



How did we get the Bible?

We have discussed the Old Testament canon and found that it was fixed by the time of Jesus. The Apocrypha; has been accepted by only the Roman Catholic Church, Greek Orthodox Church, Russian Orthodox Church, and Coptic Church and the Apocryphal books are not the same across these churches. No other churches accept these writings as being inspired. We will now turn our attention to the New Testament.

The New Testament Manuscripts

The original copies or *autographs* of the New Testament books would originally have been written on papyrus. These fragile original copies have been lost, but many copies of the originals exist and more are being discovered.

The word **manuscript**, when it refers to the New Testament, denotes those copies written by hand in the original language. In the case of the New Testament, all the manuscripts must be in Greek.

One of the primary considerations when examining a manuscript is to determine its age. While some manuscripts give the date of copying, most do not. There are a number of keys to dating a manuscript. The first is the lettering. The oldest manuscripts are written with all capital letters called **uncials**. Later copies which appeared in the ninth century used **cursives** which is a

type of writing where the letters are smaller and the letters run together. Therefore, the uncial manuscripts are more important because they are older.

While more than 5,000 manuscripts have been located only about 375 are written with uncial letters. Most manuscripts are not complete New Testaments, but contain only a book or a section of books.

Of the 375 uncial manuscripts, about ninety are written on papyrus and about fifty date from the second to fourth centuries. About thirty fragments are written on broken pieces of pottery and are known as *ostraca*. This leaves about 250 uncial documents that were copied onto vellum and date from the fourth to the tenth centuries.

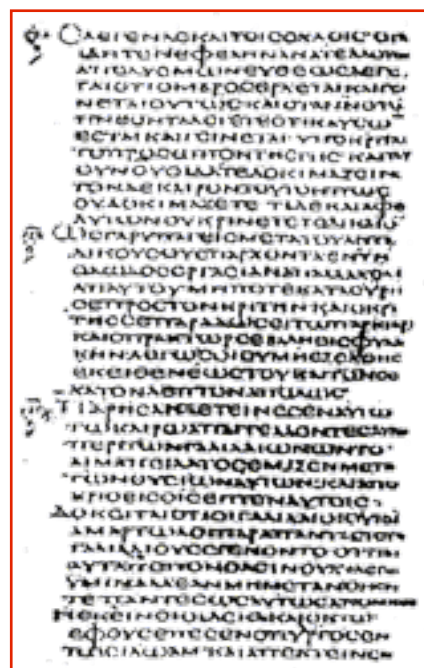
The most important uncial manuscripts are written on vellum and are known as the **Vatican Manuscript**, the **Sinaitic Manuscript**, and the **Alexandrian Manuscript**. These manuscripts date to the period of A.D. 300-450.

The Vatican Manuscript (known as Codex B) is located in the Vatican Library in Rome and contains most of the Old and New Testaments. The library was founded in 1448 and the manuscript was listed in the first catalog in 1475. No record of the manuscript exists prior to this date. The manuscript is bound in codex (book) form with 759 vellum pages. Each page is 25cm square with three columns.

The Sinaitic Codex (Codex Aleph) was discovered in 1844 by Constantine Tischendorf at St. Catherine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai who literally saved the manuscript from the fire. He gained access to the manuscript fifteen years after his original discovery. This codex is now housed in the manuscript room of the British Library and contains the entire New Testament and part of the Old Testament.

The third of these most important manuscripts, the Alexandrian Manuscript (Codex A) is housed in the British Library. While the manuscript has both the Old and New Testaments, a few leaves are missing. This manuscript was formerly in the Alexandrian Library, but has been in England since 1627.

The Vatican zealously guarded its manuscript and only made it available in recent years in form of facsimiles and microfilm. The Sinaitic Codex was unknown until Tischendorf's discovery in 1844. The Alexandrian Manuscript was unavailable to translators until after it came to England in 1627.



**Alexandrian Manuscript
Luke 12:54-13:4**

I. Were any of these three great uncials available to the translators of the King James Version and what are the implications?

There are other important uncials such as the *Manuscript of Ephraem* (Codex C) which dates to the fifth century and is housed in the National Library of Paris. A full edition was published in 1845 and contains all the New Testament except 2 Thessalonians and 2 John.

The *Codex Bezae* (Codex D) was presented to the University of Cambridge in 1581. This codex contains both Greek and Latin facing each other. This manuscript contains only the Gospels and Acts. This was the only important uncial available at the time of the translation of the King James Version.

There are far more **cursive** manuscripts with about 2,800 of them being cataloged and dating from the ninth to sixteenth centuries. Though less esteemed than the uncials, these are still a valued treasure for Bible translators.

Lectionaries are sections of Scripture that were copied to be read in public worship services. About 2,200 lectionaries have been found.

Another source for the New Testament text comes from various ancient **versions** or translations. Some of these are very old (older than many of our manuscripts) and as such are an important witness to the original text. Some of these date back to the second century A.D.

Some important versions are the Syriac Version which is almost identical to Aramaic. Old Syriac is even older than the Syriac Version. The Peshitta is a standard Syriac translation which was used in the fifth century. The Old Latin Versions date back nearly as far as the best of the uncials and the first English translations came from the Latin. Other old versions are found in Egyptian, Armenian, Gothic, Ethiopic, and Georgian. All these bear witness to the reliability of the New Testament Text.

Much of this lesson comes from: *How We Got the Bible*. Neil R. Lightfoot. Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1986.