

## How Reliable is Our Bible (2)

Today we will take a look at some of the manuscripts that have been preserved over the centuries. By 400 AD there was wide acceptance of the collection of 27 New Testament books as Scripture. These books were from manuscripts written in Greek. From the first century on, early Christians made many copies of the apostolic documents and over 5,000 of these manuscripts remain today! But, most of these do not contain a complete copy of the New Testament. In fact, only a few have a complete copy. Neil Lightfoot has pointed out that four categories were generally followed when making copies of the New Testament:

- The four gospels
- Acts & the general epistles
- Pauline epistles
- Revelation

Some suggest a hand produced copy of the entire New Testament was too bulky for practical use and thus the reason for them to be divided up. Lightfoot suggests *the New Testament is without doubt the best-attested book from the ancient world.* (How We Got the Bible, p. 17)

### ***The Uncial Style***

New Testament manuscripts are of two major types. The New Testament was first written with the uncial style of writing. Today, there exist around 300 manuscripts of this type. The letters of the apostles were inscribed in large letters, without spaces between words, and without marks of punctuation. Here is an example of this style of writing in English:

PAULASER VANTOFJESUSCHRISTCA LLEDTOBE ANAPOSTLESEPARATEDUNTOT HEGOSPELOF  
GODWHICHHEPROMISED AFORETHROUGHTHEP

Of the 300 uncial manuscripts, 70 date to as early as the 2nd century. The rest of the uncials date between the 4th and 9th centuries. Of the uncial manuscripts three stand out as of extreme importance.

The Vatican Manuscript. Contains in Greek practically all of the Old and New Testament and is dated to about the 4th century. It is presently located at the Vatican in Rome. It is considered to be the most exact copy of the New Testament known.

The Sinaitic Manuscript. It was found in 1859 by Constantine Tischendorf at St. Catharine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai . On a visit fifteen years earlier he located some manuscripts located in a basket full of old parchments which were destined to be burned. They were the oldest manuscripts he had ever seen. In 1859 he was handed over a old copy of the scriptures by a monk—which contained part of the Old Testament and the entire New Testament. Most think the Sinaitic manuscript dates to the middle of the fourth century.

The Alexandrian Codex. Although the quality of it's contents do not match up to the Vatican and Sinaitic manuscripts—this manuscript was the first of the uncials to come to light. Lightfoot has said, *its different readings from current translations was to usher in a new era of textual investigation.* (p. 20)

All three of these manuscripts have become known since the translation of the King James Bible.

### ***The Cursives***

Cursive manuscripts number around 5000 in total. In these, the handwriting is smaller and in a *running hand-style*. The earliest of these date to the 9th century and continue all the way to the 15th century. These manuscripts are full of elaborate, artistic decorations. This style was common during the middle ages. These manuscripts are generally considered less reliable because of their late date.

### ***Early Versions or Translations***

From the beginning, the gospel was translated into various languages. Of course, at first the letters of the apostles were circulated in the language of the day—Greek. But, Greek was not known in all places—and as a result different translations were made. These offer additional insight on the New Testament text. Here are a few of the early translations:

Old Syriac & Syriac. Syriac was the chief language spoken around Syria and Mesopotamia. Lightfoot says it is almost identical to Aramaic. Many believe these to be the earliest translations made—and some of the texts we have date to the second century.

Latin versions. Old Latin was dates to around 150 AD. We have some 20 copies in Old Latin—not including fragments.

The ***Latin Vulgate*** By the 4th century, the old Latin version had been copied and recopied. Some began to fear that mistakes were made—and there was an emphasis to keep the text from being corrupted. Beginning in 382, the scribe Jerome attempted to revise some of the copies with some of the earlier textual authorities. By 384 his work on the gospels was completed and several years later he completed the rest of the New Testament. Within a few years, Jerome's version became the standard authority. In fact, his version would become the official bible of the Catholic church. For the next millennium every translation of the Scriptures in western Europe was based on Jerome's vulgate. Much of the King James Version is based upon the Latin Vulgate.

Other versions. We know there were versions of the Bible in Egyptian, Armenian, Ethiopic, and Arabic.

### ***What about the Apocrypha?***

Apocrypha is a Greek word meaning *things hidden*, and in ancient times this word was applied to religious writings esteemed almost as scripture by some, but which were not read to the unlearned in public. In modern usage the word "apocrypha" refers to all those writings which have *wrongly* been regarded as scripture by many in the church.

The apocrypha is a list of 7 books and 5 passages added to books that are considered a part of the canon of the Catholic church. These were written between 200 BC and 100 AD. These books were not added to the Catholic bible until 1546 at the Council of Trent. These books are also included in the 1611 edition of the King James Version. See the list of these [books to the left](#). For details on what these books are about see an excellent website I found last week: <http://www.bible-researcher.com/canon2.html> For the most part, these books are fanciful tales about various Jews.

These were excluded from the Canon because:

They contain historical and geographical inaccuracies

They contain false teaching

Jesus and the apostles never quoted from these books.

Many "church fathers" spoke against these books—and no canon or council recognized them during the first four centuries AD.

(To be continued...)

Matthew [Allen](mailto:webmail@mhallen.com)  
[webmail@mhallen.com](mailto:webmail@mhallen.com)

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