

# Bible Manuscripts

Most Protestant denominations include something comparable to the following as part of their doctrine statements:

*The books of the Old and New Testament are the verbally inspired, plenary Word of God, inerrant in the original writings and faithfully preserved, and they are the supreme and final authority.*

The original manuscripts of the books of the Bible, or *autographs*, no longer exist and current versions of the Bible are based on a variety of manuscript copies of the originals. Included below is a partial list of these manuscripts, listed in approximately chronological order (of the source).

## Old Testament

<b><u>Hebrew Manuscripts</u></b>			
Ketef Hinnom I and II	ca. 600 B.C.	Each scroll contains most of the Priestly Benediction from Numbers 6:24-26.	
Dead Sea (Qumran) Scrolls	ca. 100 B.C. - 70 A.D.	Various portions, including some in Greek and Aramaic	
Nash Papyrus	ca. 100-50 B.C.	Ex. 20:1-17 and Deut. 6:4-9	
British Museum Oriental 4445	ca. 850 A.D.	Part of the Pentateuch	
Codex Cairensis (proto-Masoretic Text)	ca. 895 A.D.	Former and latter Prophets	
Aleppo Codex (Masoretic Text)	900-950 A.D.	Complete Old Testament	
Leningrad MS	ca. 916 A.D.	Latter Prophets	
Leningrad MS B-19A	ca. 1010 A.D.	Complete Old Testament	
Samaritan Pentateuch	11th century	Pentateuch	
Torah Finchasiye	ca. 1204 A.D.	Pentateuch, including Aramaic and Arabic translations	
<b><u>Printed Hebrew Editions</u></b>			
Bologna Edition of Psalter	1477 A.D.	Psalms	
Soncino Edition of Old Testament	1488 A.D.	Entire Old Testament	
Second Bomberg Edition	1525/26 A.D.	Entire Old Testament	
<b><u>Greek Manuscripts</u></b>			
Septuagint (LXX)	ca. 250 – 150 B.C.	Torah (and possibly other books)	Copies only
Rylands Papyrus 458	ca. 150 B.C.	Portions of Deut. 23-28	
Aquila's Version	130 A.D.		Fragments
Chester Beatty Papyri	ca. 150-350 A.D.	Fragments	
Symmachus' Version	170 A.D.	Entire Old Testament	Fragments
Theodotion's Version	ca. 180-190 A.D.	Entire Old Testament	Fragments
Papyrus 911	3rd century	Fragments	
Origen's Hexapla	ca. 240 A.D.	Hebrew and Greek	Partially preserved in copies only
Freer Manuscript V	ca. 250-300 A.D.	Most of the minor prophets, except Hosea	

Codex Vaticanus (B)	ca. 325–350 A.D.	Most of the Old and New Testaments	
Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph)	ca. 375–400 A.D.	Most of the Old and the complete New Testament	
Codex Alexandrinus (A)	ca. 450 A.D.	Most of the Old and New Testaments	
Codex Sarravianus (G)	4th or 5th century	Parts of Genesis through Judges	
Codex Marchalianus (Q)	6th century	Isaiah through Malachi	
Codex Venetus (N)	8th century	Portions of Exodus and Leviticus	
<b><u>Aramaic Manuscripts</u></b>			
Targum of Onkelos	3rd century	Torah	Copies only
Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel	4th century	Joshua to Kings, Isaiah to Malachi	
Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan	650 A.D.	Torah	
Jerusalem Targum	700 A.D.	Torah	
<b><u>Latin Manuscripts</u></b>			
Old Latin or Itala Version	ca. 200 A.D.	Fragments	Copies only
Jerome's Vulgate	ca. 390–404 A.D.	Entire Old Testament	Copies only
Wurzburg Palimpsest Codex	ca. 450 A.D.	Fragments of the Torah and Prophets	
Lyons Codex	ca. 650 A.D.	Fragments from Genesis to Judges	
<b><u>Syriac Manuscripts</u></b>			
Peshitta Syriac Old Testament	2nd or 3rd century	Entire Old Testament	Copies only
Syriac Hexapla	ca. 616 A.D.	Entire Old Testament	
<b><u>Other Manuscripts</u></b>			
Coptic manuscripts	2nd or 3rd century		Copies from the 4th century
Ethiopic manuscripts	ca. 4th century		Copies from the 13th century
Arabic translation of Saadia Gaon	ca. 930 A.D.		

## New Testament

<b><u>Greek Manuscripts</u></b>			
Papyri from Oxyrhynchus, Egypt	100 A.D. - 300 A.D.	Including the Chester Beatty (Dublin) and Martin Bodmer (Geneva) papyri	
Codex Vaticanus (B)	ca. 325–350 A.D.	Most of the Old and New Testaments	
Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph)	ca. 375–400 A.D.	Most of the Old and the complete New Testament	
Codex Alexandrinus (A)	ca. 450 A.D.	Most of the Old and New Testaments	
Codex Ephraemi	5th century	Most of the New Testament	
Codex Bezae (or Codex Cantabrigiensis)	5th or 6th century	Gospels and Acts (Greek and Latin)	
<b><u>Latin Manuscripts</u></b>			
Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis	Possibly 2nd century	Parts of Matthew and Mark	
Codex Vercellensis (a)	4th century	Most of the Gospels	
Jerome's Vulgate	ca. 390–404 A.D.	Entire New Testament	Copies only
Codex Veronensis (b)	5th century	Most of the Gospels	
<b><u>Syriac Manuscripts</u></b>			
Peshitta Syriac New Testament	ca. 5th century		
<b><u>Other Manuscripts</u></b>			
Coptic manuscripts	ca. 3rd century		Copies only
Armenian manuscripts	ca. 5th century		Copies only
Georgian manuscripts	ca. 5th century		Copy from 897 A.D.
Ethiopic manuscripts	4th-7th century		Copies from the 13th century

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## Texts, Versions, Manuscripts, Editions

THE ORIGINALS of the books that comprise the Hebrew [OT](#) and the books of the Greek [NT](#) have not survived. We do, however, have very old copies of the original books, which are called 'manuscripts' ([MSS](#)) because they were hand-written. Moreover, both [OT](#) and [NT](#) books were translated into other languages of the ancient Near East and copies of these early translations, called 'versions' ([VSS](#)), are available to us. Through the science of textual criticism, biblical scholars have been able to establish rather accurate texts for both the [OT](#) and the [NT](#) books. These are available to us today in printed editions.

