

## Brief Overview of the New Testament

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### The Gospels: Matthew – John.

The Gospels were written to tell us about Christ's ministry (His doings and teachings) with a special focus on His birth and death, (Note how much of the gospels are spent on His final week of His life.) They are divided into two sections: the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke – which share much of the same material) and the fourth gospel, the Gospel of John.

What is the significance of four gospels? (See Deuteronomy 19:15) The Old Testament law two or more witnesses to establish a fact and it is because each writer has a different audience in mind with different perspectives that require a unique emphasis.

- **Matthew** – writes as a **Jew** to Jews. He presents Jesus as the Messiah who fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies (note the numerous Old Testament quotations). Matthew uses the phrase, “This was to fulfill...” See Matthew 1:22; 2:15; 2:23; 3:15; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:56. A key section for study is the Sermon on the Mount in Chapters 5-7, which contains the kingdom principles only for the future. Matthew is transitional in nature. It is a transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament.
- **Mark**--Writes to the **action** minded **Romans** He presents Jesus Christ as the busy Servant of God who demonstrates supernatural power over nature, disease, demons, etc. This book is the shortest--yet most active of the Gospels. The key section for study is Jesus' warning against religionism in Mark 7 (very pertinent for people today).
- **Luke**--Writes to the **Gentiles** picturing Christ as full of compassion for absolutely everyone, especially the poor and sinful. This is the most complete gospel, written entirely in chronological order. Luke also wrote the Book of Acts as well.
- **John**--Gives a theological portrait of Christ. He does this by demonstrating through several key signs and speeches that Jesus is God (Deity) come in the flesh in order to save His people from sin. John states his purpose very clearly in John 20:3 to bring readers to saving faith in Jesus Christ. (No wonder so many have been saved through passages like John 1:12 and 3:16!) Almost half of the Book is about the last week of Jesus' life. A key phrase in John is “I am...”.

<b>Matthew</b>	Presents Jesus as the King of the Jews, the promised Messiah	Written to the Jews	“Behold Thy King” Zech. 9:9
<b>Mark</b>	Presents Jesus as the Servant of God	Written to the Romans	“Behold thy Servant” Isa. 42:1
<b>Luke</b>	Presents Jesus as the Son of Man	Written for the Greeks	“Behold the Man” Zech. 6:12
<b>John</b>	Presents Jesus as the Son of God	Written to the whole world	“Behold your God” Isa. 40:9

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- **The Acts**--Luke wrote the Book of Acts as a sequel to his Gospel (Acts 1: 1-2). It is a book of missionary history as it follows the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. Its major emphasis is the continued acts of Jesus from heaven by the Holy Spirit through His Church. It provides important background for the principal writers of the epistles or letters to the churches.

The key elements of the Gospel of Luke are repeated throughout the book of Acts in the preaching. It is important to remember that Acts is a transitional book. Transitioning from the offering of the Israel to the Church Age.

### The Epistles (Letters):

Include the letters of Paul, Peter, John, James, and Jude. Most of these letters were written to churches, but some were written to individuals. The epistles are where the great doctrines of the faith are explained in their greatest detail--both theologically and practically.

- **Paul's Letters (Romans through Philemon)**.

Paul wrote Ephesians through Colossians while during his imprisonment. Paul wrote First and Second Timothy to Church Leaders.

- **Romans**--Written to the believers at Rome, setting forth the need for and the plan of salvation (Romans 1-11) and the practical implications of this salvation for godly living. Chapter 12 contains a discussion of gifts and ends with a powerful section on how to relate to people (especially unbelievers) who mistreat you. Chapter 13 is a key passage for the Christian's relationship to their **government**. Chapters 14 and 15 contain some vital principles on how to handle non-essential differences with other believers (i.e. the issues of Christian liberty).
- **1 Corinthians**--Deals with church problems such as church cliques and **factions** (1-3), incest and the need for church discipline (5), believers taking believers to court (6), sexual sin (6), marriage and divorce (7), Christian liberty (8, 10), abuses of the **Lord's Supper** (11), spiritual gifts (12-14), and a right approach to giving (16). It is a great book to turn to for answers to common church problems.
- **2 Corinthians**--A defense of Paul's apostleship and his motivation for ministry. Chapter one has some helpful information on comfort and affliction. Chapter two deals with how to re-assimilate a disciplined church member. Chapter four deals with how to overcome difficult circumstances that could otherwise lead to depression. Chapter five underscores the goal and motivation for the Christian life. Chapter six warns against being **unequally yoked** with **unbelievers**. Chapters eight and nine deal with Christian **giving**. And chapter twelve states that the reason for the sign gifts (tongues and healing) was to authenticate the Apostles and their message.

