

Reliability of the Bible

Sermon Notes | July 12



OUTCOME

By the end of this teaching, you will be able to explain to someone else how passages of the Old Testament and New Testament were constructed using various manuscripts.

THE PROBLEM WITH ANCIENT DOCUMENTS

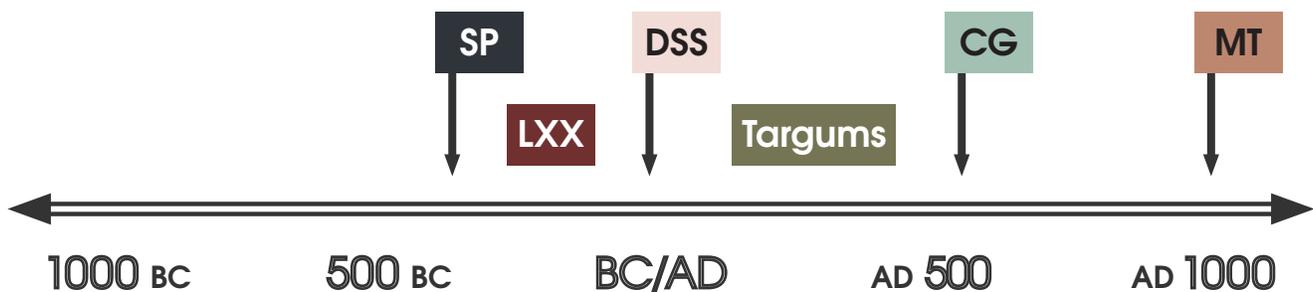
To begin with, you need to know that **NONE** of the original manuscripts of either the New Testament or Old Testament are still in existence - all that remains are imperfect copies.

THE OLD TESTAMENT PROBLEM

The Old Testament was written between 1500 BC (Moses) and 400/300 BC (Chronicles) but the earliest complete Hebrew manuscript of the Old Testament that we have comes from roughly between 500 AD and 1100 AD (Masoretic text).

THE TIMELINE

Is there any data before AD 500?



Masoretic Text (AD 500-1100) - the Masoretes (a group of Jewish scholars) standardized the Hebrew text and included vocalization.

Dead Sea Scrolls (1000 BC) - these scrolls provided manuscript evidence 1000 years earlier than the MT (roughly the time of Christ). 800 scrolls which contained fragments from every Old Testament book except Esther were discovered dating from 250 BC to AD 50. Despite 1,000 years of separation, when the DSS is compared to the Masoretic text, the two are virtually identical, showing very careful scribal transmission.

Cairo Geniza (5th Century AD) - includes 200,000 biblical fragments, providing insight on the Hebrew text before the Masoretic standardization and vocalization.

Samaritan Pentateuch (4th Century BC) - agrees in several places with the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls against the MT.

Targums (3rd to 5th Centuries CE) - a rabbinic interpretation of the Old Testament that was written in Aramaic.

FACTS ABOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. It is important to remember the Bible was written over a period of **1,500** years by at least **40** authors, including: kings, scholars, philosophers, fisherman, poets, statesmen, historians, and doctors.

2. They wrote different types of **LITERATURE**, such as history, poetry, prophesy, apocalyptic and letters.

Work	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span (yrs)	# of Copies
Herodotus	488-428 BC	900 AD	1,350	109
Plato	375 BC	400 AD	1,300	219
Homer's Iliad	800 BC	300 AD	400	2,300
Thucydides	460-400 BC	900 AD	100	95
Tacitus	100 AD	1100 AD	800	20
Caesar's Gallic War	58 - 50 BC	900 AD	950	9-10
Livy's Roman History	59 BC - 17 AD	900 AD	400	150
New Testament	40 -100 AD	130 AD (full manuscripts by 350 AD)	35	5,000+ Greek 10,000 Latin 9,300 Other

**Taken from F.F Bruce's Are The New Testament Documents Reliable?*

3. There are over **5,000** Greek manuscripts, **10,000** Latin manuscripts and **9,300** other manuscripts, as well as **36,000** citing's in the writings of the early church fathers.

4. Homer's Iliad, the greatest of all Greek classical works, is extant in about **457** papyri, **2** uncial manuscripts and **188** minuscule manuscripts; and Euripides tragedies exist in about **54** papyri and **276** parchment manuscripts.

5. The lapse for most classical Greek works is about **1,000** years; whereas the lapse for many books in the New Testament is around **100** years.

6. Although there are certainly differences in many of the New Testament manuscripts, not **ONE** fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading.



7. Because not one original writing (autograph) of a New Testament book still exists, we depend on **COPIES** for reconstructing the original texts.

8. According to most scholars, the closest copy to an autograph is a papyrus manuscript designated **P₅₂**, dated around 110-125, containing a few verses of John 18. Other scholars believe there is an earlier manuscript designated **P₄₆**, which contains the entire collection of Paul's epistles, dated in that later part of the first century.

9. When we speak of recovering the text of the New Testament, we are referring to **INDIVIDUAL BOOKS** of the New Testament, not to the entire volume.

10. The earliest copy of the entire New Testament is the one preserved in **CODEX SINAITICUS**, written about 350 AD. Prior to the 4th century, the New Testament is circulated in various parts.

11. All of the books were **ALTERED** from the original state due to the process of manual copying decade after decade and century after century.

12. The New Testament manuscripts are made of either **PAPYRUS** (plant) or **PARHMENT - VELLUM** (skin).

13. Two forms of writing styles were used. The formal style is called **UNCIALS** (formal) and the informal style is called **MINUSCULES** (cursive).

14. The three categories of works include: **PAPYRI**, **UNCIALS**, and **MINUSCULES**.

15. Manuscripts of papyrus have the Old English letter "**P**" followed by a small superior numeral.

16. The uncial manuscripts are commonly designated by **CAPITAL** letters of the Latin and Greek alphabet and one Hebrew letter. Since the number of manuscripts came to exceed the number of letters, an Arabic numeral preceded by a zero was assigned.

17. Scribes often put **COLOPHONS** or notes in the margins of the books they copied.



18. The act of copying involved four fundamental actions:
- a. The reading to oneself
 - b. The retaining of material to one's memory
 - c. The dictating of this material to oneself (either by memory or out loud)
 - d. The movement of hand in executing the copy

19. Unintentional transmission errors include:
- a. Faulty eyesight
 - b. Faulty hearing
 - c. Errors in the mind
 - d. Errors of judgement

20. Intentional transmission errors include:
- a. Spelling or grammar
 - b. Harmonistic corruptions
 - c. Natural complements
 - d. Cleaning up historical and geographical difficulties
 - e. Conflation of readings
 - f. Doctrinal considerations
 - g. Miscellaneous details

21. As a general rule of thumb, it is always best to take the more **DIFFICULT** and **SHORTER** reading.

F.J. Hort said:

"In the variety and fullness of evidence on which it rests, the text of the New Testament stands absolutely and unapproachably alone among ancient prose writings."

New Testament Scholar F.F. Bruce says:

"The interval then between the dates of the 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. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established."

Renown Paleographer and textual critic Frederic Kenyon says:

"The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries."