### *The Hebrew Text of the Old Testament*

**The Writing of the [OT](#) Books:** An example of how an [OT](#) book came to be written can be found in Jeremiah 36. Baruch, the scribe of Jeremiah, recorded the spoken messages of the prophet ([v.](#) 4). When the king destroyed the original scroll ([vv.](#) 20-23), Baruch produced another scroll and added other prophetic messages to the original ([v.](#) 32).

The language spoken in Judah at the time was Hebrew, and with the exception of portions of Daniel and Ezra, which are in Aramaic, the books of the [OT](#) were written in Hebrew.

Hebrew, together with Canaanite, Moabite, Phoenician, and Ugaritic, belongs to the Northwest Semitic family of languages. The Hebrew alphabet, consisting of twenty-two consonants, can be traced back to about 1000 B.C. The shape of the letters underwent a process of change from the earlier cursive form to the boxlike shape called the 'square script,' which is known from pre-Christian times. This Northwest Semitic alphabet was taken over from the Phoenicians by the Greeks and with some adaptations is the alphabet of the Greek [NT](#). This Greek alphabet became the progenitor of all European alphabets that have spread the world over.

Although other writing materials were known, parchment (made of leather) and papyrus (from the papyrus plant) were in wide use hundreds of years before the biblical books came to be written. Reed pens were used to write on these materials with ink made of soot mixed with a solution of gum.

**The Transmission of the Hebrew Text:** Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls ([DSS](#)) in 1947, the Hebrew [MSS](#) (other than the Nash Papyrus fragment) were dated no earlier than the ninth century A.D. The discoveries at Qumran, however, have pushed the [MS](#) tradition of the Hebrew Bible back a thousand years. One reason for the scarcity of early Hebrew [MSS](#) was the reverence with which the scrolls were held in Judaism. When [MSS](#) showed signs of wear and tear, they were disposed of. And since Jewish scribes exercised great care in copying the sacred books, they did not think that older copies had any advantage over new ones.

Variant readings, however, did creep into the copies of the Hebrew books; this became a growing concern to Jewish rabbis, and by the end of the first century of the Christian era a kind of standard text emerged. At the end of the fifth century A.D., the scribal tradition, popularly traced back to Ezra, was continued by scholars known as Masoretes (literally [Heb.](#), 'transmitters'), and because of their work on the text of the [OT](#), our Hebrew Bible today is said to have the Masoretic Text ([MT](#)).

Scribes in the pre-Masoretic period had already made word and paragraph divisions in the Hebrew text (not to be confused with the chapter divisions of our Bibles today, which were introduced as late as the fourteenth century A.D.). The Masoretes, whose centers of activity were Babylonia and Tiberias, were bent on preserving the most accurate consonantal text possible. To prevent the misreading of the original consonantal text, they introduced vowel signs into the Hebrew Bible and thereby fixed the pronunciation of words. They left the original consonantal text unchanged, except for corrections and improvements, which they placed in the margin. The textual notes supplied by the Masoretes are called Masorah. After the Masoretic schools of Babylonia became defunct (prior to the tenth century A.D.), the Tiberian school continued its textual studies.

Two families, Ben Asher and Ben Naphthali, vied with each other in transcribing and preserving the best Hebrew text on which the printed editions of the Hebrew Bible were later based. The Ben Asher tradition has generally been preferred by scholars.

**mss of the Hebrew Bible:** Before the discovery of the DSS, the chief extant MSS of the Hebrew OT were: the Cairo Codex of the Prophets (A.D. 894); the Aleppo Codex of the entire OT (ca. A.D. 930); the Leningrad Codex (ca. A.D. 1008), which formed the basis of Rudolf Kittel's third edition of the Hebrew Bible; the British Museum Codex of the Pentateuch (first five books of the OT = Torah) (ca. A.D. 950); the Leningrad Codex of the Prophets (A.D. 1016); and the Reuchlin Codex of the Prophets (ca. A.D. 1105), which, unlike the others mentioned here, stands in the Ben Naphthali rather than the Ben Asher tradition. There are other MSS, some of them quite fragmentary, but these are the most important MSS of the OT in the Masoretic tradition. With the discovery of the DSS in the Judean desert in 1947 and following, we now have MSS a thousand years older than those just mentioned. The largest copies of OT books found in the caves at Qumran are two Isaiah scrolls (one complete, one incomplete). Fragments of over a hundred scrolls of OT books have been discovered at Qumran and Murraba'at on the western shore of the Dead Sea. The texts reflect some diversity of readings, but they also show a trend toward a standard Hebrew text.

**The Printed Hebrew Bible:** Jewish scholars faithfully transcribed the MT during the Middle Ages. With the invention of printing in the fifteenth century, however, Jewish printers in Italy began putting portions of the Hebrew OT into print. The entire OT was first published in Soncino in 1488. Rabbinic Bibles, which contained not only the biblical text but also Targums (translations of Hebrew OT books into Aramaic) and commentaries, were also put into print. The first such Bible was published by Daniel Bomberg of Venice, in 1416-17. This served as a base for the rabbinic Bible edited by Jacob ben Chayyim in 1524-25.

About 1520, Christian scholars began to publish the so-called polyglot Bibles, in which the Hebrew text was included as one column beside others in other languages. The Complutensian Polyglot, published in 1522, was prepared by Cardinal Ximenes and published in Spain. Other polyglots followed. The most massive was the London Polyglot (1654-57), which had not only the Hebrew text but the Samaritan Pentateuch, a Targum (Aramaic), the Septuagint (LXX; Greek), the Vulgate (Latin), the Peshitta (Syriac), and other versions.

