

The Reliability of New Testament Manuscripts

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In this essay, we will survey the manuscripts of the New Testament, including the transmission process and the individual manuscripts produced by that process. We will also consider objections to the reliability of the New Testament. Special attention will be given to this point due to the recent publications that advocate there are errors in the New Testament, especially as put forth by Bart Ehrman. We will begin with a look at the transmission process since it has come under recent attack.

THE TRANSMISSION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Function of Scribes and Scriptorium

In the age of classical antiquity, scribes served an important function in the production of literary and non-literary works. Scribes were employed within Mesopotamia, Egypt, Palestine, and the Greco-Roman Empire. Professional scribes, who were trained craftsmen, were commonly employed in the commercial book trade or for a library or government post. Many of these professional copyists had expertise in using fine book-hand or calligraphy. Still other scribes were amateur copyists or even educated slaves. Customarily, scribes were paid not only by the length of the text, but also by the type of hand used which affected the quality of the script. Thus, the work of professional scribes demanded higher pay but also produced higher quality work, which became very important in the explicability of historical texts. Scribes were responsible for copying literary and non-literary works including books, petitions, receipts, letters, and deeds. Nevertheless, their greatest achievement of last two thousand years, is realized in their craftsmanship by their duplication of the manuscripts of the New Testament.

A scribe was a skilled copyist. Scribes were both responsible for hand writing a new copy or first draft, or a “fair copy” of a manuscript. A new copy was produced from direct oral dictation from a author or lector. As the lector spoke clearly and at a moderate pace, the scribe, sometimes called a secretary, would copy every word until the piece was completed. After that point, the communication between the author and the scribe was critical as the author would examine the text, make revisions as needed and then the scribe would create a new copy called a fair copy, or final draft. In the case of a New Testament manuscript, a fair copy would be made for the author, such as Paul, and also the congregation to which the letter or book would be read aloud. Finally, a copy would be made available for others to copy, and thus published. The work of scribes would continue as additional copies would be made, employing the handiwork of various scribes to duplicate each copy. Since there was no notion of copyright in the ancient world, scribes could even make a copy for themselves. The practice of the scribe would be to sit on the ground or upon a small bench or stool with legs crossed, with the bottom of his tunic extended across his knees. This provided a flat surface in which to lay his scroll which was held in position with his left hand. These scrolls were most commonly made of papyrus which was utilized from about 2100 B.C., or parchment made from animal skin, which began to be used

later in the fourth-century A.D. Parchment was popular for the creation of codices (an ancient books as opposed to scrolls) and are referenced in Revelation 5:1, 2 John 12, and 2 Timothy 4:13. The scribe would then take a pen/penknife (3 Jn. 13) dip it in ink contained in an inkhorn and commence writing. The ink used for papyrus was black, carbon based, and made from soot, water, and gum. The ink used for parchment could be made from nut-galls, water, iron and gum arabic. As the ink on the text aged, it became a brownish-rust color. At the ending of the fourth-century A.D. this kind of ink was also used on papyrus. Other materials employed by scribes included a ruler, straight-edge, thin lead disk, compasses, sponge, and piece of pumice stone. With pen and scroll in hand, the scribe would sit ready under the guiding voice of the lector.

Then the Papyrus would be lined (much like our standard notebook paper) by using the horizontal fibers of the sheet as a guide. On parchment, scribes would mark the sheet and then draw both horizontal and two or more vertical lines, to signify the margins. When a scribe was ready to begin copying, one of two types of writing, book-hand and ruling hand, were employed. These and many other styles of handwriting can factor in significantly to the dating of a document (see below). Bookhand was a more reformed style consisting of carefully written upright letters, separate from each other, in a more fastidious fashion. Ruling hand, or “documentary hand”, was executed more quickly and less conscientiously. It was a cursive script and a type of shorthand used mainly for everyday purposes. In this form the use of ligatures was possible which enabled the scribe to keep his pen to the scroll when joining letters together. Even the careful penmanship of the scribe allowed for the greater preservation of the text.

In order for a document to be committed to print adequately, the process of dictation to pen had to be done purposefully and slowly. A literary work may have taken a number of days to dictate and then weeks to complete. The time actually used in copying the script may have taken between five to six hours a day. In addition to the time spent writing the script, more time was needed to mix the ink, make ready the papyrus, rest the hand, and sharpen the pen nib from time to time. Then editing and writing of the fair copy (or copies) completed the laborious task. The careful writing of the Paul’s letter to the Roman church by Tertius (Rom. 16:22) may have taken two to three weeks or more from the time of dictation to the final draft (fair copy).

New Testament manuscripts were mostly transcribed by Christians themselves. Due to the personal value they placed upon the Scriptures they were committed in craft and became faithful stewards of furthering the gospel to the “ends of the earth.” In early times, these manuscripts were not commercially produced but rather copied and shared among small Christian communities and congregations. It is conjectured that many of these scribes actually were not professionals, due to the fact that clear bookhand is infrequently found in documents prior to A.D. 400 and small churches may have not had the means to afford them. Although fine bookhand is not evidenced in early Christian texts, Christians were still found to be fastidious in hand. Warnings from the authors, such as Paul himself, encouraged the faithful and accurate hand of the scribe. Galatians 1:6-9 is only one of the examples of such a warning, where Paul declares accursed by God, anyone who would alter their gospel. In fact Christian scribes marked paleographic history by developing what has been called a type of “reformed documentary” hand of writing. It was a more reformed ruling hand script because it used less ligatures and more precise letter formation than regular documentary hand. Christian manuscripts were written primarily for practical use and less for aesthetic purposes. They were orally shared and circulated among Christian congregations, where a limited amount of people enjoyed literacy. In fact, to facilitate public reading, copyists of Christian manuscripts would write fewer lines and letters to the line, than was normal in practice. Another practice distinct to Christian scribes was the

scribal convention of the *nomina sacra*. The *nomina sacra* created a form of contractions out of religious words. It abated the written form of these words by contracting the letters or syllables found in the middle of the word and connecting the first and last letters/syllables with a line. It is evident that the mostly illiterate audience to which these Christian manuscripts were addressed was considered by the scribes. One common *nomina sacra* was to use the Greek *chi* (which looks like our English X), the first letter of the name “Christ” in Greek, with one of the following syllabus (e.g. the Greek letter for s or r) and placing a line over the top. For example, “X-mas” means Christmas and is most likely how the earliest Christians would have written it! They liked to abbreviate, this saved space and costly writing materials.

As the church attained sanction from the state in the fourth-century A.D., the use of the Scriptorium became more frequent. The Scriptorium was a place used for the writing of documents. Rather than dictating a literary work to one scribe, the scriptorium allowed the lector to dictate the work from the exemplar text, to several scribes simultaneously, thus producing many copies. Scribes would sit around the lector, and each copy the same text as the author read aloud. Although the scriptorium fueled the desire for multiple copies in a short amount of time, it also opened the door to more distractions, which sometimes resulted in technical mistakes. A simple cough or sneeze by one of the various scribes could interfere with the dictation of the script. Thus, the role of the “corrector” held the invaluable position of examining the scripts for error. After the work was copied, the corrector of the scriptorium would inspect the finished work. The corrector would then correct these mistakes with different ink or secondary placing, as needed. Also, during this time (fourth-century) commercial book manufacturers were more commonly used to copy New Testament scripts and would use scriptoriums to do so. In the scriptorium, scribes were paid by the amount of lines written. In A.D. 301, scribes could receive between 20-25 denarii per 100 lines depending upon the time and quality of their handiwork.

The dawning of the Byzantine period bestowed even greater development in the transcribing of the New Testament manuscripts. It was in this time period that monks became beneficiaries of the scribal practice. Unlike the earlier days of classical antiquity, these scribes did not need the role of the lector in transcribing documents. Although the scriptoriums were still in existence, many monks preferred to work privately in their own cells using the exemplar text as their master-copy and archetype. Monks sharply adhered to the ideology of Jewish scribes found in Deuteronomy 12:32, they were purposefully diligent not to “add” or “take away” from the text. Scribal practices among monks included several tasks. Scribes would engage in reading, memorizing, and repeating small portions of the text before actually committing the words to its written form. The use of colophons apparently related to these detailed practices, referred to these arduous tasks performed by monks. Colophons were notes written by scribes and found at the end of books, which expressed among other things relief from the laborious task. Sometimes colophons would even attest to the physical discomfort of hand or body experienced by the scribe himself. Although monks primarily only copied for themselves or a benefactor to the monastery, pressure was not only inward with the importance they personally bestowed to the texts, but also from the outside, with rules and punishments enforced within the monastery. Monks were chastised with various penances for making mistakes in the text or showing even simple signs of negligence, such as not handling writing tools responsibly. Although the task of transcribing could prove to be a laborious one, the work of scribes has proved to be invaluable in the preserving of the New Testament manuscripts.

