

# The Transmission of the Bible Text

## Introduction

- How were the original prophetic and apostolic writings copied and passed down to us?
- Can we be sure that the Bible which we have today is actually what the ancient writers wrote?
- Did God not promise that “the word of the Lord abides forever”? (1 Peter 1:25)

## The Languages of the Bible

- Hebrew
  - The language of Abraham the Hebrew
    - (Genesis 14:13) And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these *were* confederate with Abram.
  - May have derived the name from Eber
    - (Genesis 10:21, 25) <sup>21</sup>Unto Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder, even to him were *children* born. <sup>25</sup>And unto Eber were born two sons: the name of one *was* Peleg<sup>g</sup>; for in his days was the earth divided; and his brother's name *was* Joktan.
  - Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew.
  - From the families of Shem come the Semitic languages: Hebrew and Aramaic.
- Aramaic
  - The language of Laban the Syrian
    - (Genesis 31:47) <sup>47</sup>And Laban called it Jegarsahadutha<sup>g</sup>: but Jacob called it Galeed.
  - Some parts of the Old Testament were written in Aramaic
    - Daniel 2:4 – 7:28
    - Ezra 4:7 – 6:18; 7:12-26
- Greek
  - Koine Greek was the common language of the people in the 1<sup>st</sup> century
    - The New Testament does contain a few Aramaic words

# THE LANGUAGES OF THE BIBLE

שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד

**“Hear O Israel: The Lord is our God. The Lord is one,”  
(Deuteronomy 6:4)**

וְשִׁבְיָהּ יְהוּדִיָּא בְּגִין וּמְצַלְחִין

**“And the elders of the Jews built and prospered,”  
(Ezra 6:14)**

οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον

**“For God so loved the world,”  
(John 3:16)**

## Writing Materials

- Stone
  - The 10 Commandments
    - Exodus 31:18
    - Exodus 34:28
  - The entire law of Moses
    - Joshua 8:32
- Tablets (Stone, Clay, or Wood)
  - Isaiah 30:8
  - Engraved with a sharp stylus
- Scrolls
  - Parchment or Papyrus

- Papyrus

Papyrus is made from the stem of the plant. The outer rind is first stripped off, and the sticky fibrous inner pith is cut lengthwise into thin strips of about 40 cm long. The strips are then placed side by side on a hard surface with their edges slightly overlapping, and then another layer of strips is laid on top at a right angle. The strips may have been soaked in water long enough for decomposition to begin, perhaps increasing adhesion, but this is not certain. While still moist, the two layers are hammered together, mashing the layers into a single sheet. The sheet is then dried under pressure. After drying, the sheet of papyrus is polished with some rounded object, possibly a stone or seashell or round hard wood.



Papyrus plants in Kew Gardens, London

- The unaccountable disappearance of this plant from Egypt was foretold by Isaiah (Isa. 19:6, 7) as a part of the divine judgment on that land. <sup>6</sup>And they shall turn the rivers far away; *and* the brooks of defence shall be emptied and dried up: the reeds and flags shall wither. <sup>7</sup>The paper reeds by the brooks, by the mouth of the brooks, and every thing sown by the brooks, shall wither, be driven away, and be no *more*.