Bomberg's printed Bible enjoyed almost canonical status up to the twentieth century. Although other editions were published, it was only in 1937, when Rudolf Kittel published his third edition, that the ben Chayyim tradition was abandoned. Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica*, which became a kind of international standard, was based on the Leningrad Codex. Recently the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensis* was published. It has made few changes in the text itself as Kittel published it but has improved the textual apparatus. Other printed editions of the Hebrew Bible are in the process of preparation.

### *The Versions of the OT*

**The Samaritan Pentateuch:** This is, strictly speaking, not a version, but simply the Hebrew Pentateuch written in Samaritan letters. It arose out of the conflict between the Samaritan and the Jewish communities in the fifth century B.C. The Samaritans established their own place of worship at Shechem (now Nablus) and accepted the Pentateuch as their Bible. Since this Pentateuch was prepared long before the Hebrew text became standardized, it is an important witness to the early form of the OT text.

The Samaritan text differs from the MT in about six thousand places, but most of the variations are trifling, having to do with grammar and spelling. In some places it is closer to the DSS; in about sixteen hundred places it agrees with the Greek LXX. Although the Samaritan Pentateuch was known to some church fathers, it was not until A.D. 1616 that European scholars were able to obtain a copy of it. It was published for the first time in the Paris Polyglot Bible in 1632.

The most important copy of the Samaritan Pentateuch is the Nablus Scroll, still in the hands of the Samaritans. It probably dates from the early centuries of the Christian era. The standard printed edition of the Samaritan Pentateuch was published at Giessen, Germany, by A. von Gall in 1914-18 and is based on some

eighty MSS. It was reprinted in Berlin in 1963. The Samaritan Pentateuch is an independent witness to the Hebrew text.

**The Aramaic Targums:** By the time the Jews returned from Babylon in the fifth century B.C., they had pretty nearly made the switch from Hebrew to Aramaic as their spoken language. The ancient Hebrew, however, remained the language of the sacred books. It became necessary, therefore, to translate the biblical text into Aramaic for those who attended the synagogue. These oral paraphrases were eventually put into writing and are called Targums (*targum* meaning ‘translation’ or ‘paraphrase’). The Targums that have survived show either a Palestinian or a Babylonian provenance.

A complete MS of an Old Palestinian Targum of the Pentateuch (Codex Neofiti I) was discovered in the Vatican Library as recently as 1957. In addition, there are the Jerusalem I and II Targums of the Pentateuch, wrongly ascribed to Jonathan and known, therefore, also as the Pseudo-Jonathan Targums. The official Targum of the Pentateuch took shape in Babylonia and is called Targum Onkelos. It dates from the second or third century A.D.

Several Targums of the Prophets are also available. The official Babylonian Targum of the Prophets is known as Targum Jonathan bar Uzziel. It was published in Leiden, the Netherlands, by A. Sperber (the Former Prophets, 1959; the Latter, 1962). The Targums of the third division of the Hebrew Bible, the Writings, reflect a greater diversity in style. There are Targums for most of the books in this division with the exception of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel (parts of Ezra and Daniel are already in Aramaic). A Targum of the book of Job was discovered at Qumran. Some of the Targums of the Writings can hardly be called paraphrases, let alone translations; they are more like commentaries.

Some of the OT quotations in the NT are closer to the Targums than to the Hebrew original (see, e.g., Mark 4:12; Eph. 4:8).

**The Greek Translations of the OT:** *The Septuagint VS.* Greek-speaking Jews in the Diaspora (Dispersion) were in need of a Bible in Greek. In Alexandria, which had a large Jewish community, efforts were made to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. According to a tradition preserved in the Letter of Aristeas, the Egyptian Ptolemy Philadelphus, who ruled 285-246 B.C., sent a delegation to the high priest in Jerusalem who, in response, chose six men from each of the twelve tribes and sent them to Alexandria with a copy of the Hebrew Torah (the first five books of the OT). These men translated the Hebrew Pentateuch into Greek in seventy-two days. Other versions of this story add interesting details, but there is considerable doubt about the trustworthiness of some of these traditions. In any case, the translation got the name Septuagint, meaning ‘seventy.’ Perhaps because seventy elders accompanied Moses up the mountain to receive the Law it was only appropriate that the number should be rounded off to seventy (the symbol for the Septuagint, LXX, is seventy in Latin numerals).

As time went on, the Prophets and also the Writings were translated into Greek, and since different translators were involved, the style of the LXX is not uniform. By the time of Jesus ben Sirach (late second century B.C.), the LXX was completed.

The LXX contains not only the books of the Hebrew Bible but also the Apocrypha. Also, there are a number of passages that have been transposed by the LXX translators. The Psalms, for example, are rather scrambled. Job is considerably shorter in the LXX than in Hebrew. The unevenness of the style of the LXX may be due not only to the different translators but also to the fact that the Hebrew text they used differed somewhat from the later standardized text.

The LXX became the Bible not only of Greek-speaking Jews but also of the early Greek-speaking Christians. However, due to the controversies between church and synagogue and the emergence of a standardized Hebrew text about A.D. 100, the LXX lost its popularity in the Jewish community. The preservation of the LXX must then be credited to the Christian church. It is available in the great codices from the fourth and fifth centuries A.D.—Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Alexandrinus, and others (see below under NT). The first printed edition of the LXX was published in 1522 in the Complutensian Polyglot Bible. In the English-

speaking world, the edition of H. B. Swete, published at Cambridge (1887-94), became popular. Alfred Rahlfs, who edited the LXX published by the Württemberg Bible Society in 1935, knew of fifteen hundred complete and fragmentary MSS of the LXX. Several more have been discovered since. At present, a new edition of the LXX is being published in stages, known as the Goettingen Septuagint.

*Revisions and Rival Versions of the LXX.* Once the LXX had been renounced by the Jewish community, other translations emerged. Aquila of Sinope produced a slavishly literal translation of the Hebrew text into Greek (ca. A.D. 130). At the end of the second century A.D., Theodotion produced a very free translation of the Hebrew books into Greek. It became so popular that the church preferred his version of Daniel to that of the LXX. About A.D. 170 Symmachus prepared a Greek version of the OT. He tried to produce an idiomatic and accurate translation.