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- **Galatians**--Combats the problem of **legalism** and asserts Christian freedom through justification by faith alone. Chapter five speaks of the struggle in the Christian life, the **works** of the **flesh**, and the **fruit** of the **spirit**. Chapter six opens with the mandate for all Christians to counsel.
  - **Ephesians**--Reveals the eternal plan and purpose of God in salvation (chapters 1-3) and how it forms the basis for the believer's walk with God and his fellow Christians (chapters 4-6). Chapter 4 explains the process God uses to **change** believers and then illustrates how it works in solving the problems of communication that tend to divide believers. Chapter five gives the basic pattern for dealing with life dominating sins (v. 18) and then goes on to deal with God's pattern for marriage. Chapter six covers parent-child responsibilities and the Christian work ethic as well as the **armor** of God.
  - **Philippians**--Written to assure the believers of God's unfailing purpose through Paul's imprisonment. It contains important instructions throughout on how to handle rivalry and jealousy between believers (esp. chapter 2). Chapter four covers the kind of **joy** that is vital for overcoming worry.
  - **Colossians**--Overlaps with much of the content of **Ephesians**. Both deal with the Church as Christ's body, but Colossians stresses Christ's role as the **head**. Contains some great passages on the sufficiency of Christ! Further develops how Christians grow (only as we put off the habits of the flesh and put on God's new ways of thinking and handling life).
  - **1 Thessalonians**--is the great passage on the second coming of Christ and the **rapture** of believers.
  - **2 Thessalonians**--Corrects **errors** regarding Christ's second coming.
  - **1 Timothy**--Important instructions on how to have a healthy **church**. It covers issues like the role of women in the church, guidelines for spiritual leadership, the importance of the pastor's own walk with God, and vital instructions about attitudes toward money.
  - **2 Timothy**--Paul's **last** letter. It contains a great chapter on the **sufficiency** of Scripture--even in the most challenging of times.
  - **Titus**--Instructions to Titus on how to organize a new church in a pagan society. Titus has a great section on Christian ethics (practical living) in chapter two.
  - **Philemon**--Paul's letter in behalf of a runaway, converted **slave**. It gives a good model of how to raise a "sticky" issue with another believer.
- **Letters From Other Writers**

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- **Hebrews--** It teaches the superiority of Christ to all that these Jewish believers left behind in Judaism. The danger of defecting is sounded throughout. Chapter five explains why believers fail to grow (5:11-14). Chapter ten gives a challenge for believers to minister to each other. Chapter eleven is the great chapter on faith. Chapter twelve explains God's purpose in discipline. Hebrews is a Transitional book from the Church Age to the Tribulation Period.
- **James--**Covers God's purpose in trials--to make His people mature and complete. Shows that man's own desires are his greatest enemy, deals with partiality, the importance of controlling the tongue, and how that desires gone awry are at the root of interpersonal conflicts. This book puts a lot of emphasis on how you live, and what you do as a Christian, instead of just what you believe.
- **1 Peter--**Teaches believers how they can endure suffering for Christ in a way that pleases God. It focuses on suffering especially in the context of failing relationships—with legal authorities and workplace authorities (2), and with spouses.
- **2 Peter--**Warns against the infiltration of false teachers - and how to identify them.
- **1 John--**Key book on how to have a Biblically based assurance of salvation.
- **2 John--**Letter of encouragement to a Christian woman; warns against aiding false teachers.
- **3 John--**Short work on Christian hospitality.
- **Jude--**Warns against false **teachers**--and how to rescue those who have been influenced by them.
- **The Revelation:** Deals primarily with the second coming of the Jesus Christ and the final act in God's unfolding drama of redemption! The first three chapters contain direct words from Jesus to His church. His observations, commendations, and warnings are relevant to churches in every age! From chapter four on, the emphasis is on the future!

