

For slides see 04.AMW-NT Presentation.pdf

[Slide 1]

NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

Whereas the Old Testament was written over the span of 1000 years, the New Testament was completed within fifty years, during the second half of the first century A.D.

In the first century, Christians treated the Old Testament as their “Scriptures.” But after the apostles died, Christians depended more and more on what the apostles had written. Following Peter and Paul, the church recognized that the apostles’ writings were on the same par as the Old Testament.

Christians began to make copies of the New Testament writings before the end of the first century. Instead of a scroll, the early Christians used a codex, which was constructed much like our modern books.

[Slide 2] **Papyrus**

The earliest copies we possess were written on papyrus, a kind of paper made from the papyrus plant.

The problem with papyrus was that it would only last a few decades in the European climate, so most of the papyri we have were discovered in Egypt where they were preserved by relative dryness.

We possess 127 registered papyrus documents representing various parts of the New Testament. They are considered the earliest and best witnesses to the original text of the New Testament. All but nine of them were discovered in the 20th century.

Important papyrus manuscripts include:

[Slide 3] P⁵²: Dated around 110 – 125 AD, containing a few verses of John 18 (vv. 31-34, 37-38)

[Slide 4] P⁴⁶: Dated to 150 – 250 AD, though some have dated it as early as 80 AD, containing most of Paul’s epistles (except part of Romans, 2 Thessalonians, the Pastoral epistles, and Philemon)

[Slide 5] P⁶⁶: Dated c. 175, containing almost all of John

[Slide 6] **Vellum**

Vellum is a translucent material produced from the skin of a young animal that has been treated so that ink will adhere to it. It came into use in part because of the limited durability of papyrus. It could last as much as 1000 years, even in more humid climates.

When Constantine legalized Christianity in the 4th century and established his capital at Byzantium, he ordered 50 copies of the Bible on vellum. With the durability of vellum, this era produced the earliest existing complete copies of the scriptures.

Important early manuscripts include:

[Slide 7] **ⲛ**: Codex Sinaiticus – Dated around A.D. 350, containing the entire NT

[Slide 8] **B**: Codex Vaticanus – Dated slightly earlier than Sinaiticus, contains all of the OT and most of the NT

[Slide 9] **A**: Codex Alexandrinus – Dated to the fifth century, containing nearly all of the NT

The increasing demand for the Bible led to several developments: the development of a cursive script; the development of paper, the monastic movement, and the use of scriptoria.

[Slide 10] Minuscule 676 – 13th century: an example of a minuscule script

[Slide 11] **The Printing Press** – Gutenberg’s Printing Press – Copying the Bible by hand essentially came to an end with the invention of moveable type and the printing press.

[Slide 12] **TEXTUAL CRITICISM**

1. Definition

[Slide 13] J. Harold Greenlee, *New Testament Textual Criticism*: “*Textual criticism is the study of copies of any written work of which the autograph (the original) is unknown, with the purpose of ascertaining the original text.*”

It is also called “lower criticism” to distinguish it from “higher criticism,” which refers to areas of study that move beyond what the text of scripture is to questions of sources and authorship (source criticism), historicity (historical criticism), literary form (form criticism), development (tradition criticism), and editing (redaction criticism).

Higher criticism is a modern development that arose from evolutionary and antisupernatural philosophies such as rationalism, dialectical materialism, evolution, etc. as a way to deny or destroy biblical Christianity.

[Slide 14] Textual criticism gathers and compares the available manuscripts (mss), and applies objective criteria to try to determine which alternative of a given variant is most likely the reading of the original.

2. The necessity for textual criticism [Slide 15]

- a. The large number and diversity of manuscripts (mss)
 - 1.) There are 5,338 mss, no two exactly alike, with over 400,000 total variants.
 - 2.) Geographical distribution, with the effects of climate on preservation
 - 3.) Historical distribution, with the effects of church history on proliferation, preservation, and duplication
 - 4.) The influence of copying methods: Ignorance of Greek, poor lighting, focusing on one letter or word at a time, and fatigue made errors unavoidable. Multiple copies could be made simultaneously by a room full of scribes writing down what was read from one ms. Errors in reading, pronunciation, hearing, and writing could all produce variants in the text.
- b. Reality check: [Slide 16]
 - 1.) 62.9% of the verses the New Testament have no variants!
We have total certainty as to the reading of almost two-thirds of New Testament verses.
 - 2.) Of over 400,000 total variants, none affects a major doctrine!
One-third of verses and 5,338 mss presents thousands of variants, yet no major doctrine is at stake. (Proponents of the different views concerning textual theories, texts, translation, and versions would do well to remember this point!)