A revision of the LXX was undertaken by the famous Christian scholar Origen at the beginning of the third century. His monumental work is known as the Hexapla—a sixfold version of the OT. It was completed about A.D. 245. This massive work had the Hebrew text in the first column, the Hebrew text written in Greek letters in the second, Aquila's Greek version in the third, Symmachus' version in the fourth, a revision of the LXX in the fifth, and the Greek translation of Theodotion in the sixth column. The whole work ran to nearly seven thousand pages. Only fragments of the entire work are available in MS form. Fortunately, Origen's fifth column (i.e., the LXX) was recopied several times and is available in extant MSS. Moreover, his revised LXX was translated into Syriac before the Hexapla was lost in the Moslem conquests of the seventh century.

In the century following Origen, three editions of the LXX were published. Eusebius of Caesarea supplied Constantine with copies of the Bible that contained the fifth column of Origen's Hexapla. Also, Lucian of Samosata, who died a martyr's death in A.D. 311, undertook a revision of the LXX. A third edition of the LXX was prepared by Hesychius of Egypt. These different versions of the LXX tended to intermingle, and so it is somewhat difficult to establish the original form of the LXX.

No version of the OT has been so significant in the history of Bible translation as the LXX. Also, it was the text from which the NT writers, who wrote in Greek, quoted most often. Moreover, the translation of Hebrew words into Greek resulted in Greek words taking on Hebraic meanings, a fact of great significance for the interpretation of the NT. Thus, for example, 'grace' came to mean God's benevolence, not simply human charm or pleasantness.

**Other Ancient vss:** The OT was translated into many other languages in the early centuries of the Christian era. Since most of these vss contain both OT and NT, they are discussed under the NT section. Suffice it to say here that the OT was translated into Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Georgian, and Gothic by the fifth century A.D., and into Slavonic and Arabic by the tenth.

### *The New Testament: Formation and Language*

About the time when the text of the OT books was assuming standard form (first century A.D.), the books that were to constitute the NT were being written. Before the NT books were written, the teachings of Jesus circulated in oral form. It was standard practice in the ancient Near East to pass on traditions in oral form. With the expansion of the church into the Mediterranean world, the need for written material arose. By the end of the first century, most of the books of the NT had been written, and eventually twenty-seven such books comprised what Christians call the NT.

The copying of the original writings must have begun very early, for a fragment of John's Gospel circulated in Egypt early in the second century (P<sup>52</sup>). Copying was done for both private and public use. In the process, errors tended to slip in, as can be seen from extant MSS.

By the time the NT books came to be written, Greek was the principal language of the Mediterranean world, although Latin was the official language of the Roman government. Greek is one of a number of languages that constitute the Indo-European family. Different dialects had been absorbed into the Greek language spread by the conquests of Alexander, producing a widespread dialect called Koine (Gk., 'common'). The NT books were written in Koine Greek, the language of that day. There are also some

Latinisms in the NT, since Latin was the official language of the government. Also, the vocabulary and style of the Greek NT have been strongly influenced by its Hebrew and Aramaic backgrounds.

### ***The Character of the NT MSS***

**Scrolls and Codices:** Some of our earliest copies of the NT are papyrus MSS. From the third century on, however, parchment became the standard writing material up to the age of printing (fifteenth century), when paper replaced both papyrus and parchment. Writing on papyrus or parchment was done ‘with pen and ink’ (3 John 13). The ink was normally black or brown, although deluxe codices were at times written in silver or gold on fine parchment, called vellum. Red ink was not uncommon for titles, headings, and initial letters or lines.

The form of the NT books originally was that of a roll. The writing on these rolls was arranged in a series of columns. Finding passages in rolls was not very convenient and so about the beginning of the second century the codex (the leaf-form of a book) came into use in the church.

**Styles of Writing:** Two basic types of writing style were in use: the cursive or ‘running’ hand, which could be written more rapidly, and the more formal style, somewhat resembling our capital letters. MSS in this more literary style are called ‘uncials,’ those in the flowing hand are called ‘minuscules.’ NT MSS from the third to the sixth centuries are generally uncial; the minuscules are generally from a later period.

**Palimpsests:** Since parchment was costly, the original writing was at times scraped and washed off, the surface resmoothed and then used again. Such copies are called palimpsests (from two Greek words meaning ‘rescraped’). Of the 252 uncial MSS of the NT extant, 52 are palimpsests.

**Helps for Readers:** Some MSS of the NT provide helps for readers. There are, for example, chapter divisions (these divisions bear little relation to our present chapter divisions). These divisions often have headings (called *titloi* in Greek). Some scribes supplied information about the life of the author of the NT book or explained difficult words in the margins and between the lines. Some MSS are rich in Christian art. Since the NT books were read in worship, some have the beginning and end of the lessons clearly marked. In fact, a great many MSS are called ‘lectionaries,’ since they contain the lessons to be read during the church year.

### ***Classification of NT MSS***

**Their Number:** There are some five thousand complete or partial MSS of NT books available. To these must be added the thousands of copies of VSS of the Greek NT, which date from the early centuries of the Christian era. Also, there are numerous quotations of NT passages in the writings of the church fathers. Compared with the relatively small number of MSS of nonbiblical books from the ancient world, the NT is extremely well documented. The antiquity of some of the NT MSS is as impressive as the number.

**Listing NT MSS:** Before standard lists were universally accepted, it was often difficult to know where some of the MSS were located. Different systems of labeling or numbering added to the confusion. The standard list of Greek NT MSS was begun by C. R. Gregory, 1908, and his work has been superseded by the work of K. Aland, 1963.

MSS are classified on the basis of writing material. Papyrus MSS are listed separately from those made of parchment and are identified by a ‘P,’ followed by a superior number (P<sup>45</sup>, for example, is a codex belonging to the Chester Beatty Papyri). Uncial MSS are commonly designated by the capital letters of the Latin and Greek alphabets. Since, however, the number of uncials exceeds the number of letters of the Latin and Greek alphabets, they also have an Arabic numeral assigned to them, preceded by a zero (the Vaticanus, for example, has the designation ‘B, 03’). Several uncial MSS are so important they also have names (Vaticanus, Alexandrinus, etc.). The minuscule MSS are referred to simply by Arabic numerals. Lectionaries are designated by the letter ‘l,’ followed by an Arabic numeral.