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1. Matthew presents Jesus as the \_\_\_\_\_?  
a. King of the world   b. King of the Gentiles   c. King of the Jews   d. King of the Romans
2. Mark presents Jesus as the \_\_\_\_\_?  
a. Servant of all   b. Servant of God   c. Servant of the Jews   d. Servant of Gentiles
3. Luke presents Jesus as the \_\_\_\_\_?  
a. Son of man   b. Son of Mary   c. Son of God   d. Son of Joseph
4. John presents Jesus as the \_\_\_\_\_?  
a. King of Glory   b. Servant of God   c. King of the Jews   d. Son of God
5. Zechariah 9:9 matches up with what Gospel?  
a. Matthew   b. Mark   c. Luke   d. John
6. Isaiah 40:9 matches up with what Gospel?  
a. Matthew   b. Mark   c. Luke   d. John
7. Zechariah 6:12 matches up with what Gospel?  
a. Matthew   b. Mark   c. Luke   d. John
8. Isaiah 42:1 matches up with what Gospel?  
a. Matthew   b. Mark   c. Luke   d. John
9. Acts is what kind of Book?  
a. Transformational   b. Transmissional   c. full of Church doctrine   d. Transitional
10. First Corinthians deals with \_\_\_\_\_ problems?  
a. Home   b. Christian   c. Work   d. Church   e. Sunday School
11. Second Corinthians is a defense of Paul's \_\_\_\_\_ and motivation for \_\_\_\_\_?  
a. Ministry / apostleship   b. Apostleship / ministry   c. Apostleship / preaching
12. Galatians combats the problem of \_\_\_\_\_?  
a. Law   b. Legalism   c. Church discipline   d. giving
13. In what chapter of Ephesians is the whole armor of God listed? \_\_\_\_\_
14. First Thessalonians is a great passage on the \_\_\_\_\_?  
a. Second coming of Christ   b. Second coming of Christ and the rapture of believers.

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15. What book gives important instructions on how to have a healthy church? \_\_\_\_\_
16. What book is a Transitional book from the Church Age to the Tribulation?
- a. Matthew   b. Acts   c. Hebrews
17. What book covers God's purpose in trials? \_\_\_\_\_
18. Revelation deals primarily with \_\_\_\_\_

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### Biography of Each Author

- **Matthew:** Mathew, also known as Levi, was a publican or tax collector who was chosen by Jesus to be one of the twelve Apostles. As a tax collector Matthew would have been a literate person well suited to author one of the gospel records. Early church tradition credits Matthew with the authorship of the gospel bearing his name.
- **John Mark:** This disciple is given credit by the early church as the author of the Gospel bearing his name. Mark was the Latin surname given to this young man whose Jewish name was John. John Mark was cousin to Barnabas, a prominent figure in the early church. Mark travelled with his cousin Barnabas in ministry and later in years ministered to the Apostles Peter and Paul. Mark is not identified as one who walked with Jesus yet his association with the Apostles makes him more than qualified to produce a gospel record.
- **Luke:** This man is credited with authoring the third Gospel and the book of Acts. Luke is mentioned three times in the New Testament. (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11) and from these passages we learn that Luke was a Physician and a fellow worker of Paul who travelled with Paul during his missionary journeys. Luke was an educated man whose attention to historical detail is of great value to us today.
- **John, the Son of Zebedee:** One of the twelve apostles, John was a fisherman and brother to one of the other twelve apostles, James. The Apostle John is the author of the fourth gospel, three epistles, and the Revelation. John was a close personal associate of Jesus being referred to as the “...disciple whom Jesus loved.” John's writings are of tremendous value to the Christian church and account for a significant portion of the New Testament.
- **Simon Peter:** Peter was one of the most prominent of the twelve Apostles. He was also a fisherman and brother to another of the twelve whose name was Andrew. Peter was also referred to at times as Simeon (Acts 15:14) along with Cephas and Simon (John 1:43). Peter was a part of Jesus inner circle of disciples and remains an important person throughout the early church history. Peter is credited with authoring the two Epistles which bear his name and as being the likely source for Mark's Gospel.
- **Paul:** The Apostle Paul, although not one of the original twelve Apostles, was chosen by Jesus to be an apostle and to go out to bring the gospel to the non-Jewish people of his day. Paul was a Jew of respectable heritage and a ranking member of the strict Jewish sect of the Pharisees. Paul was also a Roman citizen by birth which he used to his advantage in times of persecution. His name before his conversion was Saul and he was well known because he fiercely persecuted the early Christians. After his miraculous conversion Paul went on to live one of the most fruitful lives of service for the kingdom of God.
- **James:** The author of the epistle of James this man was also a half brother of Jesus. (Galatians 1:19). James was not one of the twelve Apostles but was clearly a leader in the early church in Jerusalem. An important council in Jerusalem chaired by James was responsible for deciding that it was no longer a requirement to keep the ceremonial

