

## Lesson 3: The Transmission of the Bible

### Preserving God's Word

#### God's Promise to Preserve His Word

**Psalm 119:89** *Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.*

**Matthew 5:18** *For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*

**Isaiah 40:8** *The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.*

#### The Languages of the Bible

##### Hebrew (Old Testament)

**Aramaic** Jeremiah 10:11; Daniel 2:4–7:28; Ezra 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26

##### Greek (New Testament)

#### The Transmission of the Old Testament

##### Copying rules for scribes

- Written on clean animal skins, prepared by Jewish scribes.
- No copying from memory — each word had to be read before writing.
- Exact spacing required between letters, words, and sections.
- Mistakes required discarding the page.

##### The Masoretes (6th–10th centuries A.D.)

- Developed vowel pointing for Hebrew (which had no written vowels).
- Used meticulous methods: counted letters, words, and verses; could identify the middle letter of a book.

**Early Translation:** Septuagint (LXX) Greek translation, c. 250–150 B.C.

#### The Biblical Attitude Toward Copies and Translations

##### Old Testament Examples

- **David & Solomon** – Solomon was commanded to obey what was “written in the Law of Moses” (**1 Kings 2:3**). This was a copy written some 500 years after Moses, yet it was considered God’s authoritative Word.
- **Kings’ Duty** – Each king had to write his own copy of the Law (**Deut. 17:18**). Even the copy carried full authority.
- **Ezra and Nehemiah** – Ezra read from the Book of the Law (**Ezra 7:14; Neh. 8:1–8**). The people heard God’s Word through copies and even translations into Aramaic.
- **Proverbs 25:1** – Hezekiah’s men copied Solomon’s proverbs, and these copies were recognized as inspired Scripture.

##### New Testament Examples

- **Jesus & Isaiah** – Jesus read from a copy of Isaiah (**Luke 4:16–21**) and declared it to be Scripture fulfilled in Him.
- **Paul & Timothy** – Timothy was taught the “sacred writings” (**2 Tim. 3:15**), likely in Greek translation (Septuagint), yet they were sufficient to lead to salvation.
- **Bereans** – The Bereans examined the Scriptures (copies) daily (**Acts 17:11**) to confirm Paul’s teaching.
- **Jesus’ Confidence** – Jesus grounded arguments on single words and tenses of Scripture (**Matt. 22:32; John 10:35**), demonstrating His trust in the accuracy of the copies.

## The Great Manuscripts and Discoveries

**Codex:** A codex is essentially an ancient book, consisting of one or more sheets of papyrus or parchment folded together to form a group of leaves, or pages. This form of the book was not widely used in the ancient world until around the second century AD, when it slowly but steadily began to replace the traditional papyrus roll.

**Papyrus:** Papyrus was the paper of the ancient world, made from long thin strips of the papyrus reed. These strips of reed were overlaid in crisscrossing layers. When pressed together, the gum from the plant's cellular structure acted as a bonding agent. Multiple sheets of papyrus were joined into scrolls that could be over 100 feet long.

**Text and manuscripts of the Old Testament:** Autographs written between 1500-400 BC

**A. The Cairo Codex (AD 895)** Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the 12 minor prophets.

**B. The Leningrad Codex of the Prophets (AD 916)** Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the 12 minor prophets

**C. The London Codex (AD 900-1000)** First 5 books of the Bible

**D. Aleppo Codex (AD 950)**

**E. The Dead Sea Scrolls**

### Contents of the Dead Sea Scrolls

**Biblical Manuscripts** Portions of every OT book except Esther, most notably Isaiah

**Sectarian Texts: Manual of Discipline** (community rules) **Pesharim** (commentaries)

### Historical Background

- In 1947, a Bedouin shepherd discovered the first scrolls while searching for a lost goat.
- Over the next decade, additional caves were explored, yielding approximately 900 manuscripts.
- The texts were written primarily on parchment, with some on papyrus and copper.
- Dating from the third century BC to the first century AD, the scrolls are generally associated with a Jewish sect, likely the Essenes

### The Importance of the Book of Isaiah - textual preservation - contains almost entire book.

- The scroll dates to around 125 BC, within 500-600 years of writing.
- Confirms faithful preservation of one of the most important prophetic books for over a 1,000 years before the Masoretic Text.