- Parchment

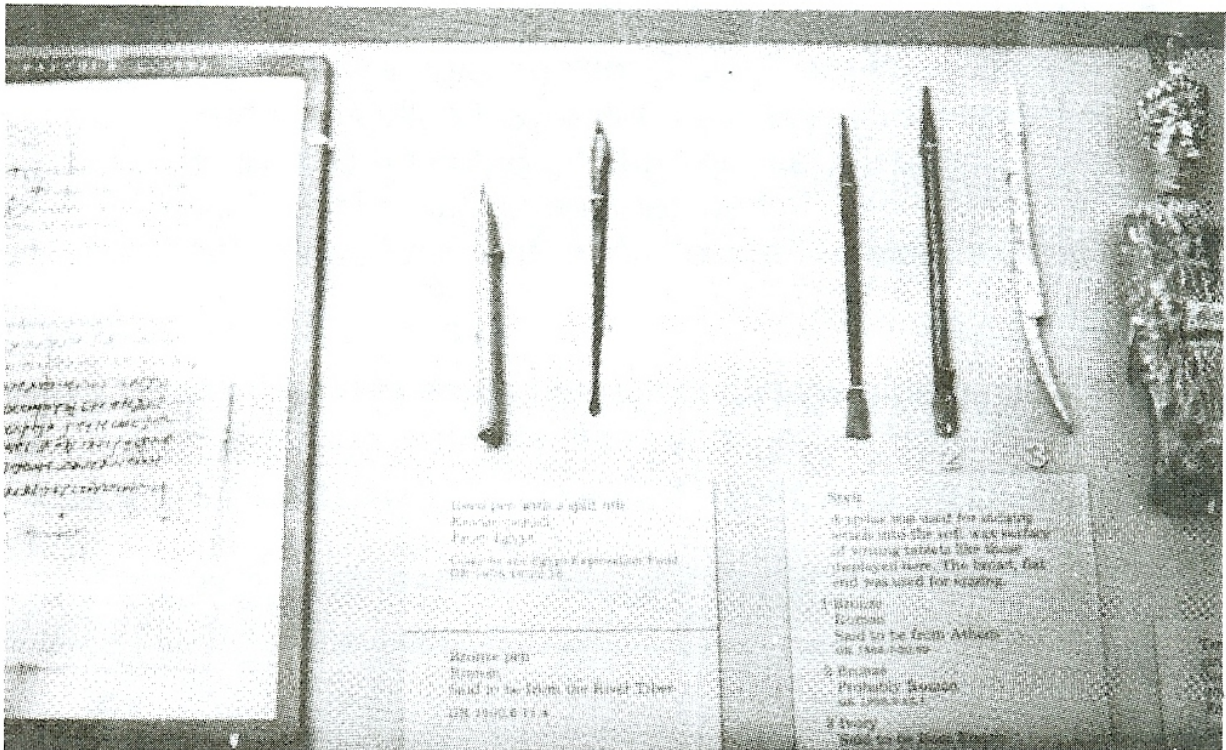
**Parchment** is a thin material made from [calfskin](#), [sheepskin](#) or [goatskin](#). Its most common use is as the pages of a [book](#), [codex](#) or [manuscript](#). It is distinct from [leather](#) in that parchment is not tanned, but stretched, scraped, and dried under tension, creating a stiff white, yellowish or translucent animal skin. The finer qualities of parchment are called [vellum](#). It is very reactive with changes in [relative humidity](#) and is not waterproof.



- Paul requested Timothy to bring parchments
  - 2 Timothy 4:13
  - <sup>13</sup>The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring *with thee*, and the books, *but* especially the parchments.
- Jeremiah 36:2-4
- Ezekiel 2:8 – 3:4
- Jeremiah 36:21-ff
- Daniel 9:2; 12:4



- Codex
  - Parchment or Papyrus
  - Stacked sheets, folded in the middle, sewn together
    - Somewhat like modern bookbinding (without the glue)
  - Most New Testament manuscripts were produced using the codex format
- Primitive pens and inks
  - Reed pens
  - Split reeds (like a fountain pen)
  - Quill pens (5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century AD)
  - Writers would mix their own inks



Ancient Writing Equipment Displayed in the British Museum

## The Text of the Old Testament

### 1. Masoretes

- a. Special Jewish scribes and scholars entrusted with the sacred task of making copies of the Hebrew Scriptures
- b. Approximately 500 to 950 AD
- c. Responsible for the copying and preservation of the Hebrew text during that period

### 2. Masorah

- a. Information regarding the number of occurrences of particular words, names, or phrases in the text
- b. Contained information regarding the specific word which marked the middle of a book or section of the Hebrew Bible.
- c. Contained a count of the number of words in each book.
- d. By constantly referring to the masorah and its many statistics, the Masoretes transmitted the Hebrew Text with meticulous care as it was handed down to them.
- e. Any scroll found to have an error was buried.



The British Museum Codex, A Famous Masoretic Manuscript, Open At Exodus 20



## **MASORETIC MANUSCRIPTS**

1. **BRITISH MUSEUM ORIENTAL 4445 - A COPY OF THE PENTATEUCH DATING FROM ABOUT A.D. 850. PARTS OF THE BOOKS OF GENESIS AND DEUTERONOMY ARE MISSING.**
2. **CODEX CAIRENSIS - A COPY OF THE FORMER AND THE LATTER PROPHETS, COPIED BY AARON BEN ASHER IN A.D. 895.**
3. **LENINGRAD MS P- A COPY OF THE LATTER PROPHETS, DATING FROM A.D. 916.**
4. **LENINGRAD MS B-19A- A COPY OF THE ENTIRE OLD TESTAMENT, CONTAINING THE BEN ASHER MASORETIC TEXT, DATING FROM A.D. 1010.**
5. **THE ALEPPO CODEX - A PARTIAL COPY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, COMPLETE UNTIL PARTIALLY DESTROYED IN 1948. CORRECTED AND PUNCTUATED BY AARON BEN ASHER IN A.D. 930.**
6. **THE REUCHL IN CODEX - A COPY OF THE PROPHETS IN THE TRADITION OF THE BEN NAPHTALI FAMILY OF MASORETES. DATES FROM A.D. 1105.**
7. **THE CAIRO GENIZA FRAGMENTS - OVER 24,000 HEBREW BIBLE FRAGMENTS DISCOVERED IN 1890 DURING THE REBUILDING OF AN OLD SYNAGOGUE IN CAIRO. THEY DATE FROM THE SIXTH TO THE NINTH CENTURIES A.D.**