Dating Scribal Handwriting

The dating of New Testament manuscripts has been met with astonishing results due to the collection of paleographic evidence. Although no original manuscripts (known as *autographs*) have been preserved, New Testament texts have been dated within 30 to 300 hundred years of the time the autographs were written. Paleographers are specialized historians who study ancient texts, including the over 5,800 manuscripts which make up the New Testament. According to these historians, surviving manuscripts of the New Testament date between the early second through fifteenth-centuries A.D. This is remarkably close to the autographs, considering that the original documents of the New Testament were most likely written between about 50 AD and 95 A.D. Some whole Gospels and Epistles are preserved in manuscripts were written within a hundred to 150 years from the time of their composition. The vast majority of New Testament text was preserved within documents dating less than two hundred years from the original. This noteworthy find is remarkable when compared to most other ancient books that date from five hundred to fifteen hundred years after the autograph (e.g. the copies of Homer, Plato, Aristotle, or Livy). In comparison, only a very limited amount of manuscripts of these secular books actually exist and only a few date from the second-century A.D. Meaning the New Testament manuscripts are the most well attested and supported texts from the ancient world based on their quantity, quality, and early dates. In pondering the early dates of many of the New Testament manuscripts, one must ask the question of how these documents have been dated. A closer look at these dating methods leads us to a further understanding not only of the reliability of the New Testament documents, but also of the methods used to date them.

Several methods are employed by historians to date the handwriting of a script. These methods include comparing the handwriting in a text with the handwriting in scripts that are already originally dated. In fact, within the lamentations of various scribes as revealed in their colophons at the end of the text, we find actual dates signifying the completion of the transcription. Various archeological finds of both religious and non-religious texts may also include dating that can be used as a reference point for paleographers. But for many scholars, the examination of the development of script hands, is used to distinguish clear dating. Since scribes for the most part were consistent in their writing style while alive, we can assume that a script in their hand would date within their working life period of approximately fifty years. As Paleographers examine the development of hands, they compare the handwriting style in the text, including how the letters are formed and the angle of the writing. They also analyze the nuances in the handwriting of the editing found abutting the text and their correlations to each other. An organizing of the information gained from these observations can denote the handiwork of scribes and allow for a simple chronology. Within this study, one can even learn the specificities of individual scribes and their work. This information becomes invaluable as scholars have used the handwriting, theology, and vocabulary of scribes to discern variants in texts. Thus, the dating of the hands of the scribe can prove to be very useful in laying a foundation for the sequencing of scribal trademarks. By researching the handiwork of a scribe in a given period of time, historians can attribute common practices of the hands to distinct time periods and places of origin. Perhaps one of the greatest areas of study in early manuscripts exists within the handiwork of the Alexandrian scribes. Alexandrian scriptural training marks the diligent hand of a scribe who was careful to copy word by word accurately, holding to their belief in the holy inspiration found within the text.

The progression of handwriting has over time become its own subject of study. Distinguishing both time, skill, and author, it has proved to be a fundamental tool for dating

literary compositions. Since different periods of history bore their own chirographic trademarks, examination of these trademarks within the manuscript, assists in determining its chronology. Although the evolution of handwriting can prove to be gradual in nature, significant changes within the shapes of letters and the script as a whole, are found within general gaps of time. An examination of these changes within their assumed periods, aide paleographers in matching the handwriting on the manuscript to the time period according to its nature.

Amongst the archeological findings of the earliest manuscripts, are the ancient texts dated within the first and second-century A.D. These writings show evidence of a style of handwriting used within the second and first-centuries B.C. to the third-century A.D. This was a decorated style using a book-hand script. In particular, it commanded the use of small details on the ends of lettering, known as serifs. The style of writing in the early centuries of the church was somewhat cumbersome. Extending as far as the fifth-century A.D., we find a particular style of handwriting known for its emphatic form. This form is referred to as the Biblical Majuscule (or Biblical Uncial) style. This style employed the use of elongated letters that were written separate from each other and in capitalized form. Additionally, the horizontal sloping strokes of letters were periodically accompanied by thick dots or completed with serifs. Scribes also employed the use of *scriptio continua*. This script was a connected form that did not provide spaces between words or sentences. Although the name can be deceiving, the biblical uncial style of writing is prevalent in both religious and non-religious literature. As the uncial book-hand thrived, an introduction of larger and annular letters is found within the sixth and seventh-century A.D. It is in this time period that one can see the lengthening of the central shaft in the Greek letter *omega* as well. As time continued to progress, circular letters changed to become more oval shaped and narrow, setting the stage for its next succession of form. Due to the vast collection of partial and full manuscripts of the New Testament scriptures, scripts can be examined, used, and compared to provide abundant evidence for the dating of documents.

In the ninth-century A.D. a significant change marked distinctly within paleographic history shows that the transcribing of letters drastically acquired a new form and changed over its hand from the majuscule (uncial) to the cursive miniscule script. Its special form of cursive, as seen in its name, was smaller and more compact. It was a style of book-hand that allowed scribes to transcribe more speedily, while using letters that were well formed. Miniscule handwriting was so useful that it continued well on into the fifteenth- century A.D., until it was eventually replaced in the reformation age by the introduction of the moveable type printing press.

It was also during this time period (A.D. 900 and A.D. 1300) that a greater amount and kind of ligatures were employed. Ligatures allowed the scribe to connect letters without lifting the pen, by a simple stroke. Other noteworthy considerations include the differences observed in breathing marks (dashes used to aid in reading and pronunciation) according to time periods. For example, the breathing marks used prior to the eleventh-century A.D. are more square than the annular breathing marks applied after the fourteenth-century A.D. There was a brief overlapping of majuscule and miniscule writing. Majuscule writing continued on into the tenth and eleventh-centuries A.D. but was primarily used for liturgical books.

A more broad and general categorization of manuscripts, according to chronology, can be seen in four distinct time periods. Paleographers refer to these periods as the time of the papyri (documents written on material made from papyrus plant), uncial (majuscule) script, minuscule script, and lectionaries. It is important to note that within these accepted time frames, two of the four periods are attributed entirely to the style of handwriting found in texts. The diligent craftsmanship of the copyists has certainly made its mark in the history of New Testament

manuscripts.¹

NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPT DISTRIBUTION BY CENTURY AND MANUSCRIPT TYPE*																			
Cent.	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	Totals
<i>Papyri</i>	1	31	20	5	9	13	3												85
<i>Uncial</i>		3	16	44	60	29	27	47	18	1									245
<i>Min.</i>			1	1	3	4	22	13	125	436	586	569	535	248	138	44	16	4	2745
<i>Lect.</i>								116	143	241	490	298	313	168	194	73	11		2147

Evaluating Variation in Greek Manuscripts

The gathering of New Testament manuscripts has generated a collection of over 5,800 Greek manuscripts that contain part or all of the New Testament. By its number alone, copies of the New Testament stand apart from other ancient writings by a significant proportion. If it wasn't for the rapid multiplication of the New Testament writings within the first-century A.D., it is highly unlikely that we would have our New Testament today. For hundreds of years these manuscripts continued to duplicate by the diligent hands of scribes. Many of these scribes were not only manual laborers but Christians devoted to the proclamation of the gospel message. Though these scribes seem to have been quite devoted to their craft, it is no surprise that mistakes were sometimes made, producing “variants,” or deviations from the original/accepted text, in the manuscripts themselves. Consequently, the more scribes committed themselves to the task of copying the New Testament, the more variants that crept into the texts.

New Testament critic Bart Ehrman says, “Scholars differ significantly in their estimates—some say there are 200,000 variants known, some say 300,000, some say 400,000 or more! We do not know for sure because, despite impressive developments in computer technology, no one has yet been able to count them all . . . There are more variations among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.”² But even Ehrman admits that: “Far and away the most changes are results of mistakes, pure and simple—slips of the pen, accidental omissions, inadvertent additions, misspelled words, blunders of one sort or another.”³

Variants are typically categorized into two groups: intentional and unintentional errors. Textual critics argue that most variants found in the New Testament manuscripts are the result of the latter. We will review these kinds of variants first but only in accordance with the contextual manner to which they were made. Historians are careful to recognize, that in the early church

¹ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible, Revised and Expanded*, 387. *This arrangement is an adaptation by Darrell L. Bock of material from Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *Der Text des Neuen Testaments: Einführung in die wissenschaftlichen Ausgaben sowie in Theorie und Praxis der modernen Textkritik* (Deutsch Bibelgesellschaft, 1982), 90. There is an apparent contradiction in the totals summarized in the Aland list (5,222 items) and the evidence presented by Metzger (5,366 items). Aland and Aland seem to have excluded from their list manuscripts whose century is uncertain, whereas Metzger, UBS, and Nestle (26th ed.) include all catalogued papyri and uncials but incorporate selected minuscule and lectionary evidence into their lists. More recently, Dr. Dan Wallace, head of The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts (CSNTM), has discovered a number of new manuscripts and is the leading evangelical scholar on the topic. According to Dr. Wallace, the total Greek New Testament manuscript count is approximately 5,805, of these about 5,600+ can be located and identified.

² Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 89-90.

³ *Ibid.*, 55, emphasis added.

era, the scribe or scribes would sit, or sometimes stand, at the feet of the lector and copy down word-by-word or phrase-by-phrase an orally delivered message. Obviously, in this process, simple *errors of the ear* will inevitably result. These simple and unintentional errors can be seen in passages like Mathew 19:24 where some manuscripts read *kamelos* as “a rope” rather than it’s logical meaning found in other manuscripts of “a camel.” Much of the confusion is inherently due to the similarities in Greek vowels. For example, the Greek vowels iota, eta, and epsilon, sounded the same/similar when pronounced; as well as, the Greek letters omicron and omega. Over time, confusion also arose between the long vowel omega and the short vowel omicron leading to such variants as *echomen* and *echōmen*. A similar and more modern mistake in English can be seen in the accidental interchanging of “their” for “there” and “here” for “hear.” Many of these errors could have been easily overlooked by a simple scanning review of the text, but become obvious with a closer reading of the script.

