makes a total of some 25,000 manuscripts. Nothing like this exists for any other book in the ancient world.

One of the greatest authentications attesting to the trustworthiness of the New Testament manuscripts lies in the preservation of the scriptural translations of the early church. To produce a version, one must translate from an original language to another (for example, Greek to English or Hebrew to German). To accomplish such a task, one must not only have a clear knowledge of the languages addressed, but also an understanding of how to preserve both the form and the meaning of the texts. In response to the exhortation to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth, the early church began translation of the Scriptures of the New Testament. Although Greek was a significant language of the day, it was not sufficient for the church's evangelistic calling.

Syriac versions. The bishop of Edessa, Rabbula, is undoubtedly noteworthy for his contribution to the standard Syriac edition of the New Testament we possess today. In the fifth century AD, he worked to revise previously rewritten Syriac versions according to the Byzantine textual character. His revision was dispersed throughout the churches in his diocese. This revised version of the New Testament and a Syriac version of the Old Testament was called the *Peshitta.* Other noteworthy versions come from the works of early Church Fathers such as Origen and Tatian. The Syro-Hexaplaric version is a Syriac rendering that makes up the fifth column of the six-language Hexapla of Origen. Perhaps unduly literal in its translation, it lacks adequate meaning for the language and thus was never fully accepted by Syrian churches. Also, Tatian's compilation of the Gospels into one literary work, the *Diatessaron*, was widely noticed among Syrians.

Latin versions. Remarkably, the Latin versions of the New Testament date back to the third century AD and quite possibly earlier. Within the Roman world, Latin found its place in the military vernacular and as the language of the people, specifically in the West. It was in the third century AD that this common language took its place among local Christians in North Africa and Europe, finding its way into local churches. Perhaps most significant to the history of the Latin version is its later revision, the Latin Vulgate. The Vulgate (meaning "common") is a Latin revision penned by Jerome, which took a seat of prominence for nearly a millennium, into the sixteenth century AD. In fact, there are more manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate than any other version. The Vulgate still proves its significance today, as many of the modern Bible translations are founded upon this distinct version.

Coptic versions. As the church carried the Scriptures into Egypt, the Coptic versions were birthed. Within this later form of Egyptian writing, several dialects were present, including Sahidic, Bohairic, and Middle Egyptian dialects. The Sahidic (Thebaic) dialect was found in Upper (southern) Egypt, and by the fourth century AD the spread of the Scriptures in Egypt began when the New Testament was translated into it. The Sahidic version greatly represents the Alexandrian text-type but also the Western type. The Bohairic or Memphic dialect was spoken in northern, or Lower Egypt. So widespread was this dialect that it became the common dialect of the Egyptian church at large. Fayumic, Akhmimic, and sub-Akhmimic represent the dialects of Middle Egypt; unfortunately, no book of the New Testament has been entirely preserved in any of these Middle Egyptian dialects.

Armenian versions. Although Armenia was the first kingdom to embrace Christianity, its scriptural translation is less assertive. It is argued that the Armenian version is foremost a secondary translation, meaning that the original text was itself a translation rather than the original Greek. The debatable language of origin is Syriac. Although the early Armenian versions stem from within the first half of the fifth century AD, later, more significant revisions of this text came around the time of the eighth century AD. In fact, it is a revised text from this time that has been preserved and accepted up until the present.

Georgian versions. Georgia had its first translation of the Bible by approximately the middle of the fifth century AD. Proceeding from Armenia, its southern neighbor, the gospel in the form of Scripture quickly took root. The Georgian version takes its basis from the Armenian translation, thus making it a secondary translation.

Ethiopian versions. Despite the hypothesis of earlier evangelism into Ethiopia, it is clear that the good news was brought to Ethiopia in the first half of the fourth century AD during the evangelization under Constantine the Great (AD 330). Nevertheless, it was not until the seventh century AD that both the Old Testament was finished and the New Testament was in process. It is likely that Syrian monks residing in Ethiopia

are responsible for the full and complete translation from Syriac during the time of the Monophysite Controversy (fifth century AD). Later, the Arabic and Coptic versions colored the Ethiopian version as well.

Arabic versions. The Arabic version is a secondary translation from a combination of Greek, Syriac, Coptic, and Latin versions. The most ancient translation into Arabic likely originates from a Syriac translation made at the time of Islam's appearance. Unfortunately the author of the first Arabic version is unknown.

Slavonic versions. In the ninth century AD the monks and brothers Methodius and Constantine (Cyril) traveled to east-central Europe at the commission of Emperor Michael III in response to the Slavic leader Rostislav to translate the Scriptures and liturgy into the language of the people. They are respected for their development of the Cyrillic alphabet as a tool for their translation. This alphabet is used today in the Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Serbo-Croatian, and Russian languages. Starting in the mid ninth century AD, the Gospels were translated into the Old Church Slavonic version.