### **3. The Dead Sea Scrolls**

- a. Discovered by an Arab shepherd boy in March, 1947
- b. A total of eleven caves were excavated over the next 12 years
- c. A considerable library was found
- d. The library belonged to an ancient Jewish sect which had inhabited the community of Qumran from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to the latter part of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD

e. The following manuscripts have been found:

From Cave 1	From Caves 2, 3, 5-10	From Cave 4	From Cave 11
Genesis	3 of Genesis	11 of Genesis	Leviticus
Exodus	3 of Exodus	11 of Exodus	Ezekiel
Leviticus/Numbers	2 of Leviticus	4 of Leviticus	3 of Psalms
2 of Deuteronomy	3 of Numbers	2 of Numbers	
Judges	5 of Deuteronomy	18 of Deuteronomy	
Samuel	2 of Kings	2 of Joshua	
2 of Isaiah	Isaiah	2 of Judges	
Jeremiah	Jeremiah	3 of Samuel	
Ezekiel	Ezekiel	Kings	
3 of Psalms	Minor Prophets	15 of Isaiah	
2 of Daniel	4 of Psalms	3 of Jeremiah	
	Job	3 of Ezekiel	
	2 of Ruth	7 of Minor Prophets	
	Song of Songs	17 of Psalms	
	3 of Lamentations	3 of Job	
	Daniel	2 of Proverbs	
		2 of Ruth	
		3 of Song of Songs	
		2 of Ecclesiastes	
		Lamentations	
		5 of Daniel	
		Ezra	
		Chronicles	

f. Twelve manuscripts are written in paleo-Hebrew script, an archaic form of Hebrew which predates that of the other Qumran ms

- i. The Pentateuch
- ii. Job

4. Why are the Dead Sea scrolls important?

- a. When compared to the Masoretic text
  - i. Samuel was slightly different and has been used to improve the accuracy of the Masoretic text
  - ii. Other differences are very minor, involving the spelling of names.
- b. We do not have the original writings of Moses or any of the Old Testament writers



- i. Dates of some of the scrolls have been estimated at 250 BC, the oldest known copies we have
- c. Some critics have claimed that numerous errors are to be found in the Bible, errors introduced by making copies over several centuries of time
  - i. The very minor differences in copies that differ in age by 600 years or more
    - 1. dispel the claims of the critics
    - 2. remind us that God has preserved His word as He said He would.

5. Masada

- a. Ms found near Wadi Murabba at Masada
  - i. Psalms
  - ii. Minor Prophets
  - iii. Same time period as the Dead Sea scrolls
  - iv. Remarkably like those of the Masoretic Text.



*A Qumran Cave near  
the Dead Sea*

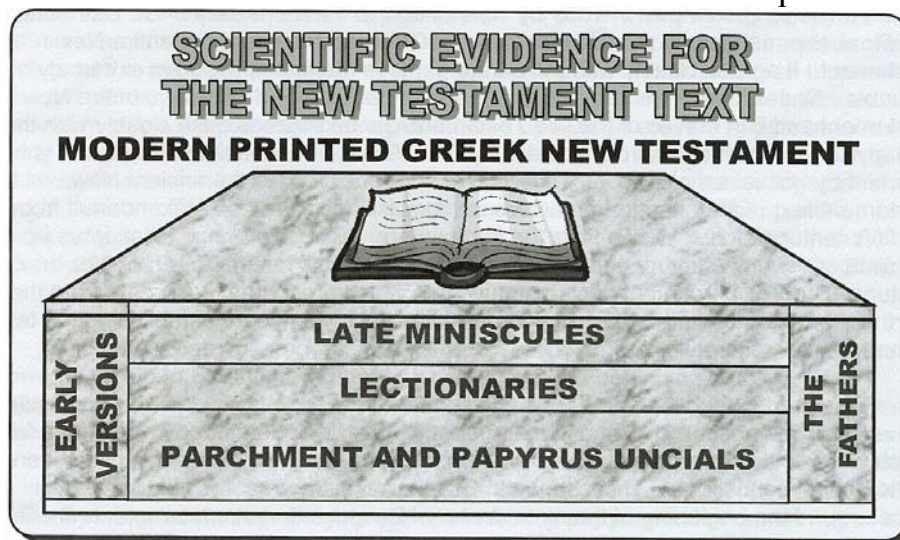
## Secondary Witnesses to the Old Testament Text