Unlike the common posture of modern copiers sitting upright at a desk with keypad, the ancient scribe worked rather uneasily, hunched over with scroll stretched out between his knees, one hand holding the script in place and the other used for the various tools surrounding him (pen, ink horn, sponge, etc). The task of simple copying in this cumbersome manner could last as long as five hours in a day. In the apostolic and sub-apostolic age, scribes labored under the dictation of the author or lector, but later copies were produced from exemplars (the authoritative copy or archetype text). Many of these scribes were monks. Monks operated with a systematic approach to copying which involved reading the text aloud, committing it to memory, repeating it aloud again, and finally copying the word. This laborious process combined with the demanding body posture, allowed for mental and physical fatigue that could eventually affect the craftsmanship of the copyist. It is due to such conditions that *errors of eye, writing, memory, and judgment* were introduced to the text. Variants exposing the *errors of the eye* can be seen in the omission of text, repetitions of text, transpositions (reversing the order of words or letters), and simple misspellings. Sometimes the astigmatic eye would loose its bearings in the text and mistake one group of letters or words for another. This error of the eye would then cause the scribe to skip over the reading and then the writing of text on the manuscript. This mistake is known as “homoeoteleuton.” The repeating of the same word or letter was also a common error of the eye and known as “dittography.” An example of this can be seen in some miniscule scripts which say “Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus, Barabbas or Jesus.” In this passage, the word “Jesus” is repeated twice. The technical term for this is “metathesis.” In addition, there are mistakes of “transposition” which refers to the reversing of a word or letter. For example, some statements within the manuscript will read “Jesus” and others read “Jeuss.” Understanding the context of the passages easily solves this problem. Lastly, simple misspellings, abbreviations, or scribal insertions can also account for various errors of the eye. This mistake is seen when the scribes joins words together that should be separated. For example, the phrase “Jesus is now here” can easily be written as “Jesus is nowhere.”

When the Christian church was being persecuted, more speedy attempts may have been made to duplicate the scriptures. Simple *errors of writing* occurred as hasty and unintelligible handwriting met the scroll. If a copyist wrote imprecisely, he would only lay the foundation for future error of sight or judgment in discerning the text by a future scribe. This accounted for errors of writing. As exhaustion set in upon the mind, *errors of memory* would most often arise. When considering the multistep process of scribal monks, it is surprising that these errors are not more numerous. Occasionally a copyist might forget the exact word in a passage and substitute a synonym. This is exemplified in passages like Ephesians 5:9. Here the Byzantine manuscripts

read “the fruit of the Spirit” and P⁴⁶ reads “fruit of light.”

Errors of judgment make up the remainder of the unintentional causes of the variants found in New Testament manuscripts. Marginal notes sometimes made their way into the scriptural text as the scribe misjudged them as a part of the text itself. This could very well have been the case in Romans 8:1 where manuscripts vary in adding or omitting the last part of the verse. Critics conjecture as to whether this ending was actually a marginal annotation. Most of the errors of judgment can be attributed to simply poor eyesight or dim lighting. Both effects of body posture obstructing the light and weakened vision of the fatigued eye. It is pertinent to note that all such unintentional errors are not necessarily the result of a lackadaisical approach to ones work but rather the physical and mental frailties of the human faculty. Such errors are not only common to man, but especially obvious blunders within their contextual frame. To the textual critic, these simple errors may easily “pop off the page” and take little effort to correct.

Finally, we come to the second category of variants found in the errors committed intentionally or knowingly by the scribe. Intentional errors demand greater effort upon the part of the textual critic (one who analyzes the text in a scholarly manner). These errors make up the minority of the variant readings. Although natural, it is wrong to assume such errors are the product of bad intentions. Taking into account that most of the New Testament scribes were Christians who valued the scriptures of supreme importance, it is more likely to assume that many intentional variants are the result of a scribe trying to emphasize the meaning of word or words rather than its syntax (grammatical structure). The intentional changes can be categorized into: 1) harmonizational, 2) historical or factual, 3) grammatical or linguistic, 4) doctrinal, 5) conflational, and 6) liturgical changes.

Scribes who made intentional *harmonizational changes*, sought to bring “harmony” to various scriptures by “correcting” them to match each other. It is possible that such harmonization, could actually be more of an unintentional result of the scribe assuming the text in error when actually it was not. Much of the harmonizational changes made can be observed in the Synoptic Gospels, as scribes attempted to harmonize accounts that were portrayed differently by each author. For example, the Luke 11:2-4, the Lord’s Prayer was transcribed to the more accepted version found in Mathew 6:9-13.

Historical or factual changes also contribute to the intentional changes of some scribes who thought they were actually correcting the mistake of a previous copyist. It is obvious that this is the case in Revelation 1:5, where a copyist changed *lusaniti* to *lousanti*, thus changing the wording from “loosed” to “washed” in regards to our sins. Other scribes may have attempted to change a word to update a name of a city, in order to eliminate confusion of history or geography. For example, variants of the geographical reference *Gergesenes Gadarenes*, *Gerasene*, are found in three of the gospels (Luke 8:26, Matt 8:28 and Mark 5:1) describing the place where Jesus healed the demoniac. These were altered to read “near the Sea of Galilee with tombs and a steep bank nearby” for fear of writing a wrong location.

As time and tradition impeded upon the linguistic nuances or stylistic idiosyncrasies of the scribe or his culture, modifications were used. These grammatical and linguistic changes included the spelling of proper names, verb forms, and other syntactical “corrections.” Similar examples can be seen between “old” and modern English that may replace “shall” with “will” or “which” with “whom.”

The most intentional of all scribal changes have been the result of the scribes pursuit of orthodoxy which resulted in doctrinal changes. The interchanging of “son” and “God” in the variant readings of John 1:18 is an example of such. Here, there is “only begotten son” rather

than “only begotten God.” Mark 9:29 is an example of such a doctrinal change, as well. The addition of “fasting” to “prayer” reflects a change on the part of the scribe that may not have been so intentionally influenced by orthodoxy. It must be emphasized here though that this was a very rare practice by a small group of scribes and was no way mainstream. In discerning the motivation or cause of a change, *intentional* doctrinal alterations of the text should only be considered when nothing else makes sense.

Christian scribes devoted to the task of copying the scriptures in their entirety may have sometimes been too fastidious in their inclusion of material. For fear of omission, it has been criticized that sometimes they included too much. The errors found in *conflational changes*, may be amongst the prime examples of this over zealotry. Conflation occurs when two or more variants are joined into one reading. A good example of this is seen in Mark 9:49 where the text includes “And every sacrifice will be salted with salt.” It is quite probable that the words “salted with salt” are the result of a conflational error, but do not actually change the meaning of the text.

Liturgical change make up the last group of intentional changes include minor changes that were made to follow ecclesiastical usage. An example of such changes may be seen in the “doxology” of the “Lord’s prayer” found in Mathew 6:13. Liturgical changes are fulsomely exemplified in the lectionaries. These occurred in places like Luke 2:41, where the names “Joseph and Mary” were likely inserted in place of “his parents.” These minor changes arose in order to establish or summarize the earlier context.

Comprehending the vast collection of New Testament manuscripts, one is overcome by the lofty distinction of credibility found in such a literary feat. The preservation of so great a mass of bibliographical material, has ensured that even the book of Revelation is supported by over three hundred Greek manuscripts. The greater amount of documentation, the greater degree to which variants are exposed and errors expunged. Though most of these variants found within the New Testament documents are comprised of insignificant grammatical errors, textual critics have worked relentlessly over the centuries to correct all error and have successfully provided us with the Bible we possess today.

THE MANUSCRIPTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament represented in our English translations is the result of an examination by translators of thousands of biblical manuscripts. This involves a process of decision-making that 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.

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 material are papyri, an ancient form of paper made from the papyrus plant, and velum, a cow hide material which usually formed the basis for the first codices—ancient books. Witnesses to the text of the New Testament may also be contained in ancient translations of the New Testament, called “versions.” The church fathers also contain portions of the Greek New Testament in their numerous quotations of the New Testament documents.

When approaching the New Testament documents, it is important to remember that textual critics group these various manuscripts into different types/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 Palestine (the Caesarean text-type), Rome (the Western text-type) and Syria (the Syrian text-type, also known as the Byzantine, Koine text-type or Majority text). In the descriptions below, we write about 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 highly unlikely or impossible that some kind of conspiracy to change the text occurred. The following New Testament Papyri manuscripts and catalog designations are arranged by date.

New Testament Papyri

The papyri are widely considered to be the earliest and for some the most significant of the documents of the Greek New Testament. This does not have to do as much with them 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 as a default earlier. 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 A.D.

^{p52}. Gr.P.457: The John Rylands Fragment 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 A.D., most likely 117-138 A.D. or earlier. It is composed on papyrus and its clear origin is of a codex, thus enlightening many paleographers to the idea that the New Testament codices did indeed exist in the first-century A.D.

The uncovering of this fragment has been significant in supporting the earlier dating of the gospel of John to within the first-century A.D. For centuries, the historical antiquity of John was questioned. Since Bauer's influential scholarship on the Gospel in the eighteenth-century, many (e.g. C.K. Barrett, Rudolf Bultmann) located the origin of the Gospel in the second-century A.D., 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 is said to have been written latest in history—John—is the earliest fragment of the New Testament that we now possess. This small piece of the Gospel of John is no insignificant fragment, what it contains is 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.

^{p104}: An impressive papyrus document, like the John Rylands Fragment, was discovered in Egypt among the Oxyrhynchus collection. It dates into the early first half of the second-century A.D. It is the oldest extant text of Matthew covering Matthew 21:34-37, 43, and possibly verse 45. The textual character reflects the Alexandrian hand with distinctions of the Zierstil or Decorated Rounded style of handwriting.