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aspects of the Law of Moses. Acts 12:17; 15:13, 19; Gal 2:9. Along with being a member of Jesus household James also had the privilege of seeing Jesus after He rose from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15:5, 7.

- **Jude:** The author of one epistle of only twenty-five verses Jude was also a half-brother of James and of Jesus. Jude 1; Gal 1:19 His name in Greek would be Judas however this is not the traitor of Jesus but the defender of the faith whose epistle speaks out boldly against the apostasy of his day.



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## Language of the New Testament

In order to understand the background and history of the New Testament text you should have a basic acquaintance with the common languages of the geographic region of that time period. There are four languages which play an important role in the New Testament.

### I. SEMITIC LANGUAGES

- A. **Aramaic** was the common language of Palestine and was the common vernacular spoken by Jesus and His disciples. The term "Aramaic" comes from the former name of Syria which was Aram. The Arameans were a people who can be traced throughout the Old Testament and who were located in the northwestern portions of Palestine. Aramaic has many similarities with Hebrew and is a close cousin to Hebrew in the Semitic family of languages.
- B. **Hebrew** has its origins in the old Phoenician alphabet from which both Semitic and non-Semitic languages of the time were derived. Some have concluded that Hebrew was a dialect of the Canaanites which Abraham acquired after migrating there. Except for a few small portions, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. Christianity and the teachings of the New Testament find their roots in the Hebrew Scriptures.

### II. INDO-EUROPEAN

- A. **Latin** was the official language of the Roman Empire at the time of Christ. This language was used by the educated of society - authors, lawyers and poets - and was more predominate in the western regions of the empire. Latin would have been used in the provinces of Judea for conducting the business of the state and for the courts of law. A good number of Latin words and proper names can be found throughout the New Testament.
- B. **Greek** was the common language of the market place in Rome during New Testament times. The New Testament was written in what is now called "Koine" Greek. "Koine" or "common" refers to the fact that this was the language of everyday life in the Roman Empire in the days of the early Church.

### III. THE METHODS AND MATERIALS OF WRITING

- A. In these days of high speed printing and computer graphics it is hard to visualize a period of time when all written communication was done by hand. However in the days of Jesus and the early church such was the case. The two most common materials used for writing in this period of time were papyrus and vellum or parchment.
  - **Papyrus** originated in Egypt at least 2500 years before the time of Christ and was by far the most **used** writing material in use when the New Testament was

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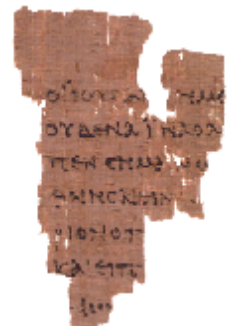
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written. Manufactured from the papyrus plant this paper like material was first used in scrolls and then in later times in codex or book form. Thin strips were cut from the stem of the Papyrus plant and laid side by side in an overlapping fashion. A second similar layer was laid crossways over the first. The layers were pressed and glued together to form sheets. Numerous sheets would then be joined together to form scrolls. Pens made from dried reeds cut to a point and slit in the end were first used as writing instruments. Later in time quills became more popular as writing instruments.