**Significant Uncial MSS:** Heading the list is the *Sinaiticus*. This codex was discovered after other uncials had already been assigned their letters of the alphabet, and since it was thought unwise to renumber the MSS,

the Sinaiticus received the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet (*aleph*). Where publishers do not use Hebrew characters, the letter 'S' (Sinaiticus) is at times used to indicate this MS. It was discovered by the German scholar Constantine von Tischendorf in the middle of the nineteenth century in the monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai and was eventually given to the Russian Czar Alexander II, patron of the Greek Orthodox Church. The British Museum purchased the MS in 1933. It contains both the OT and the NT in Greek. In addition to the twenty-seven books of the NT, it has two other early Christian writings, *The Shepherd of Hermas* and *The Epistle of Barnabas*. The text is written on vellum with four columns to the page. The date is late fourth (or early fifth) century.

The *Alexandrinus* dates from the middle of the fifth century. Evidently it came from Alexandria to Constantinople. In 1627, it came to England from Constantinople, and it lies next to the Sinaiticus in the British Museum. Originally it contained all of the OT (in Greek) and the NT, together with *1-2 Clement* and *The Psalms of Solomon*. However, most of Matthew is missing. It has two columns per page and is written on vellum with black ink. It was the first great uncial made accessible to scholars and so got the letter 'A.'

The *Vaticanus* comes from the fourth century and originally contained all the books of the Bible. Today some parts are missing. Missing are the NT books from Hebrews 9:14 onwards (including the Pastorals). Each page has three columns of text, written on fine vellum. Unfortunately a corrector has spoiled it somewhat by going over the original copy. It is in the Vatican library.

*Codex Ephraemi* is a fifth-century palimpsest. Someone erased the text of the NT in the twelfth century and wrote the sermons of Ephraim, the Syrian church father, over it. Tischendorf deciphered the biblical text behind the sermons and published his findings in 1845. Only 64 leaves of the OT (in Greek) are left. Of the NT, there are 145 leaves, containing portions of every book of the NT, except 2 Thessalonians and 2 John. The codex has only one column of text per page. It is in the National Library in Paris.

*Codex Bezae* is a bilingual MS of uncertain provenance, with the Greek page on the left facing the Latin page on the right. It contains only the Gospels (in the Western order: Matthew, John, Luke, Mark) and Acts. The text is written in 'sense lines,' which means that some are short and others are long. The first three lines of each NT book are in red ink. It was presented to Cambridge University by Theodore Beza, successor of John Calvin at Geneva, and so it is also called 'Codex Cantabrigiensis.' It comes from the fifth (possibly sixth) century and has a remarkable number of unique readings.

**Minuscules:** The minuscules are generally of a later date, but the date alone does not determine the value of a MS. When a copy is made from an early parent MS, the date of the parent MS rather than the date of the copy is what counts. There are almost three thousand minuscules (complete or partial) known to scholars today. Whereas most of them reflect a kind of fourth-century standard text, called Byzantine, some minuscules are in the Western or Alexandrian tradition.

**Ancient Papyrus mss:** A great many secular papyri had been discovered in the sands of Egypt before any biblical texts on papyrus came to light. In 1931, Chester Beatty, an American who lived in Dublin, was able to purchase twelve MSS discovered in a graveyard in Egypt. These Chester Beatty Papyri, as they are now called, pushed the date of the earliest MS of the NT back to about A.D. 200 or 250.

Among the Chester Beatty papyri, P<sup>45</sup> comprises portions of 30 leaves of a papyrus book that originally had about 220 leaves and contained all four Gospels and Acts. P<sup>46</sup> comprises 86 leaves of the Pauline Letters. Portions of several Letters are lacking, and the pastoral Letters apparently were not included in the first place. P<sup>47</sup> comprises 10 leaves of the book of Revelation.

Since the purchase of the Chester Beatty Papyri, the most important addition to the collection of papyrus MSS was made by M. Martin Bodmer, of Geneva. In 1956, the discovery of Bodmer II, written about A.D. 200, was announced. This MS (P<sup>66</sup>) contains a major portion of the Gospel of John. P<sup>72</sup> was edited in 1959 and contains, among other things, the Letter of Jude and the two Letters of Peter, providing us with the oldest text of these writings. P<sup>75</sup> is another early MS of Luke and John, dated between A.D. 175 and 225. This is our

earliest copy of Luke's Gospel and one of the earliest of John.

### *Translations of the Greek NT*

**Early Eastern Versions:** *The Syriac VSS.* One of the first efforts to render the Greek Gospels into Syriac was that of Tatian, who produced what has come to be called the *Diatessaron* (literally 'through four,' but in the sense of a 'harmony of four parts'). Either before he left Rome, where he was a student of Justin Martyr, or after his return to his homeland in the Land of the Two Rivers (second century), he wove the four Gospels together into one continuous account. It came to be known in the East as the 'mixed' Gospel. The whole work had some fifty-five chapters, and that suggests that the *Diatessaron* was designed to be read in the churches. The *Diatessaron* became very popular and was translated into a number of other languages (Persian, Arabic, Latin, Dutch, Medieval German, Old Italian, and Middle English). In 1933, a fragment of the *Diatessaron* in Greek was discovered and so there has been some debate on whether the 'harmony' was made first in Greek and then translated into Syriac or whether it was made in Syriac to begin with.

For some time, the *Diatessaron* circulated side by side with other Syriac translations of the Gospels, known as the *Old Syriac VSS.* Little was known about ancient Syriac vss until 1842, when a fragmentary codex of the four Gospels from the fifth century came to the British Museum with a mass of Syriac ms material. Dr. Cureton of the museum edited this codex and found it to be an Old Syriac vs of the Gospels. It is now called the 'Curetonian Syriac.' In 1892, a palimpsest ms of the four Gospels in Syriac was discovered in the Monastery of St. Catherine. It is now called the 'Sinaitic Syriac.' These Syriac texts take us back to the late second or early third century. Unfortunately, no ms of the Old Syriac vs for Acts and the Letters has yet been discovered, although we have quotations from these books in the Syriac church fathers. As time went on, the Old Syriac vs was superseded by the Peshitta.