^{p46}. Chester Beatty II/P.Mich.Inv.6238 : The Chester Beatty Papyrus II is dated to

approximately A.D. 250. This is an excellent papyrus codex, demonstrating the duplication of an early dated exemplar text. Although portions of this book have been lost (2Thessalonians and parts of Romans and I Thessalonians) it still boasts of Hebrews and the Pauline epistles such as Romans, 1Corinthians, 2Corinthians, Ephesians, Galatians, Philippians, and Colossians. All of these books are embraced within the surviving 86 leaves of 11 by 6.5 inches of single quire (collection of leaves). 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 admired. This document is extremely important to reliability because it provides us not only with one of the earliest copies of the Pauline letters, but also of evidence of a mini-canon of Paul's literature. This indicates that not only that Paul's letters were around and circulating from an early date, but also that they were being collected very early on into a single collection.

^{p66} The Bodmer Papyri was a single literary work containing six quires of most of John in just over one hundred leaves. This papyrus codex is dated at A.D. 200 or earlier. Again, we find very early evidence for the circulation of John's Gospel. The codex is about 6 by 5.5 inches and was written in the biblical Uncial or biblical Majuscule hand, medium sized, and displays both the Alexandrian and Western types. Four hundred and forty-four alterations have been made to the piece mostly corrected by the scribe himself.

^{p87} The Inv. Nr. 12 manuscript is small and contains Philemon verses 13-15, and 24-25. Its writing is very similar to ^{p46}, thus dating it around the middle of the second-century A.D. or possibly earlier. The craftsmanship of the scribe shows a clear Roman Uncial hand. It is normal text and is classified as Alexandrian.

^{p4,p64,p67} The Chester Beatty II collection consists of fragments of papyri originally embodying all four of the Gospels. These fragments were first catalogued as texts belonging to separate works, ^{p4} being discovered in a concealed jar in a home. After further review, they were finally recognized as belonging to the same codex in the single-quire form. They particularly display out-denting (where the Greek letter extrudes on the far outer left margin) and continuous-text. They are recognized for their noteworthy agreement in the Gospel of Luke with ^{p75}.

^{p98} the P.IFAO manuscript dates to the late second-century A.D. This fragment is housed in Cairo, Egypt, and consists of Revelation 1:13-2:1. It does not reveal the hand of a professional scribe but rather a common untrained hand.

^{p90} P.Oxy. 3523. This papyrus fragment was discovered among the relics of Oxyrhynchus in Egypt. It has been dated to the later part of the second-century A.D. It bears John 18:36-19:7 and was likely intended for a church gathering which is conveyed in the calligraphy, or size of the letters. It is more akin in textual comparison to ^{p66} than any other single manuscript. It is classified among the early papyrus fragments and was written in a Decorated Rounded hand.

^{p77} P. Oxy. 2683 was discovered in Egypt and dated from the middle to the late second-century A.D. Of the Oxyrhynchus collection, this papyrus manuscript contains Mathew 23:30-39. It is proto-Alexandrian and may have been originally sourced from the same codex as ^{p103}.

^{p103} P. Oxy 4403 This manuscript of papyrus from Oxyrhynchus, dates from the middle to late second-century A.D. It evidences Mathew 13:55-57, 14:3-5 and likely exists from the same codex as ^{p77}, exemplifying a proto-Alexandrian text-type.

^{p32} The P. Rylands 5 manuscript is dated from the middle to late second-century A.D. This reliable manuscript shows striking affinity in type of the text to Sinaiticus (a), Augiensis

(F), and Boernerianus (G). It is the earliest manuscript of the Pastoral Epistles. It provides the work of an informal hand with a Decorated Rounded style. It abides in England at the John Rylands University Library.

^{p109} P. Oxy.4448 of the Oxyrhynchus collection, contains John 21:18-20, and 23-25. It has been speculated that it was intended for church reading. Its textual type is too difficult to label, due to the insignificant size of the papyrus. It is dated from the middle to the late second-century A.D.

^{p108} P. Oxy 4447 is a papyrus manuscript of the late second century. Discovered in Egypt, this document contains the text of John 17:23-24 and 18:1-5. It is recognized for its close affinity to Sinaiticus (a).

^{p1} P.Oxy.2 dates from the middle to the third-century A.D. from among the Oxyrhynchus collection. It consists of Matthew 1:1-9, 12, 14-20. Of the Alexandrian type, this papyrus shows remarkable agreement with Vaticanus (B) and was most likely copied from a respectable exemplar text.

^{p5} P.Oxy was discovered in Egypt containing portions of John 1, 16, and 20. Among the great relics of Oxyrhynchus, this manuscript of papyrus dates within the early third-century A.D. It is recognized for its concurrence with Sinaiticus and displays the distinct textual type of the Alexandrian order.

^{p13} P.Oxy 657+PSI 1292 dates within the first half of the third-century A.D. This papyrus includes portions of Hebrews 2-5 and 10-12. Its textual type agrees with Vaticanus (B), even providing text for where text is lacking. Originally discovered in Egypt it now resides in London at the British Library. This manuscript is written in a type of Severe (slanted) style. Despite this manuscript being found with other manuscripts, such as P. Oxyrhynchus 654, that date back to the third-century A.D., some have dated this manuscript to the fourth-century A.D. This is based on comparable handwriting found in P. Oxyrhynchus 404. According to Comfort's analysis based on the handwriting form of comparable manuscripts, this text dates back to just after A.D. 200.⁴ He compares this manuscript to that of P. Oxyrhynchus 852, in terms of its handwriting style, which has been dated back from the late second to the early third-century A.D. because of the accounts that are documented on that manuscript to approximately the same time period. Comfort also finds striking resemblances between ^{p13} and P. Oxyrhynchus 852 in terms of the formation of the characters and the overall appearance among other aspects. Its long-tailed swooping epsilon is also noted to be similar to P. Oxyrhynchus 2635, which is dated no later than A.D. 200.

^{p23} P.Oxy 1229 One of the great manuscripts of Oxyrhynchus, this papyrus contains James 1:10-12, 15-18. Dated within the late second to early third-century A.D., this document is noted for its textual likeness to Rescriptus (C), Sinaiticus (a), and Alexandrinus (A). This document has been dated based on an investigation of the letters of the manuscript. It has been noted by Comfort that it displays small serifs in many of the characters, such as the Greek letters alpha, iota, lambda, mu, nu, with the absence of small omicrons, all of which are characteristic of the second-century A.D.

^{p22} P.Oxy 1228 Now residing in the University Library of Scotland, this manuscript of papyrus preserves John 15:25-16:2, 21-32. Dating to the middle of the third-century A.D., its textual type is eclectic, representing an independent text. It was uncovered in Egypt among the Oxyrhynchus manuscripts.

⁴ Philip Wesley Comfort. *Encountering the Manuscripts: An Introduction to New Testament Paleography & Textual Criticism*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 168.

^{p37} P Mich.Inv.1570 This fragment upholds chapter 26 verses 19-52 of the Gospel of Matthew. It is dated at approximately A.D. 250. The textual character is free, with certain likenesses to ^{p45}.

^{p30} P.Oxy 1598 This papyrus manuscript was written in a relaxed biblical Uncial script that dates to the early third-century A.D. and includes portions of 1 Thessalonians 4-5 and 2 Thessalonians 1-2. The similarities found between this document and other early third-century A.D. documents, such as P. Oxyrhynchus 867 and P. Oxyrhynchus 1398, would suggest that this manuscript dates to early third-century A.D. Among the documents of Oxyrhynchus, its textual character is recognized for its overall agreement with Sinaiticus (a).

^{p38} P.Mich.Inv. 1571 This fragment of papyrus represents the book of Acts with various verses from chapters 18 and 19 (Acts 18:27-19:6, 12-16). It is a fragment among the early documents dating to the early third-century A.D. The manuscript portrays the Western form. It is written in the D-text. Many comparable forms of this manuscript have been found in P. Oxyrhynchus 834 of the late second-century A.D. and P. Oxyrhynchus 1607 from the late second to the early third-century A.D. An earlier stage of this form of handwriting can be seen in P. Oxyrhynchus 26 that dates back to the second-century A.D., while P. Oxyrhynchus 849 represents a later form. P. Oxyrhynchus 37, P. Oxyrhynchus 405, and P. Oxyrhynchus 406 from around the early third-century A.D. show other comparable examples of the form of handwriting in this manuscript fragment.

^{p45} The codex of the Chester Beatty collection contains text from all four of the gospels and Acts. Thirty of the approximate 220 leaves of papyrus still remain, which equates to approximately 14% of its original leaves. Its early date of A.D. 250 and large portions of the gospels and Acts, make it a most valuable asset to the collection. After study of the text, some historians have critiqued the scribal liberties taken in its transcription, observing an emphasis on the copying of the idea of the text rather than the exact wording of it. Kenyon notes particularities of the individual Greek characters that its simplicity displays that are common characteristics of the Roman period. He notes that the lack of exaggeration found in the Greek letters epsilon and phi and the curves of the letters, epsilon and sigma attest to its early date. But paleographers date this manuscript in the third-century A.D. due to its Severan (sloping) appearance. The text exemplifies the Caesarean, Alexandrian, and possibly the Western textual types. Comfort notes of calligraphic similarities with many comparable texts, comparing it to P. Michigan 3, P. Egerton 3, P. Oxyrhynchus 2082, P. Oxyrhynchus 1016, P. Oxyrhynchus 232, and P. Rylands 57.⁵

^{p106} P.Oxy 4445 This early papyrus of the Oxyrhynchus manuscripts includes John 1:29--35, 40-46. It was written within the first half of the third-century A.D. mostly of the Alexandrian type.