### The Importance of the Book of Daniel

- Portions of every chapter of Daniel were found, dating from roughly 125 BC. This is only 375 years after Daniel.

### The Importance of the Commentaries (Pesharim)

- These writings provide critical insight into how the Qumran community interpreted Scripture and expected the coming of the Messiah.
- Demonstrates that messianic expectation was central to Second Temple Jewish thought.

### **Significance for textual reliability**

- With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars have Hebrew manuscripts one thousand years earlier than the great Masoretic Text manuscripts, enabling them to check on the fidelity of the Hebrew text.

### **The Transmission of the New Testament**

#### **Manuscript Abundance**

- Over **5,600 Greek manuscripts** of the NT exist, plus thousands more in Latin, Coptic, Syriac, and other languages.
- Complete NT manuscripts date within 300 years of the originals; many portions are within 100–200 years.

#### **Early Translations**

- **Old Latin:** c. AD 150–200. **Syriac (Peshitta):** 2nd century. **Coptic translations:** Egypt.

#### **Early Church Citations**

- Church Fathers cited NT extensively: Clement of Rome (AD 96), Ignatius (AD 110), Polycarp (AD 110).
- **36,000 quotations** from the 100's and 200's
- If all manuscripts were destroyed, the NT could almost be entirely reconstructed from these quotations.

#### **Ostraca**

- Ostraca or pottery, especially broken pottery was used as writing material for centuries for school exercises, receipts, orders, lists, Bible verses, messages, etc.

### **Text and manuscripts of the New Testament**

#### **A. Uncial manuscripts on Papyrus (2nd – 3rd centuries)**

- There are eighty-eight papyri manuscripts of portions of the New Testament. These very early and important witnesses of the New Testament include most of the New Testament.
- P52 (c. AD 110-125) “According to most scholars, the closest copy to an autograph is a papyrus manuscript designated P52, dated around 110-125, containing a few verses of John 18.
- P87 (c. 125) Contains a few verses of Philemon.
- P77 (c. 150) Contains a few verses of Matthew 23.
- P32 (c. 175) Has portions of Titus 1 and 2.
- P45 (late second century) Contains portions of all four Gospels and Acts.
- P46 (c. 200) Has almost all of Paul's epistles and Hebrews;
- P47 (third century) Contains Revelation 9-17.
- P66 (c. 175) One of the earliest witnesses to the New Testament is this almost complete copy of the Gospel of John.
- P72 (c. third century) Earliest copy including Jude and 1 and 2 Peter.
- P75 (c. 175-225) Contains large portions of Luke 3 through John 15.

- **The significance of these small fragments - the originals were written before the copies.**

#### **B. Uncial manuscripts on vellum and parchment (4th – 9th centuries)**

The most important manuscripts of the New Testament are the great uncial codices that date from the fourth and following centuries.

**Codex Vaticanus (c. 325-350)**

- This manuscript has been located in the Vatican Library in Rome since 1481 but its contents were not made available for all until 1889.

**Codex Sinaiticus (c. 340)**

- It is known as Codex Sinaiticus because it was discovered by Constantine Tischendorf at St. Catharine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai in 1844.

**Codex Alexandrinus (c. 450)**

- This Alexandrian manuscript, composed by scribes in Alexandria.
- Codex Alexandrinus was originally to be offered as a gift to King James of England. But since James died before he received it, it was presented to his successor Charles I in 1627.

**Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (c. 345)**

- This document is a palimpsest—a manuscript in which the original writing has been erased and written over. Through chemicals and hard work, the original writing underneath can be read.

**Codex Bezae (c. 450 or 550)**

- This is the earliest known biblical copy in two languages, Greek and Latin. It contains the Gospels and Acts with a small section of 3 John in Latin.

**C. Minuscule Manuscripts (9th — 15th centuries)**

- These minuscule manuscripts make up the majority of New Testament manuscripts.
- There are 2,795 manuscripts and 1,964 lectionaries in minuscule script (Compare with 362 manuscripts and 245 lectionaries in uncial script.).

**1. Treasure God's Word****2. Trust God's Word****3. Obey God's Word****4. Proclaim God's Word**