The *Peshitta* (Syriac, 'simple') was prepared in the early part of the fifth century and became the standard version of the Syriac church. It contains also the OT. The Pentateuch seems to have been translated in the second or third century A.D. Whether Jewish scholars were involved in the first attempts to translate the OT into Syriac is not altogether certain. In contrast to the LXX and the Latin Vulgate, the *Peshitta* originally omitted the Apocrypha. These books were added later. In its official form, the *Peshitta* included only twenty-two books of the NT. More than three hundred and fifty *Peshitta* MSS of the NT are available to scholars today.

In A.D. 509, Philoxenus, bishop in eastern Syria, asked a certain Polycarp to revise the *Peshitta*. His effort was in turn revised again in 616 by Thomas of Harkel. These revised vss include also the five books of the NT absent from the *Peshitta*. There is also the Palestinian Syriac vs in the Aramaic dialect of Christians in Palestine. It dates from the fifth century and is known chiefly from lectionaries of the Gospels, preserved in several MSS from the eleventh or twelfth centuries.

*The Coptic VSS.* Various dialects were spoken in Egypt in the early centuries of the Christian era. Outside of Greek-speaking Alexandria, Bohairic was the tongue of the common people. Farther up the Nile, Sahidic was spoken. Bohairic is the language of the Coptic church's liturgy to this day. About the beginning of the third century, portions of the NT were translated into Sahidic. The Bohairic vs appears to be somewhat later. Both vss preserve some very interesting readings and are important witnesses to the NT text.

*The Armenian VS.* Since it is one of the most beautiful and accurate translations, it is sometimes called 'the Queen of the Versions.' With the exception of the Latin Vulgate, more MSS of this vs are extant than of any other early vs. Christianity came to Armenia in the third century and eventually the entire country became officially Christian. In the early part of the fifth century, an Armenian alphabet had been devised by Mesrop. Whether the translation was made from the Greek or from the Syriac is still a question of debate. The early Armenian vs seems to have undergone a revision in the eighth century.

*The Georgian VS.* Georgia lies between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, north of Armenia. Christianity came here in the fourth century. Again, an alphabet had to be devised before the NT could be translated into Georgian. The Gospels at least were translated as early as the middle of the fifth century. The majority view seems to be that the translation was made from the Armenian vs. Later it was revised and

brought into closer conformity with the Greek text. The oldest Gospel MS in Georgian is the Adysh MS of A.D. 897.

*The Ethiopic VS.* There is some debate among scholars whether the Ethiopic vs dates as early as the fourth century or whether it comes from the sixth or seventh. Ethiopia had an alphabet long before the time of Christ. Christianity came to Ethiopia by the end of the fourth century and eventually the entire country became officially Christian. Whether the Old Ethiopic (known as Ge'ez) vs was based on a Greek or a Syriac original is not clear. It was revised later in the light of the Greek. The earliest MS available is a codex of the four Gospels from the thirteenth century.

*Other Eastern VSS.* The Bible was also translated into Arabic, Persian, and other Eastern languages, but they are too far removed from the first-century Greek NT to be of great help in establishing the text of the NT.

**Early Western vss: Old Latin VSS.** As Latin came to be adopted as the language of the West, the need for a Latin Bible arose. It appears that the first attempts to render the Bible into Latin were made in the Roman province of Africa. During the third century, several Old Latin vss circulated not only in North Africa but also in Europe. No codex of the entire Bible is extant, but a goodly number of MSS of the Gospels and Acts are available. The rest of the NT is not represented that well. Representing the African family, there is Codex Palatinus, a fifth-century MS of the Gospels, now at Trent. More important is Codex Bobiensis, now at Turin, containing about half of Matthew and Mark, representing a text that goes back to the second century.

Of the European family, the most outstanding is the fourth-century Codex Vercellensis, now at Vercelli in northern Italy. It is the most important MS of the Gospels in Old Latin next to Bobiensis. Codex Veronensis, stored at Verona, Italy, is a fifth-century codex, written in silver and occasionally gold letters on purple parchment. Codex Colbertinus comes from the twelfth century but has the Gospels in Old Latin. One of the largest MSS in the world is appropriately called 'Gigas' (giant). Its pages are 20 × 36 inches. It was in Prague until it was moved to Stockholm in 1648. It contains the whole Bible in Latin, but only Acts and the book of Revelation are in Old Latin; the other books are from the Vulgate.

The Old Latin Bible was printed in several volumes at Oxford, beginning in 1883, and another series was begun in Rome in 1912. At the moment, an ambitious project is under way at the Monastery of Beuron in Württemberg, Germany, to publish the most trustworthy Old Latin Bible to date.

*The Latin Vulgate.* Several forms of the Old Latin vs were in circulation in the fourth century. In A.D. 382, Pope Damasus asked the scholar Jerome to bring some order out of the chaos. Jerome began his work in Rome but later moved to Bethlehem. His revised Latin vs was not immediately accepted and for some time Old Latin and Vulgate vss circulated side by side. Eventually, however, Jerome's version won out and got the name 'Vulgate' (in the sense of 'common' or 'popular'). More than eight thousand MSS of the Vulgate are extant today.

It was inevitable, in the course of time, that Jerome's original Vulgate should be corrupted by errors in transmission. Several attempts were made, therefore, to purify the Vulgate text. About A.D. 800, Charlemagne engaged the famous British monk Alcuin to carry out a revision. In the thirteenth century, scholars at the University of Paris revised it, and this became the basis for the first printed Bible, produced by Gutenberg in 1456. When the Council of Trent decreed (1546) that the Latin Vulgate was to be regarded as the authoritative version, it was quickly recognized that the Vulgate had no one standard form and required a thorough revision once again. Out of such efforts emerged the Sixto-Clementine Vulgate in 1592, which became a kind of 'authorized version' of the Roman Catholic church. A critical edition of the NT was published at Oxford beginning in 1890. Since 1907, Benedictine scholars have been working on a revision of the Latin Vulgate.