^{p107} P.Oxy 4446 was discovered in Egypt and dated from the early part of the third-century A.D. Of the Oxyrhynchus collection, this papyrus manuscript contains John 17:1-2, 11. Its textual character is independent but is most agreeable with Washingtonianus (W).

^{p39} P.Oxy 1780 once among the relics in Egypt, it now abides in Rochester, New York at the Ambrose Swabey Library. This manuscript of papyrus contains John 8:14-22. Due to its agreement with P. Rylands 16 (dated from the late second to early third-century A.D.) and with P. Oxyrhynchus 25 (dated to the early third-century A.D.) it is dated to the earlier half of the third-century A.D. Its penmanship shows that it was written by a professional scribe who wrote in the biblical Uncial script in its early form. It agrees with the Vaticanus (B), and is proto-

⁵ Ibid., 173, 176.

Alexandrian in its textual type.

^{p29} P.Oxy 1597 This papyrus fragment contains Acts 26:7-8, 20 and was discovered in Egypt. This early third-century A.D. manuscript is too small to determine its character textually. But from what is available, the study of the characters of the manuscript, such as its square pi and epsilon and triangular theta, it has been shown that it share similarities with P⁴⁵, which is a small portion of the book of Acts, and P. Oxyrhynchus 2949, an apocryphal Gospel. It has been suggested though that it may be connected to the Western text.

^{p111} P.Oxy 4495 of the Oxyrhynchus collection, contains Luke 17:11-13, 22-23. Its textual type agrees with ^{p75}. It is dated within the first half of the third-century A.D.

^{p49} P.Yale 415 + 531 Dated into the middle of the third-century A.D., this manuscript contains Ephesians 4:16-29 and 4:31-5:13. Written on papyrus, this document shows the Alexandrian text type. Paleographers have noted the striking familiarities between P⁴⁹ and P⁶⁵ in their letter formation, leading some to believe that they could very well be part of the same codex.

^{p65} PSI XIV 1373 This manuscript of papyrus holds 1Thess 1:3-2:1, 6-13. Dated around A.D. 250, this document clearly shows the text of the Alexandrian distinction. It has also been hypothesized that both ^{p49} and ^{p65} originated from the same codex.

^{p53} P.Mich.Inv. 6652 Home to the University of Michigan Library, this third- century A.D. papyrus displays Matthew 26:29-40 and Acts 9:33-10:1. The Acts portion clearly shows the Alexandrian trained hand where as Matthew alludes to no significant agreement.

^{p69} P.Oxy 2383 Discovered among the manuscripts of Oxyrhynchus, this papyri bears the Scriptures of the Gospel of Luke (Luke 22:40, 45-48, 58-61). It is a free text with some D-text readings.

^{p80} P.Barcelona 83 Dated at around A.D. 250, this papyrus fragment encompasses just one single verse from the Gospel of John (John 3:34). This fragment is not lengthy enough to correctly ascertain its textual character.

^{p91} P.Mil.Vogl.Inv.1224 + P.Macquarie Inv. 360 contains selections from the second and third chapters of Acts. The text includes Acts 2:30-37 and 2:46-3:2. Its text is most likely proto Alexandrian.

^{p9} P.Oxy. 402 Housed in the Semetic Museum of Harvard University, this papyri is too insignificant in length to determine its textual type. It is comprised of 1John 4:11-12, 14-17 and has been dated to the third-century A.D.

^{p20} P.Oxy. 1171 This manuscript provides a very reliable excerpt of the second and third chapter of James. The papyri in whole accounts for James 2:19-3:9. Discovered in Egypt it boasts of the Oxyrhynchus collection with an Alexandrian character. It is especially characteristic of Sinaiticus (a) and Vaticanus (B). Though some have dated this manuscript to around the late third-century A.D., no significant paleographic evidence has been provided to support this claim. This manuscript is similar to that of P. Oxyrhynchus 1230, which is a second-century A.D. document as well as P. Oxyrhynchus 3830 of the same time period. P²⁰ possesses characteristics of a rounded, medium upright capital, with its informal appearance resembling that of P²⁷. Some suggest that the same scribe who produced P²⁰ may have also penned P²⁷.

^{p24} P.Oxy.1355 contains portions of Romans 8-9. It is a third-century A.D. papyri of the Alexandrian textual character.

^{p35} PSI 1 Dated among the early manuscripts of antiquity, this third-century A.D. papyri is comprised of Matthew 25:12-15, 20-23. Its textual affinity is distinctly to the Vaticanus (B).

^{p40} P.Heidelberg G. 645 This collection of papyri fragments make up various portions of

Romans 1-4, 6 and 9. It is among the Alexandrian documents of the third- century A.D.

^{p48} PSI 1165 Preserved in the *Biblioteca Laurenziana*, this papyri holds Acts 23:11-17, 25-29. Though a small manuscript, it dates among the ancient documents of the third-century A.D., since it displays the Severe (slanted) style that was prominent during that time. The handwritten style found in P⁴⁸ can also be found in other manuscripts, such as P. Oxyrhynchus 223, P. Oxyrhynchus 852, P. Oxyrhynchus 2341 and P. Oxyrhynchus 2635. These comparable manuscripts solidify the third-century A.D. dating of P⁴⁸. It is a D-text.

^{p95} PL II/31 This third-century A.D. manuscript contains the verses of John 5:26-29 and 36-38. It is too fragmentary to determine its textual character, but this papyri does reflect a proto-Alexandrian text type.

^{p101} P.Oxy 4401 Discovered in Egypt, this papyrus manuscript accommodates Matthew 3:10-12 and 3:16-4:3. It finds its place among the third-century A.D. Alexandrian texts.

^{p113} P.Oxy 4497 This papyri contains only a few verses of Romans, Romans 2:12-13, 19. It was found in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, and dates to the third-century A.D. Its inadequate size, makes it hard to determine its textual character.

^{p114} P.Oxy 4498 of the Oxyrhynchus collection, contains Hebrews 1:7-12. It is a papyrus manuscript of the third-century A.D. Its textual type is too difficult to label, due to the small size of the papyri.

^{p18} P.Oxy 1079 Once among the relics of Egypt, this papyri is now housed in the British Library of London, England. This manuscript is a copy of Revelation 1:4-7 and dates from the middle to the late third-century A.D. Its textual agreement mostly adheres to Ephraemi Rescriptus (C), then Sinaiticus (a), and Vaticanus (B).

^{p47} This papyri is from the Chester Beatty Collection, once held the entire text of Revelation but now only about eight chapters (31% of its original text) have survived in the text between Revelation 9-17. The manuscript reveals a documentary hand and dates from the middle to the late third-century A.D. based on the formation of its letters. It was dated by Kenyon in accordance to his “test-letter” methodology, which is no longer a method used by paleographers, and was unable to find any manuscripts that paralleled its handwriting from which to confirm its date. Comfort finds P. Tebtunis 268 a comparable manuscript to P⁴⁷. P. Tebtunis 268 is dated at approximately A.D. 220 and has been found to have many handwriting similarities with that of P⁴⁷, with its short, shallow strokes and their placement on a line. Although only 10 of the original 32 leaves of the codex have been preserved, these valuable papyri date within two hundred years of the autograph, marking its origin within the third-century A.D. The handiwork alludes to an untrained scribe and may even reveal the intention of the codex for private use. The text type agrees with Alexandrinus (A), Ephraemi Rescriptus (C) and Sinaiticus (a). The omissions in the text are few (below twenty) but outnumber the additions almost three to one.

^{p115} P.Oxy.4499 of the great manuscripts of Oxyrhynchus, this manuscript embodies large portions of Revelation and is dated within the mid to late third-century A.D. This document of papyrus is noted for its textual likeness to Alexandrinus (A) and Ephraemi Rescriptus.

^{p15/16} P.Oxy. 108 + 109 was discovered in Egypt and dated into the late third- century A.D. Of the Oxyrhynchus collection, this papyrus manuscript contains 1Corinthians 7:18-8:4 and Philippians 3:10-17; 4:2-8. Its text-type is Alexandrian.

^{p17} P. Oxy. 1078 This papyrus manuscript reveals Hebrews 9:12-19. Discovered in Egypt, this late third-century manuscript is in general accordance with P⁴⁶.

^{p24} P.Oxy 1230 Of the collection at Oxyrhynchus, this papyri contains only six verses from Revelation 5 and 6 (Rev. 5:5-8, 6:5-8). Its date signifies it among the Alexandrian scripts of the

late third-century A.D.

^{p28} P. Oxy. 1596 This late third-century A.D. manuscript contains John 6:8-12, 17-22. The papyri is of the Alexandrian type.

^{p50} P. Oxy. 1543 was discovered in Egypt containing Acts 8:26-32 and 10:26-31. Among the great relics of Oxyrhynchus, this manuscript of papyrus dates within the late third-century A.D. Decidedly, its textual type of the Alexandrian order.

^{p70} P. Oxy. 2384+ PSI Inv. CNR 419, 420 date within the later half of the third-century A.D. Among the artifacts of Oxyrhynchus, the papyri displays Luke 22:40, 45-48, 58-61. Unfortunately, the text denotes the work of a careless hand, leaving its textual character uncertain.

