

# The Authority of Scripture

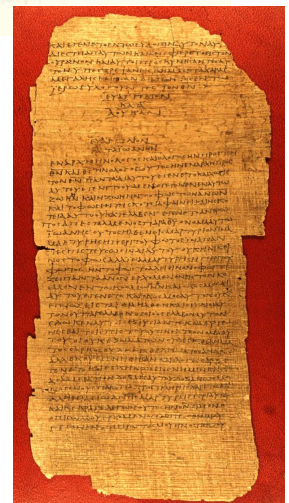
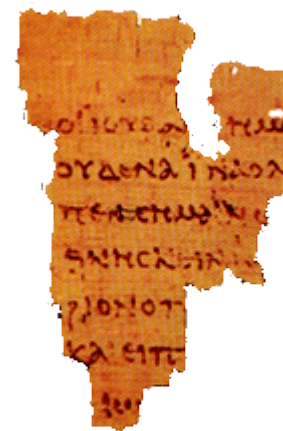


New Testament Textual Evidence

Dr. Richard D. Phillips  
Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC

# The New Testament Textual Evidence

- Papyrus, parchment, & codex
- P<sup>46</sup> – Codex of Paul's letters from 200 A.D. (86 pages)
- P<sup>52</sup> – Rylands Fragment: John ch. 18, 130 A.D.
- P<sup>75</sup> – Gospels of Luke and John. A.D. 200. (51 pages)



# NT Texts: Full Bibles

- Codex Sinaiticus: 325-60 A.D., found at Monastery of St.Helen on Mt. Sinai, 1840's
- Codex Vaticanus: 320-40 AD. Probably brought to the Vatican from Constantinople shortly before the fall of Constantinople (1400's).
- Other early codices: Alexandrinus, 5<sup>th</sup> c.; Ephraemi, 5<sup>th</sup> c.; Bezae, 5<sup>th</sup> c.
- There is little doubt that recent Greek texts rely fairly heavily on Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, including *Tischendorf* (1869), *Westcott and Hort* (1881), and today's *Nestle-Aland* text.



# Codex Sinaiticus (early 4<sup>th</sup> c.)





# Ancient Texts



John chapter 1 in Codex  
Alexandrinus (5<sup>th</sup> c. AD)



A page from Codex  
Vaticanus (early 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD)

# Reliability: A Comparison of the NT & Other Ancient Texts

- “If Christians were familiar with the vicissitudes of all ancient literature, and then heard about NT transmission problems, they would be amazed at how the NT testimony is so very much richer and more reliable than other literature.” - Moises Silva
- Epectitus, 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> c. philosopher: Only 4 of 8 Discourses have survived. Of those four, the earliest manuscript is AD 1100. All other copies derive from this one.
- Aeschylus, 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC Greek tragedian: Earliest manuscript from 1000 AD. Parts missing.
- Homer, 9<sup>th</sup> c. Greek mythologizer: 2500 ancient or early medieval texts, earliest from 400 BC
- New Testament:
  - Over 5700 ancient and early medieval manuscripts.
  - Enter NT well attested.
  - Over 100 manuscripts from 2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> c. AD.
  - Numerous ancient translations: Latin, 2<sup>nd</sup> c., Syriac, 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> c., Coptic, 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> c.
  - Counting all versions, there are over 24,000 ancient and early medieval NT manuscripts.
  - Thousands of quotations from the Greek and Latin church fathers.
  - “The New Testament is the best attested collection of writings from the ancient world. Hands down. It’s not even close.” Dr. Matthew S. Harmon

# Is Our Bible Filled with Errors?

- Can we trust that we have the actual words of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, etc. in our New Testament? According to Bart Ehrman, the answer is No!

“It is one thing to say that the originals were inspired, but the reality is we don’t have the originals – so saying they were inspired doesn’t help me much, unless I can reconstruct the originals... What we have are copies made later – much later. In most instances, they are copies made many *centuries* later. And these copies differ from one another in so many places that we don’t even know how many differences there are... There are more differences among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament” – Dr. Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 10.

“What can we say about the total number of variants known today? Scholars differ significantly in their estimates – some say there are 200,000 variants known, some say 300,000, some say 400,000 or more!” Dr. Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 89.

This proves that “the Bible is a human book from beginning to end” Dr. Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 11

# Examining the “Problem” of Errors

What do we make of the 200,000-400,000 variants?

- The reason for this “problem” is the sheer number of manuscripts. Given 24,000 texts, at the highest this is about 16 variants per text, an incredibly small amount.
- The overwhelming majority of these variants are mistakes in spelling, differences in word order, or the use of synonymns with no effect on meaning.
- Less than 1% of textual variants have *any* impact on the meaning of a verse at all.
- Example: Romans 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Some manuscripts put this, “let us have peace with God”. Greek ἔχομεν vs. ἔχωμεν.
- Example: Luke 2:33, “his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.” There are some variants that read “Joseph and his mother.”
- *This is supposed to overturn Christianity? This proves a devious suppression of the truth?*



# Assessment of the Accuracy of Our New Testament

- While we do not have the original manuscripts, God has providentially given an overwhelming and compelling testimony through the manuscripts to the entire NT.
- The very words of the NT are certain in over 99% of the verses. In the remaining 1%, there is no question as to the meaning.
- There are no doctrines in any question because of textual variants.
- There are no elements of the story of Jesus in in question because of the textual variants.

# Assessment of the Accuracy of Our New Testament

- Conclusion:
  - The Bible we hold in our hands contains the books that God intends for us to recognize as authoritative for faith and practice.
  - What we read in the New Testament is exactly what God inspired the human authors to write. They are the most carefully transmitted and preserved documents from the ancient world. There are no places where a doctrine or belief of the Christian faith is at stake.
  - When you open your Bible to read about the good news of who Jesus Christ is and what he has done for us, you can rest your eternal destiny on what you read there.
- Ehrman's conclusion relies on the assumption that God could not preserve and transmit the NT text through normal historical processes, providentially overseen by God. He argues that unless the preservation of NT manuscripts mirrors the divine miracle of inspiration, then it is not divine at all. He fails to realize that the *inspiration* of Scripture was a divine miracle using *normal* historical processes, just as is the *transmission* of Scripture to us.