- **Vellum and Parchment** are the names used to describe the animal skins that were prepared to receive written words with reed or quill pen. The oldest known leather scrolls of this type in existence today date back to 1500bc. The animal skins were prepared by soaking them in limewater and scraping them clean of all hair Afterwards they were dried and then rubbed smooth with a pumice stone. This process made for an extremely durable writing surface which was a great asset in the preservation of the early Greek manuscripts. Technically, Vellum refers to the higher quality sheets that were derived from the skins of calves. Parchment was derived from other animals like bulls and goats which resulted in a product of a lesser quality.

### B. THE MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE

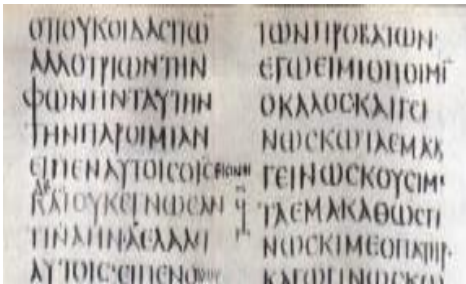

Now it is time to begin to look at the facts regarding the transmission of the text of the New Testament. This information will continue to support the claim that the New Testament we presently have in our hands today is an accurate and trustworthy representation of the original text. The evidence to be examined is threefold: 1) The Greek manuscripts of the New Testament now available 2) the copies of the early versions of the New Testament now available 3) the citations made by the early Church Fathers of the New Testament documents that were available to them. On this page we will explore the first part of this evidence: the Greek manuscripts we now have in our possession.



- **THE GREEK MANUSCRIPTS**

- **Original Autographs:** This term describes the original documents that were penned by the author. No original autograph is known to exist today. It is believed that the originals were most likely prepared on papyrus scrolls which in time would have perished without having taken extraordinary measures to preserve them.

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- **Biblical Papyrus** Over the last 125 years a collection of biblical papyrus manuscripts has been gathered and documented by archeologists and biblical scholars. This collection ranges from a small fragment containing a few verses to large portions of the New Testament. One of the more notable examples is the “John Ryland’s Fragment” also known as P52 which contains a small portion of the gospel of John dating to approximately 125AD. This collection of Greek manuscript portions consisting of over seventy five items is the first important piece of information available for the reconstruction of the New Testament text.
- **The Uncial Manuscripts:** These Greek manuscripts containing large portions of the New Testament form the backbone of the information needed to accurately reconstruct the New Testament text. This collection of manuscripts deriving its name from the large box like letters that are found within each document dates from the fourth to the ninth centuries.
- The three most famous are *codex Vaticanus, Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus*. Vaticanus, presently housed in the Vatican library (!!!), dates at 350 AD and is a high quality codex of vellum containing most of the New Testament, except for part of the book of Hebrews and the remaining books after that. Codex Sinaiticus also dated at 350 AD contains the entire New Testament as we have it today except for 24 verses. Codex Alexandrinus dates from 450 AD and contains most of the New Testament except for approximately 34 chapters as compared to our English translation. Both Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus are housed at the national library of the British museum. They are all three some of the most **CORRUPT** revisions of the Greek New testament text!
- **The Miniscule Manuscripts:** These manuscripts date from between the ninth to the fifteenth centuries and number over 2500. They also gain their name based on the style of lettering which is a small cursive type of letter. While these manuscripts are not as valuable as the Uncials they are by themselves an extremely important and valuable witness to the text the original New Testament documents.

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- **The Lectionaries** These important witnesses to the original text of the New Testament were created for local church instructional purposes and worship. These documents which number well over 2,000 are dated from the fourth to the twelfth century. There is a wide range of material both in quality and quantity represented in the lectionaries. From these manuscripts alone the text of the New Testament can be reproduced many times over except for the book of Revelation and some portions in the book of Acts.
- The information supplied to us by the Greek manuscripts provides an overwhelming wealth of data from which scholars can easily reproduce an accurate and trustworthy reconstruction of the New Testament text. No other document comes to us from antiquity with the quantity or quality of manuscript evidence as does the New Testament. Building on this rock solid foundation let's now consider the testimony of the early versions of the New Testament.