^{p110} P. Oxy. 4494 Among the manuscripts of the New Testament, this independent text is of Mathew 10:13-15, 25-27. It is part of the collection of papyri from Oxyrhynchus.

^{p220} MS 113 This manuscript dates to the late third century. It includes Romans 4:23-5:3, 8-13. With the exception of Romans 5:1, its textual character agrees with Vaticanus (B) (see below).

^{p72} The P. Bodmer VII and VIII holds the oldest known manuscripts of 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude dating to the late third-century A.D. or early fourth-century A.D. It also contains apocryphal works, as well. Remarkably its early date, proves the use of 2 Peter among the Coptic Christians in Egypt during the A.D. 200's. Though debatable, the text-type has been recognized as normal text in 1 and 2 Peter and free in Jude, both including textual idiosyncrasies. The codex does reveal an Alexandrian influence and the hands of approximately four scribes. It was likely a private codex. The variants within the text account for more omissions than additions.

^{p78} P. Oxy. 2684 From Egypt to England, this papyri has revealed four verses from Jude. It is a free text and it distinctly represents Jude 4-5 and 7-8.

^{p92} P. Narmuthius 69.39a + 69.229a This Alexandrian text is dated from the late third-century A.D. to the early fourth-century A.D. It contains Ephesians 1:11-13, 19-21, and 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5 and 11-12.

^{p100} P. Oxy. 4449 Abiding in the Ashmolean Museum in England, this manuscript of papyrus contains James 3:13-4:4, 9-5:1. Dated from the late third to the early fourth-century A.D., this New Testament piece shows agreement with the Alexandrian witnesses.

^{p102} P. Oxy. 4402 Dated around the late third to early fourth-century A.D., this papyrus fragment encompasses just four verses from the Gospel of Mathew-Mathew 4:11-12, 22-23. This fragment is not lengthy enough to adequately determine its textual character.

0162 P. Oxy. 847 This Oxyrhynchus Papyrus embodies John 2:11-22. It is dated from the late third to the early fourth-century A.D. Its textual agreement is with p⁶⁶ and p⁷⁵, as well as Vaticanus (B):

033: This ninth-century A.D. work is recognized for its great agreement with (put symbol-Sinaiticus c). This miniscule contains the Gospels, Acts, Paul, and Catholic Epistles. It is of the Alexandrian text-type.

081: Manuscript 81 is clearly one of the most valuable miniscule manuscripts. It was written in 1044 A.D. and exemplifies an Alexandrian type text.

1739: Manuscript 1739 is a codex which was written in the tenth-century A.D. Substantially this document is transcribed from an Alexandrian exemplar with notations from the works of Origen, Basil, Clement, Irenaeus, and Eusebius.

The 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 A.D. are in the codex form. Codices bound parchment or vellum 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 why this became the preferred choice for the New Testament manuscripts. The codices certainly provide us with the most comprehensive collections of New Testament manuscripts.

I (01) Discovered in the St. Catherine monastery of Mount Sinai, is debatably the most critical and valuable manuscript to the New Testament, Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph). Dating into the middle of the fourth-century A.D., 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 embrace 364 and a half pages, double sided and mostly in a four column distinction. Distinct within its historicity, is its most captivating discovery. It is said that Forty-three of its vellum leaves were rescued from the flames, when recognized by Constantine von Tischendorf among the waste lying in a basket for kindling the fire. 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 studying the Septuagint and the New Testament along with two other early Christian documents, the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas. This is a highly revered artifact, being produced in the middle of the fourth-century A.D. in the southeastern Mediterranean region. This Bible was written on parchment and originally contained 743 leaves, or 1486 pages. It is the oldest surviving complete New Testament, being one of the two oldest manuscripts of the entire Bible.

The Codex was written on animal skin in black and red metallic based ink. It's text is Greek along with several Arabic marginal notes that were added later. Of the 1486 original pages that the codex contained, only approximately 822 pages have remained. As for the structure of the text, there are four columns per page with 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 the London British Library. The complete New Testament and portions of the Old Testament manuscripts dispersed among Leipzig University Library, St. Petersburg National Library of Russia, and Sinai Monastery of St. Catherine. The fourth-century A.D. was an important time period for Christianity, in terms of its development, the preservation of Scriptures, and the development of this Codex which serves as a witness to this period in the history of Christianity.

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

The text of the Sinaiticus is very unique in terms of the variations that are found 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. The study of this 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 its thorough study. 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.

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

There is a missing gap of information of the history of Codex Sinaiticus down to the eighteenth-century A.D. 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 that Codex Sinaiticus was used as a source material for bookbinding. German scholar, Constantine Tischendorf took portions of the Old Testament home with him and used them for bookbinding in 1844. Tischendorf eventually went on to publish a complete copy of the codex after attaining 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 there is included notes 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 after and is considered a significant improvement. The New Testament was published in 1911, with the Old Testament being published shortly after in 1922.

B(03) The Codex Vaticanus is distinct in both its antiquity and composition. Dated between A.D. 325 and A.D. 350 this Uncial contains books of both the Old and New Testaments, as well as, the 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-Philemon, and Hebrews 9:14-the end of Revelation. This 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.

A (02) The Codex Alexandrinus contains virtually the entire Old Testament and most of the New Testament with few exceptions. 773 leaves are still intact from the original codex of about 820 leaves. 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 its first bestowing to the great Patriarch of Alexandria. It is dated into the mid fifth-century A.D., clearly revealing the handiwork of the Alexandrian scribes of Egypt. The amount of scribes employed for its composition is arguable as the text examples various quality in handiwork, independent textual nuances, and multiple exemplars. Distinctly, it is 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 unseen by the human eye. Documentation of both the Old and New Testaments were discovered underneath the sermons of Ephraem, from this palimpsest rescriptus (i.e. used, erased, and rewritten manuscript). Chemical reactivation, illuminated the concealed text of 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 A.D. and was most likely a composition of Alexandria, Egypt.

D (05) The Codex Bezae and Codex Cantabrigiensis was discovered in 1562 by the French theologian, Theodore de Beze. Most exceptional to its composition is the application of both Greek and Latin to the text, making it the oldest discovered bilingual manuscripts of the New Testament. The 406 leaves embody the four gospels, Acts, and 3 John 11-15. The Gospels were transcribed in Western and other various text types with Greek on the left page and Latin on the right. To attempt to date this codex may be somewhat difficult as Parker declares. Parker argues that since this kind of text, placed in its contextual setting in the oral period, has no fixed form, the texts were constantly being reshaped within the churches' context.⁶

W (032) The Codex Washingtonianus is an Uncial manuscript containing most of the gospels (missing 25 verses in Mark and a part of chapters 14, 16 and all of 15 in John) and portions of the epistles of Paul. It represents both Byzantine and Alexandrian textually and is dated to the early fifth-century A.D. or late fourth-century A.D. This clearly written codex is transcribed on 187 sheets of vellum, and is formatted in one column. D (06) The Codex Claromontanus was discovered in France and dated to the middle of the sixth-century A.D. In many ways it completes the New Testament work of Codex Bezae, by embodying much of its missing texts. A western work, it was transcribed on 533 pages of thin vellum. This bilingual manuscript includes Hebrews as well as the entire collection of Pauline epistles in either or both Greek and Latin. This single column codex reveals an artistic hand and resides at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris.

L (019) The Codex Regius, although poorly written, is significant in its overall agreement with the Vaticanus. The codex 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 A.D.

(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 A.D.

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 A.D. text includes both Greek and Latin.

G (012) The Codex Boernerianus may uniquely be of Irish origin embodying Paul's epistles. This ninth-century A.D. 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 back to the ninth-century A.D. Mark resembles the earlier text (third or fourth-century A.D.) employed by Eusebius and Origen. Where as, Matthew, Luke, and John clearly resemble the Byzantine text.

NEW TESTAMENT TRANSLATIONS IN EARLY LANGUAGES

In addition to the nearly 6000 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, bringing the number to some 29,000 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

⁶ D. C. Parker, *Codex Bezae: An Early Christian Manuscript and Its Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 280.

manuscripts has been studied in the preservation of the scriptural translations of the early church. To produce a version, one must translate from one original language to another (e.g. 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 this evangelistic calling. The bishop of Edessa, Rabula, is undoubtedly noted for his contribution to the standard Syriac edition of the New Testament we possess today. In the fifth-century A.D., 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 of the fifth column of *Hexapla* by Origen. Perhaps overly literal in its translation, it lacks adequate meaning for the language and thus was never fully accepted by Syrian churches. Tatian in his compilation of the gospels into one literary work the *Diatessaron* was widely noticed among Syrians.

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

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 resided in Upper (southern) Egypt and by the fourth-century A.D. the proliferation of the Scriptures in Egypt began as the New Testament was translated into Sahidic. It greatly represents the Alexandrian text-type but also the Western type. The Bohairic or Memphic dialect was home to northern or Lower Egypt. So prolific was this dialect, that it became the common dialect of the Egyptian Church at large. Fayumic, Achmimic, and sub-Achmimic represent the dialects of Middle Egypt. Unfortunately no book of the New Testament has been entirely preserved in any of these Middle Egyptian dialects.

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 of translation was taken from a translation itself rather than the original Greek. The debatable translation of origin, is Syriac. Although the early Armenian versions stem within the first half of the fifth- century A.D., later more significant revisions of this text came around the time of the eighth-century A.D. In fact, it is a revised text from this time, that has been preserved and accepted until present.