Among the most trustworthy MSS of the Vulgate are Codex Amiatinus (Florence), Codex Cavensis (Salerno), Codex Dublinensis (Book of Armagh, at Dublin), Codex Fuldensis (Fulda), the Lindisfarne Gospels (British Museum), Codex Sangallensis (St. Gall), and others.

*The Gothic VS.* Shortly after the middle of the fourth century, Ulfilas (meaning 'Little Wolf'), who was a

missionary among the Goths of the lower Danube, translated the Bible from Greek into Gothic. For this purpose he had to create an alphabet—primarily from Greek and Latin characters but also from Gothic runes—and reduce the language to a written form. He translated the OT from the standard Greek VS; for the NT, Ulfilas used the Greek text that had established itself at Byzantium. It was a rather literal translation and is the earliest known literary monument in a Germanic dialect. Several fragmentary MSS of the Gothic Bible are available. The most complete is Codex Argenteus ('the Silver Codex') from the fifth century, which is now in Uppsala, Sweden.

*The Old Slavonic VS.* About the middle of the ninth century, a Moravian Empire was formed in eastern Europe that professed Christianity. King Rostislav, in order to check the growth of Frankish influence from the West, in 863 asked that Slavonic-speaking priests be sent from Byzantium. Two brothers, Constantine (who later assumed the name Cyril) and Methodius, responded to the invitation. They devised a Slavonic alphabet and translated the Scriptures from Greek into Slavonic.

### ***The Printed Greek NT***

**The First Printings:** With the invention of printing, a new era dawned in the history of the transmission of the biblical text. The practice of copying MSS was discontinued and paper replaced parchment as writing and printing material. With the Renaissance and the Reformation, interest in the biblical languages was revived and this led to the printing of the Greek NT.

Cardinal Ximenes was the first to put the Greek NT into print in the Complutensian Polyglot Bible. This massive four-volume work came off the press in Spain in 1514, but ecclesiastical authorities delayed its publication. So it happened that Erasmus of Rotterdam was the first to publish a printed Greek NT in 1516. His first edition was a diglot, with the Greek column alongside his own translation of the Greek into Latin. Erasmus' Greek NT had a poor MS base, for he had only few MSS at his disposal and most of them were of a late date. He published five editions of the Greek NT. With minor changes, this text was published again and again during the next three hundred years. It came to be known as the Textus Receptus because of the claim in the Greek NT published by the Elzevir brothers of Leiden in 1633 that this was the text received by all. It was essentially the text that had become a kind of standard in Antioch of Syria in the fourth century. For that reason, it is also known as the Antiochian or Syrian text. And since this text became common in the Eastern church with its seat at Byzantium, it is also called the Byzantine text. It is this text that underlies the KJV.

**The Search for a More Trustworthy Text:** For the next two centuries, scholars put forth serious efforts to collect variant readings from the Greek MSS, the VSS, and the church fathers. With the discovery of new MS material in the nineteenth century, it became obvious that the Byzantine text did not represent the best and earliest form of the Greek NT. Through hundreds of years of copying, a great many variant readings had crept in. Some of these errors were made unintentionally, but others were made deliberately. Fortunately, no major doctrine is affected by these variant readings.

Copyists at times made mistakes because they wrote from dictation and the ear could not always distinguish clearly between some of the vowels and diphthongs. Other mistakes were made because the eye did not clearly distinguish between letters that looked alike or because a word or line was missed. Sometimes errors were made when the scribes carried over words or phrases from parallel passages they had stored away in their memory.

Occasionally, scribes tried to improve upon the text and wrote comments in the margins and these were at times incorporated into the text at a later stage. Scholars call them 'glosses.' Some changes involved the spelling of words; others reflect the tendency to bring one Gospel in line with another, or to bring OT quotations in the NT in line with their OT form. At times, copyists wanted to clear up a difficulty in the text for the reader or even altered a reading out of doctrinal or liturgical considerations.

The science of textual criticism began when scholars became aware of the multitude of variant readings in the MSS of the Greek NT. A number of seventeenth-century scholars did the spade work in the field of textual criticism. Important names to be mentioned in connection with this endeavor include John Fell (1625-

86), John Mill (1645-1707), Edward Wells (1667-1727)—all of Oxford; Richard Bentley (1662-1742) of Cambridge; J. A. Bengel (1687-1752), of Tübingen; and Jakob Wettstein (1693-1754), a native of Basel. The foundations of a more scientific approach in textual criticism were laid by J. J. Griesbach (1745-1812) who, on the basis of his study of the Greek *mss*, the *vss*, and the church fathers, isolated three larger families (i.e., texts related to one another) in the textual transmission of the *NT*: Alexandrian, Western, and Byzantine. Also, he laid down some fifteen rules of textual criticism, many of which hold even today.

In the nineteenth century, scholars like Charles Lachmann (1793-1851), L. F. K. von Tischendorf (1815-74), and S. P. Tregelles (1813-75) helped to overthrow the rule of the *Textus Receptus*. The most noteworthy edition of the Greek *NT* at the end of the nineteenth century (1881) was published by the Cambridge scholars B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort. One weakness in their approach was that they put too much stock in the *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus*, which they called the ‘neutral text’ (in the sense of ‘uncontaminated by error’). Conversely, they had too negative a view of the Byzantine text. As scholarly studies continued and new *ms* material came to light (even as late as the middle of the twentieth century), Westcott and Hort’s approach had to be modified.

Today, many scholars argue that one cannot simply follow the readings of those Greek *mss*, *vss*, and church fathers that belong to one or the other textual family, whether this be Alexandrian, Western, Byzantine, or Caesarean (not all accept the latter as a distinct family). Every reading has to be weighed and considered on its own merits. This is sometimes called the ‘eclectic’ method. In studying variant readings, the age of the text is more important than the age of the *ms*. Readings supported by ancient witnesses, especially when these come from a wide geographical area, are generally preferred. The quality, not the quantity, of *mss* is the determining factor in choosing a reading. Also, the shorter reading is usually preferred, for scribes tended to add or expand. Moreover, the more difficult reading is usually correct, since copyists tended to ease difficult readings. In parallel texts (i.e., the Gospels), differences in readings are generally preferred, for there was a tendency to harmonize parallel passages. The reading from which the other variant readings seem to be derived is likely to be correct. These rules (and others) help the textual critic to weigh the evidence and to determine what seems to be the correct reading.