Nestorian versions. The Nestorian versions stem from traveling Persian Nestorians of the fifth century AD. Journeying into central and east Asia, they translated the Scriptures into various languages as they went along. These were all secondary translations, as they were based on the Syriac. The earliest preserved copies of the Nestorian versions date hundreds of years later, to the ninth and tenth centuries AD.

Gothic versions. The Gothic version dates back to the fourth century AD. This New Testament version was translated by archbishop and missionary Wulfila. Unfortunately only part of the version has been preserved.

The versions continue to witness to the Greek New Testament manuscripts in a significant and distinct fashion. Importantly, the versions themselves attest to the canonization of Scripture, as only the accepted books formed the basis for the work of translation.

New Testament Citations in the Early Church

In addition to the 25,000 manuscripts of the New Testament, the works of the early Church Fathers validate the dates, locations, and text-types used in the New Testament manuscripts. More importantly, these works provided quotations of the Scriptures themselves. In fact, one could reconstruct the entire New Testament based solely on the more than 36,200 Scripture quotations of the Fathers—with the exception of a few dozen verses!

The Fathers would openly compare the texts of early codices by quoting them. In addition, they would preface their quotations of Scripture with remarks such as "my codex here says," thus opening the door to the text of some of the earliest codices of the New Testament. All 27 books of the New Testament are addressed and validated by the writings of the early Fathers. Almost 36,000 quotations alone come from just five of the Fathers (see chart above). In fact, by AD 110 all the New Testament books, except for 2 John and

Jude, had been cited by either Ignatius, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, or more than one of them. There is no other book, religious or secular, that is validated by such a vast number of individual and selected quotations as the New Testament.

Early Citations of the New Testament						
Writer	**Gospels**	**Acts**	**Pauline epistles**	**General epistles**	**Revelation**	**Totals**
Justin Martyr	268	10	43	6	3 (266 allusions)	330
Irenaeus	1,038	194	499	23	65	1,819
Clement of Alexandria	1,017	44	1,127	207	11	2,406
Origen	9,231	349	7,778	399	165	17,922
Tertullian	3,822	502	2,609	120	205	7,258
Hippolytus	734	42	387	27	188	1,378
Eusebius	3,258	211	1,592	88	27	5,176
Grand totals	19,368	1,352	14,035	870	664	36,289

Chart from Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968, 1986). Used by permission of Moody Press.

Notable Early Quotations

A direct link to the apostles themselves can be seen in the work of *Polycarp* from the early second century AD. Polycarp was actually a disciple of the apostle John. Significantly, he wrote his own "Epistle to the Philippians," where he referenced and quoted the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. His work frequently quoted Romans, Galatians, and Philippians and often referred to the books of 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, and 2 John.

The early Father *Ignatius of Antioch* loosely quoted the Scriptures on numerous occasions in his seven epistles. His place in early church history is established by his textual validation of the Scriptures and also his martyrdom in Rome. Among his works are citations from Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians.

Clement of Rome is recognized for his early place in history and patristic work. He actually lived contemporaneously with the apostles and was influenced by Paul in his own epistle to the Corinthians, written in the late first century before his death in AD 101. In it he quotes not only the Gospels but also Romans. In addition, among other books he cited in his works were Ephesians, 1 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, James, and 2 Peter.

One of the earliest significant works of the Church Fathers is the *Teaching of the Twelve*, or *Didache.* Dated between AD 100 and 120, this early work contains loose quotations of the New Testament Scriptures. In particular, 1 Corinthians is cited, as are 1 Thessalonians and Revelation.

One of the most powerful early-church witnesses to the New Testament is *Irenaeus*. He is recognized as the first Father who quoted almost every book of the New Testament. The only two books not found in his citations are the tiny one-chapter books of Philemon and 3 John, which he probably had no occasion to quote. He is recognized for his vast quotation of Scripture and has a prominent place in early church history (170 AD) as one who defended the Christian faith against Gnosticism with his work *Against Heresies*.

Clement of Alexandria, active at the beginning of the third century AD, is appreciated for his significant quoting of almost every book of the New Testament. As well as the two omitted by Irenaeus, Clement also omits 2 Timothy and 2 John.

One of the most notable works of the early Father *Tatian* exists only in the form of the words of secondhand witnesses. Tatian's *Diatessaron* was a favorite among early Christians, in particular Syrians; it weaved the four Gospels harmoniously into one single work. Unfortunately this work of the second century AD is completely lost, with no remaining copy. Nevertheless, because of its significance in the early church, several witnesses have preserved it in part by their own commentaries on it. These works include *The Commentary on the Diatessaron* by Ephraem and the Latin *Codex Fuldensis*.

Conclusion

The next closest book to the New Testament in terms of manuscript support is the *Iliad* of Homer, which is attested to by 643 manuscripts, the oldest of these made 500 years after the original. Other works fare even more poorly (see chart at the end of the next chapter). Clearly the New Testament is the most well-attested book from all of ancient history. If one denies the reliability of the New Testament based upon the number of manuscripts and the interval of time between its original composition and the nearest copy, then one also discredits the reliability of every work from ancient history!