Georgia had its first translation of the Bible by approximately the middle of the fifth-century A.D. Preceding from Armenia, its southern neighbor, the gospel in the form of Scripture

quickly took root. The Georgian version takes its base from the Armenian translation, thus making it a secondary translation.

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 A.D. during the evangelizing of Constantine the Great (A.D. 330). Nevertheless, it was not until the seventh-century A.D. that both the Old Testament was complete and the New Testament was in process. It is likely that Syrian monks residing in Ethiopia are responsible for the full and complete Syriac translation during the time of the Monophysite Controversy (fifth-century A.D.). Later, the Arabic and Coptic versions colored the version as well.

The Arabic version is a secondary translation taken from several combinations of Greek, Syriac, Coptic, and Latin. The most ancient translation of Arabic likely originates from a Syriac translation near the uprising of Islam. Unfortunately, the author of the first Arabic version is unknown.

The Slavonic version finds its history within the ninth-century A.D. It was in that time that monks and brothers Methodius and Constantinus (Cyril) traveled to east-central Europe at the commission of Emperor Michael III in response to Rostislav to translate and conduct the Latin liturgy into the familiar language of the people. As a tool for their translation, they are respected for their development of the Cyrillic alphabet that is presently used today in the Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Serbo-Croatian, and Russian languages. Descending from the mid ninth-century A.D. the gospels were translated into the Old Church Slavonic version.

The Nestorian versions are taken from traveling Persian Nestorians of the fifth-century A.D. Sojourning into central and east Asia, they translated the Scriptures into various languages as they traveled. These were secondary translations, as they were based from Syriac translation. Their earliest preserved copies date hundreds of years later into the ninth and tenth-centuries A.D.

The origin of the Gothic version dates back to the fourth-century A.D. 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 the Greek New Testament manuscripts in a significant and distinct fashion. Importantly, the versions themselves attest to the canonization of scripture, as only particularly accepted scriptures were set apart for the work of translation.

NEW TESTAMENT CITATIONS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

In addition to the 29,000 manuscripts of the New Testament, works of the early church Fathers not only validated the date, location, and type of text used in the New Testament manuscripts, but more importantly, they provided quotations of the Scriptures themselves. In fact, one could reconstruct most of the New Testament based solely on the more than 36,200 Scripture quotations of the Fathers themselves.



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
Clement of Alexandria	1,038	194	499	23	65	1,819
Origin	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
Eusibius	3,258	211	1,592	88	27	5,176
Grand Totals	19,368	1,352	14,035	870	644	36,289

The Fathers would openly compare the texts of early codices by quoting them. In addition, they would preface their quotations of Scripture by writing as such “my codex here says,” thus opening the door to the text of the some of the earliest codices of the New Testament. All 27 books of the New Testament are addressed and validated by the literary works of the early Fathers. Almost 36,000 quotations alone come from only five of the Fathers. In fact, by A.D. 110 all the New Testament books were cited by the collective citation of Ignatius, Clement of Rome, and Polycarp, except for 2 John and Jude. There is no other book, religious or secular, that has validated such a vast number of individual and selected quotations, such as the New Testament.

A most direct link to the apostles themselves can be seen in the work of Polycarp of the early second-century A.D. 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 noted for his textual validation of the Scriptures and also his martyrdom in Rome. Among his works include 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, influenced by Paul in his own epistle to the Corinthians in the late first-century A.D. before his death in A.D. 101. In it he quotes not only the gospels but also Romans on numerous accounts. In addition, among the books he cited was Ephesians, 1 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, James, and 2 Peter.

One of the earliest significant works of the church Fathers is seen in the *Teaching of the Twelve*, or *Didache*. Dated between A.D. 100 and 120, this early work displays loose quotations

to the New Testament Scriptures. In particular, 1 Corinthians was cited on various occasions as was 1 Thessalonians and Revelation.

One of the most powerful witnesses to the New Testament was Irenaeus of the early church. Irenaeus is recognized as the first Father who quoted almost every book of the New Testament. Only three books not found in his citations are two 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 place in early church history (170 A.D.) as one who defended the Christian Faith against Gnosticism with his works *Against Heresies*.

Clement of Alexandria is appreciated for his significant quoting of almost every book of the New Testament. With only a couple of books less than Irenaeus (2 Timothy and 2 John), this early church Father distinctly marked the beginning of the third-century A.D.

One of the most notable works of the early Fathers comes from the words of second hand witnesses to his work. The *Diatessaron* of Tatian was a favorite among early Christians, in particular Syrians, containing a literary composition of the four Gospels, which weaved them harmoniously into one solitary work. Unfortunately, this work of the second-century A.D. is completely lost, with no remaining copy. Nevertheless, because of its significance in the early church of its time, several witnesses of the work have revealed it in part by their own commentaries of it. These works include a commentary of Ephraem titled, *The Commentary on the Diatessaron* and the Latin Codex Fuldensis.

The next closest book to the New Testament in terms of manuscript support is the work of Homer that has 1800+ manuscripts (mss) with a 500 year time gap from the original, Demosthenes with 200 mss and a 1,400 year time gap, Herodotus with 8 mss and a 1,400 year time gap; and Plato with 7 mss and a 1,200 year time gap (see chart below). Clearly the New Testament is the most well attested book from all of ancient history. If one denies reliability of New Testament based upon the number of manuscripts and the interval of time between its original composition and nearest copy, then they would have to thereby discredit the reliability of every work from ancient history!

THE ACCURACY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

The New Testament is more accurately copied than any other book from ancient history. Ehrman's mentor at Princeton, Professor Bruce Metzger, conducted a research project comparing the accuracy of the copies of the New Testament to other ancient works. He concluded that the Hindu *Mahabharata* was copied with about 90 percent accuracy and Homer's *Iliad* with 95 percent accuracy.⁷ This is a more than sufficient degree of accuracy to provide the essential teaching of the originals. However, by contrast, scholars have shown that the New Testament was estimated to have been copied with up to 99% of more accuracy. Manuscript experts Westcott and Hort estimated that only about one-sixteenth rise above "trivialities." That would make copies 98.33 per cent accurate.⁸ Ezra Abbot's figures yield a text that is 99.75% pure.⁹ The great New Testament Greek scholar, A. T. Robertson, declared that: "The real concern is with a 'thousandth part of the entire text.'" That would be 99.9% accuracy on anything of real

⁷ Bruce Metzger, *Chapters in the History of New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), 146.

⁸ Brook Foss Westcott, Fenton John Anthony Hort, and W.J. Hickie, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (New York, NY: Macmillan Co., 1951), 2.2.

⁹ See B.B. Warfield, *An Introduction to Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1886), 13-14.

concern.¹⁰ What is more, even Ehrman himself admits that the Manuscript variants themselves do not affect the central message of the New Testament. He wrote: “It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the only changes being made were by copyist with a personal stake in the wording of the text. In fact, *most of the changes found in our early Christian manuscripts have nothing to do with theology or ideology.*”¹¹

New Testament Manuscripts Compared to Other Ancient Sources					
Author	Ancient Title	Date of Original	Earliest Manuscript	Gap from Original	Manuscript Copies
Plato	<i>Dialogues</i>	4 th century BC	AD 900	c. 1,250 years	20
Homer	<i>Iliad</i>	9 th century BC	400 BC	c. 400 years	1800+
Herodotus	<i>The Histories</i>	484-425 BC	AD 900	c. 1,350 years	8
Aristotle	Assorted works	4 th century BC	AD 1100	c. 1,400 years	5
Thucydides	<i>History of the Peloponnesian Wars</i>	460-400 BC	AD 900	c. 1,300 years	8
Aristophanes	Assorted works	448-385 BC	AD900	c. 1,300 years	10
Sophocles	Assorted works	496-406? BC	AD 1000	c. 1,400 years	193
Julius Caesar	<i>The Gallic Wars</i>	58-44 BC	AD 900	c. 950 years	10
Tacitus	<i>Annals of Imperial Rome</i>	AD 58-120	AD 1100	c. 1,000 years	20
Pliny-Younger	<i>History of Rome</i>	AD 62-113	AD 850	c. 750 years	7
Suetonius	<i>The Twelve Caesars</i>	AD 70-140?	AD 950	c. 900 years	8
Total Manuscripts for non-Christian Ancient Sources					2089+
Greek New Testament Manuscripts		AD 45-100	AD 117-325	30-300 years	5,800+
Non-Greek New Testament Manuscripts					24,000+
Total New Testament Manuscripts					29,000+
Source: Adapted from H. Wayne House and Joseph M. Holden, <i>Charts of Apologetics and Christian Evidences</i> (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2006), Chart 43.					

Misleading Statistics

In view of the foregoing evidence, one can see how misleading the critic’s statistics really are. To speak of 200,000 to 400,000 errors in the Bible is completely misleading. Most of them are not errors of fact, but simply variant readings.

¹⁰ A.T. Robertson, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1925), 22.

¹¹ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 55, (emphasis added).

Actually, the more so-called errors (really, variants) there are the more certain we are of the original. For example, if one received a message like this (with the error), he would have no problem in collecting the money:

Y#U HAVE WON 10 MILLION DOLLARS.

Why? Because, even with the error, 100% of the messages comes through. And if one received a message like this it would remove all doubt:

Y#U HAVE WON 10 MILLION DOLLARS
YO# HAVE WON 10 MILLION DOLLARS

And the more lines we have (with an error in a different spot), the more we would be sure of the message. Ehrman also makes an issue over the so-called biases of the manuscript copiers. Yet, as it turns out, their bias does not affect the basic message of the Bible. Consider the following illustration:

1. YOU HAVE WON TEN MILLION DOLLARS
2. THOU **HAST WON** TEN MILLION DOLLARS [Notice the King James bias here]
3. Y'ALL **HAVE WON** \$10,000,000 [Notice the Southern bias here!]