In 1966, after a decade of work by an international committee, the United Bible Societies published an edition of the Greek *NT* for Bible translators and students. The third edition of this text was published in 1975, and is at present the best text available.

[ot](#) Old Testament

[nt](#) New Testament

[mss](#) manuscripts

[vss](#) versions

[v.](#) verse

[vv.](#) verses

[dss](#) Dead Sea Scrolls

[ms](#) manuscript

[Heb.](#) Hebrew

[mt](#) Masoretic Text

[lxx](#) Septuagint

[Gk.](#) Greek

## COMPOSITION OF THE BIBLE

### RELIABILITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT TEXT

Although we do not have the original manuscripts of either the Old or New Testaments, we nonetheless have a biblical text that is reliable. A history of the development of the Old Testament text will indicate this. The work of copying the ancient manuscripts was a tedious exercise, but the Jews very early developed strict rules for their work. Rules regulated the kind of parchment, the number of lines to be written, the color of the ink, and the manner of revision. <sup>47</sup> When parchments began to show wear, the Jew reverently buried the manuscripts. As a result, until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran, the oldest extant manuscripts were dated from A.D. 900.

Nonetheless, the reliability of the Old Testament text is seen in the careful transcription of the text in the days of Ezra and continuing later under the Masoretes, who developed a tradition of care and accuracy in copying the text. They ensured accuracy by counting the number of letters in a book, by noting the middle letter, and similar tedious procedures. For example, they noted that the Hebrew letter *aleph* occurred 42,377 times in the Old Testament. If the count in the new copy did not agree with the original copy the manuscript was recopied. When a word or statement appeared to be incorrect they left it in the text (called *kethib*) but made a marginal notation of their corrected suggestion (called *qere*). It was also the Masoretes who gave the Hebrew text its vowel pointing; prior to that time the Hebrew text was written only with consonants.

Several ancient sources indicate the reliability of the Old Testament text.

**Dead Sea Scrolls.** Prior to the discovery of the scrolls at Qumran the oldest extant manuscripts were dated from approximately A.D. 900. Some manuscripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which included copies of Isaiah, Habakkuk, and others, were dated back to 125 B.C., providing manuscripts one thousand years older than previously available. The major conclusion was that there was no significant difference between the Isaiah scroll at Qumran and the Masoretic Hebrew text dated one thousand years later. This confirmed the reliability of our present Hebrew text.

**Septuagint.** The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament to accommodate the dispersed Jews who had lost the Hebrew language. Tradition says that around seventy Hebrew scholars translated the Hebrew text into Greek (the name *Septuagint* means “seventy,” hence, it is designated LXX). It was translated piecemeal in Alexandria, Egypt, between 250 and 150 B.C. As a translation it is uneven, but it is helpful in that it is based on a Hebrew text one thousand years older than our existing Hebrew manuscripts. Moreover, New Testament writers would at times quote from the Septuagint; this provides us with further insight concerning the Old Testament text.

**Samaritan Pentateuch.** This translation of the books of Moses was made to facilitate the worship of the Samaritans at Mount Gerizim (as a rival to Jerusalem). The translation is independent of the Masoretic text and, because it goes back to the fourth century B.C., it is a valuable witness to the text of the Old Testament. Although there are approximately six thousand differences with the Masoretic text, most of them are minor, related to matters of grammar and spelling. <sup>48</sup>

**Aramaic Targums.** Following Israel’s return from captivity in Babylon, the Jews had generally abandoned Hebrew for Aramaic. It became necessary to provide the Scriptures for the Jews in their spoken language. The Targums was the result. Targums means “translations” or “paraphrases”, and they are quite free in retelling the biblical accounts; nevertheless, they “provide a valuable background for the study of the NT besides witnessing to the text of the OT.” <sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> F. G. Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, revised by A. W. Adams (New York: Harper, 1958), p. 79ff.

<sup>48</sup> Ewert, *From Ancient Tablets to Modern Translations*, p. 100.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

## RELIABILITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEXT

While we do not have the autographs (original writings) of the New Testament, nonetheless, the witness to the New Testament books is formidable. For example, there are some five thousand extant manuscripts that contain either the complete New Testament or portions of it.

**Papyrus manuscripts.** These manuscripts are old and an important witness. For example, the Chester Beatty Papyrus dates from the third century.

**Uncial manuscripts.** Approximately two hundred forty manuscripts are called *uncial* manuscripts and are identified by *capital letters*. Codex (meaning “book”) Sinaiticus contains all the New Testament and is dated A.D. 331. Codex Vaticanus contains most of the New Testament, is dated from the fourth century, and is considered one of the most important manuscripts. Alexandrinus, dated fifth century, contains all the New Testament except part of Matthew and is helpful in determining the text of Revelation. Others include Codex Ephraemi (5th century), Codex Bezae (5th–6th century), and Washington Codex (4th–5th century).

**Minuscule manuscripts.** There are some twenty-eight hundred *minuscule* manuscripts that are written in *small letters* usually in a flowing hand. They are normally not as old as uncial manuscripts. Some of the minuscules reveal a similarity of text-types and are referred to as a “family” relationship and are so categorized.

**Versions.** A number of early versions of the New Testament also help in understanding the correct text. Several *Syriac* versions exist, among them Tatian’s Diatessaron (A.D. 170), the Old Syriac (A.D. 200), the Peshitta (fifth century), and the Palestinian Syriac (fifth century). The Latin Vulgate, translated by Jerome (c. A.D. 400), influenced the Western church. The Coptic translations (translated in the third century), including the Sahidic Version and the Bohairic Version, influenced Egypt.

Through the study of the Greek manuscripts as well as the early versions, textual critics have been able to determine the text that is substantially that of the original writings. It is evident that the hand of God has preserved the various texts through the centuries to enable scholars to collate them and reconstruct the text as closely as possible to the original writings.