### C. THE EARLY VERSION

One of the first commands that Jesus gave to His disciples was to go into all the world to preach the gospel to every nation teaching them to observe all that had been commanded. (Matthew 28:19) This of course would make it necessary for the gospels and the teachings of the Apostles to be translated into the language of the people who were being visited. Therefore, quite naturally there appeared a number of early translations of the New Testament into various other languages. The existing copies of these early translations or version are of great value in continuing to verify the accuracy and trustworthiness of the New Testament documents.

### D. THE LATIN VERSIONS

The Latin translations are the most important of the early versions. Latin as it has been stated before was the official language of the Roman Empire. As time went on Latin became the predominant language of the west. Because of this the Latin versions soon became the only version to be used by the Church in these regions. There are two Latin versions to be examined.

- **Old Latin:** The first Latin translations are believed to have been made prior to 200AD. This version survives today in some thirty ancient manuscripts. This “Old



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Latin” translation was not of a high quality and was characterized by many variations in the text. Early church leaders of that time recognized the need to correct and revise this translation to make it accurate and trustworthy. The result is what is known today as the Latin Vulgate.

- **The Latin Vulgate:** In 382 Pope Damasus commissioned Jerome an outstanding Bible scholar of his day to begin a revised Latin version which would correct and standardize the numerous Old Latin translations. Jerome was well suited for this task having been trained in the original biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew. When completed this new Latin version became the Bible that was used in the western world for the next 1000 years. It is estimated that there are presently some eight thousand copies of the Latin Vulgate still in existence today.

### E. THE SYRIAC VERSIONS

Another important early translation was the Syriac version. Syrian which was the chief language spoken in the land of Syria and Mesopotamia was almost identical to Aramaic which was the language spoken by Jesus and his disciples. The first translation known as the “Old Syriac” version dates somewhere towards the end of the second century and is survived by two known manuscripts. In contrast the second Syriac version known as the “Peshitta” or “simple” most likely dates to the early fifth century and is represented by some 350 manuscripts.



### F. THE CHURCH FATHERS

The Church Fathers lived during the early centuries of the church. In the course of instructing the Christians of their day and defending the faith against the heretics of their time period they left a tremendous amount of written material which contains thousands upon thousands of citations of the New Testament scriptures. In their book “A General Introduction to the Bible” Geisler and Nix estimate that there are over 36,000 references or citations by the Fathers of the New Testament. Harold Greenlee in his book “Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism” states. “These quotations are so extensive that the New Testament could be virtually reconstructed from them without the use of New Testament Manuscripts.” (p.54) The following brief survey of the Fathers will provide an introduction to the evidence available in the writings of the fathers.

- **THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS ( c.70 - c.150 )**

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These early fathers, who lived between 70-150 AD, were Greek speaking men and with the possible exception of the books of Philemon and III John quoted from every book of the New Testament.

- **THE ANTE-NICENE FATHERS** ( c.150 - c.300 )

The Ante-Nicene Fathers wrote in Greek, Syriac and Latin. After surveying the works of these men Geisler and Nix point out that prior to the council of Nicea in 325 ad there were some 32,000 quotes and allusions made from the New Testament alone.

- **THE NICENE AND POST NICENE FATHERS** ( c.300 - c.430)

These men lived through some of the last persecutions of the church by the Roman Empire. Their testimony concerning which books of the Bible were considered authentic is very valuable. At a time in history when people were losing their lives over the possession and use of “scripture” we can be sure that they were wholly convinced when they gave their acceptance and approval to various documents they believed to be scripture.

- Overall, the value of the witness of the church fathers is twofold:
  - i. One, their testimony confirms that the existing canon of scripture (the list of books considered inspired) in our English Bibles is authoritative and true.
  - ii. Two, their quotations of the New Testament are so numerous and comprehensive that if we were to lose every single manuscript of the New Testament we would be able to reconstruct the New testament text based on the written record left to us by the Fathers.



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### Study notes for Language of the New Testament #4

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What four languages play an important role in the New Testament?

- a. Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and English
- b. Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Aramaic
- c. Aramaic, Hebrew, Latin, Greek
- d. none of the above

2. What are the two most common materials used for writing in the Time period of the New Testament writings?

- a. Parchment and vellum
- b. Papyrus and lambskins
- c. Papyrus and vellum or parchment

3. How many of the originals are known to exist today? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Name the three most corrupt revisions of the Greek New Testament?

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