Despite the bias, observe that of the 28 letters in line 2, only 5 of them [in bold] are the same in line 3. That is, about 19% of the letters are the same. Yet the message is 100 % identical! They are different in form but not in content. Likewise, even with the many differences in the New Testament variants, *100% of the message comes through*.

In the light of all the above evidence, it is fair to say that the New Testament is the most accurately copied book from the ancient world. For it survives in more copies, earlier copies, and more reliable copies than any other work from antiquity. By comparison with other classic works from the ancient world, most of which survive on only 10 to 20 manuscripts. Compare the evidence in the following chart:

CONCLUSION

In the light of all the available evidence, we can agree with the great Greek manuscript expert Sir Frederick Kenyon who declared that “The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. [Thus] both the *authenticity* and the general *integrity* of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.”¹²

In short, we can trust the Bible in our hands as an accurate copy of the original in all essentials, as the famous scholar, Philip Schaff, noted of the variant readings known his day, only 50 were of real significance, and *there is no “article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of Scripture*

¹² Sir Frederick G. Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology* (New York/London: Harper, 1940), 288f.

New Testament Manuscripts			
Name	Original Date	Earliest Copy	Biblical Books
John Rylands Fragment (P52)	1 st century AD	AD 117-125	John 18:31-33, 37-38, and is considered the oldest NT fragment known
Chester Beatty II/ P.Mich.Inv.6238 (P46)	1 st century AD	2 nd century AD	Hebrews and all of the Pauline Epistles, except for the Pastorals
P.Bodmer II/ Inv. Nr. 4274/ 4298 (P66)	1 st century AD	2 nd century AD	Most of John
Inv. Nr. 12 (P87)	1 st century AD	2 nd century AD	Philem. 13–15, 24–25
Chester Beatty II (P4=P64/P67)	1 st century AD	2 nd century AD	Portions of Luke 1-6 (P ⁴) and Matthew 3, 5 and 26 (P ⁶⁴ /P ⁶⁷)
P.IFAO Inv. 237[+a] (P98)	1 st century AD	2 nd century AD	Revelation 1:13–2:1
P.Oxy. 3523 (P90)	1 st century AD	2 nd century AD	John 18:36-19:37
P.Oxy. 2683 + 4405 (P77)	1 st century AD	2 nd century AD	Matthew 23:30-39
P.Oxy. 4403 (P103)	1 st century AD	2 nd century AD	Matthew 13:55-57, 14:3-5
P.Rylands 5 (P32)	1 st century AD	2 nd century AD	Titus 1:11-15, 2:3-8
P.Oxy. 4448 (P109)	1 st century AD	2 nd century AD	John 21:18–20, 23–25
P.Oxy. 4447 (P108)	1 st century AD	2 nd century AD	John 17:23–24; 18:1–5
P.Oxy. 2 (P1)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Matthew. 1:1–9, 12, 14–20
P.Oxy. 208+1781 (P5)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Portions of John 1, 16 and 20
P.Oxy. 657 + PSI 1292 (P13)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Portions of Hebrews 2-5 and 10-12
P.Oxy. 1229 (P23)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	James 1:10-12, 15-18
P.Oxy. 1228 (P22)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	John 15:25–16:2, 21–32
P.Oxy. 1598 (P30)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Portions of 1 Thessalonians 4-5 and 2 Thessalonians 1-2
P.Mich.Inv. 1571 (P38)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Acts 18:27–19:6, 12–16
P. Chester Beatty 1 (P45)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Large portions of all four Gospels and Acts
P.Oxy. 4445 (P106)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	John 1:29–35, 40–46
P.Oxy. 4446 (P107)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	John 17:1–2, 11
P.Oxy. 1780 (P39)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	John 8:14–22
P.Oxy. 1597 (P29)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Acts 26:7–8, 20
P.Oxy. 4495 (P111)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Luke 17:11–13, 22–23
P.Mich.Inv. 1570 (P37)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Matthew 26:19–52
P.Yale 415 + 531 (P49)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Ephesians 4:16–29; 4:31–5:13
PSI XIV 1373 (P65)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	1 Thessalonians 1:3–2:1, 6–13
P.Mich.Inv. 6652 (P53)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Matthew 26:29–40; Acts 9:33–10:1
P.Oxy. 2383 (P69)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Luke 22:40, 45–48, 58–61
P.Barcelona 83 (P80)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	John 3:34
P.Mil. Vogl. Inv. 1224 + P.Macquarie Inv. 360 (P91)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Acts 2:30–37; 2:46–3:2

¹³ Philip Schaff, *A Companion to the Greek Testament and the English Version* (New York: Harper, 1883, 1903), 177, (emphasis added).

P.Oxy. 402 (P9)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	1 John 4:11–12, 14–17
P.Oxy. 1171 (P20)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	James 2:19-3:9
P.Oxy. 1355 (P24)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Portions of Rom 8-9
PSI 1 (P35)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Matthew 25:12–15, 20–23
P.Heidelberg G. 645(P40)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Portions of Rom 1-4, 6 and 9
New Testament Manuscripts			
Name	Original Date	Earliest Copy	Biblical Books
P.Oxy. 402 (P9)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	1 John 4:11–12, 14–17
P.Oxy. 1171 (P20)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	James 2:19-3:9
P.Oxy. 1355 (P24)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Portions of Rom 8-9
PSI 1 (P35)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Matthew 25:12–15, 20–23
P.Heidelberg G. 645 (P40)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Portions of Rom 1-4, 6 and 9
PSI 1165 (P48)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Acts 23:11–17, 25–29
PL II/31 (P95)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	John 5:26–29, 36–38
P.Oxy. 4401 (P101)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Matthew 3:10–12; 3:16–4:3
P.Oxy. 4497 (P113)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Romans 2:12–13, 19
P.Oxy. 4498 (P114)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Hebrews 1:7–12
P. Antinoopolis 2.54	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Matthew 6:10–12
P.Oxy. 1079 (P18)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Revelation 1:4-7
P. Chester Beatty III (P47)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Portions of Rev 9-17
P.Oxy. 4499 (P115)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Large portions of Revelation
P.Oxy. 108 +109 (P15/P16)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	1 Corinthians 7:18–8:4 and Philippians 3:10–17; 4:2–8
P.Oxy. 1078 (P17)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Hebrews 9:12–19
P.Oxy. 1230 (P24)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Revelation 5:5–8; 6:5–8
P.Oxy. 1596 (P28)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	John 6:8–12, 17–22
P.Yale 1543 (P50)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Acts 8:26–32; 10:26–31
P.Oxy. 2384 + PSI Inv. CNR 419, 420 (P70)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Luke 22:40, 45–48, 58–61
P.Oxy. 4494 (P100)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Matthew 10:13–15, 25–27
MS 113 (0220)	1 st century AD	3 rd century AD	Romans 4:23–5:3, 8–13
P.Bodmer VII and VIII (P72)	1 st century AD	3 rd -4 th century AD	1-2 Peter and Jude
P.Oxy. 2684 (P78)	1 st century AD	3 rd -4 th century AD	Jude 4–5, 7–8
P.Narmuthis 69.39a + 69.229a (P92)	1 st century AD	3 rd -4 th century AD	Ephesians 1:11–13, 19–21 and 2 Thessalonians 1:4–5, 11–12
P.Oxy. 4449 (P100)	1 st century AD	3 rd -4 th century AD	Portions of James 3-5
P.Oxy. 4402 (P102)	1 st century AD	3 rd -4 th century AD	Matthew 4:11–12, 22–23
P.Oxy. 847 (0162)	1 st century AD	3 rd -4 th century AD	John 2:11-22
PSI 2.124 (0171)	1 st century AD	3 rd -4 th century AD	Portions of Matthew 10 and Luke 22
P.Amherst 3b (P12)	1 st century AD	285-300 AD	Hebrews 1:1
Inv. Nr. 5516 (P86)	1 st century AD	300 AD	Matthew 5:13–16, 22–25
Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph)	1 st century AD	4 th century AD	The entire NT
Codex Vaticanus B (03)	1 st century AD	4 th century AD	Most of NT except Hebrews 9:14ff, the Pastoral Epistles, Philemon, Revelation

New Testament Manuscripts			
Name	Original Date	Earliest Copy	Biblical Books
Codex Alexandrinus A (02)	1 st century AD	5 th century AD	Most of the New Testament
Ephraemi Rescriptus C (04)	1 st century AD	5 th century AD	Portions of every book except 2 Thessalonians and 2 John
Bezae/Cantabrigiensis D (05)	1 st century AD	5 th century AD	Gospels and Acts
Washingtonianus W (032)	1 st century AD	5 th century AD	Gospels
Claromontanus D (06)	1 st century AD	6 th century AD	Pauline Epistles and Hebrews
Regius L (019)	1 st century AD	8 th century AD	Gospels
Athous Laurae PSI (044)	1 st century AD	8 th / 9 th century AD	Gospels/Acts/Paul/General Epistles
Augiensis F (010)	1 st century AD	9 th century AD	Pauline Epistles
Boernerianus G (012)	1 st century AD	9 th century AD	Pauline Epistles
Koridethi – THETA (038)	1 st century AD	9 th century AD	Gospels