1. The Septuagint (LXX)
  - a. Greek translation of the Old Testament which was begun about 250 B.C.
  - b. Some Jewish writings indicate that the Pentateuch as all that was originally translated
  - c. Other books were translated later
  - d. Oldest complete ms of the Septuagint are from the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD
  - e. Tradition is that 70 men did the work of translation, therefore the name LXX in Roman numerals
2. Aramaic Targums
  - a. After Babylonian captivity, the Jewish people spoke Hebrew less, and began to speak more in Aramaic.
  - b. Became necessary for the Hebrew Bible to be explained or paraphrased in the synagogues
  - c. Nehemiah 8:7-8 --- may have been done as early as the time of Ezra
  - d. Done orally until about 200 AD, then began to be written down
  - e. Targum of Onkelos
    - i. 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD
    - ii. believed to adhere very closely to the Hebrew text
  - f. Other Targums
    - i. Targum of Johnathan ben Uzziel on the Prophets
      1. 4<sup>th</sup> century AD
    - ii. Targum of Pseudo-Johnathan on the Torah
      1. 650 AD
    - iii. Jerusalem Targum on the Torah
      1. 700 AD
    - iv. These are believed to paraphrase too much to be of value as witness to the Hebrew text
3. Other translations used as witness to the Hebrew text
  - a. Syriac or Eastern Aramaic translation --- 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD
  - b. Coptic or Egyptian translation of the Septuagint --- 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD
  - c. Ethiopic version --- 4<sup>th</sup> century AD
  - d. Gothic version --- 4<sup>th</sup> century AD
  - e. Arabic version --- 10<sup>th</sup> century AD

## The Text of the New Testament

1. Greek manuscripts of the NT
  - a. As of 1976, 5,366 Greek ms have been catalogued
  - b. Date from about 100 AD to 1500 AD
  - c. Four types
    - i. Papyrus Uncials
      1. written in Greek capital letters
      2. 88 of these have been catalogued
      3. Papyrus number 52, known as the John Rylands Fragment, dates from the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century
        - a. Only shortly after the death of John
        - b. Contains a portion of the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John
      4. Papyrus number 46
        - a. Chester Beatty collection
        - b. 86 leaves from a papyrus codex containing all or part of 10 Pauline epistles, including Hebrews
        - c. dates about 200 AD
      5. Papyrus number 45
        - a. 30 leaves from a papyrus codex of the 4 Gospels and Acts
        - b. Slightly later than Papyrus 46
      6. From those who have had an opportunity to translate from these earliest New Testament copies:
        - a. “It is a thrilling and faith building experience to translate a portion of scripture from one of these ancient manuscripts and realize that our Bible today still says the same thing.”
    - ii. Parchment Uncials
      1. Also written in Greek capital letters
      2. Since Paul asked Timothy to bring his “parchments” (2 Timothy 4:13), some think that some books of the N.T. were originally written on parchment.
      3. Codex Sinaiticus

- a. 4<sup>th</sup> century AD
  - b. found in St. Catherine's Monastery near Mt. Sinai
  - c. contains the entire N.T.
  - d. also contains most of the O.T.
  - e. discovered in 1859 AD
  - f. dated about 350 AD
- 4. Codex Vaticanus
  - a. 325 AD
  - b. 142 leaves of N.T.
  - c. 614 leaves of O.T.
  - d. released to scholars by the Vatican Library in 1889
- 5. Codex Alexandrinus
  - a. 400 AD
  - b. Made available to western scholars in 1629
- iii. Miniscule Manuscripts
  - 1. written in a running cursive hand
  - 2. change in Greek writing style took place about the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD
  - 3. 2795 miniscules have been catalogued
- iv. Lectionaries
  - 1. collections of scriptures to be read in worship services (for easy location and reading)
  - 2. 2209 lectionaries have been catalogued
    - a. 245 uncial script
    - b. 1964 miniscule script





2. Early Translations
  - a. Several thousand ms are known today
    - i. Syriac
    - ii. Coptic
    - iii. Old Latin
    - iv. Latin Vulgate
      1. 8000 ms known
    - v. Armenian
    - vi. Gothic
    - vii. Ethiopic
  - b. Serve to confirm the text of the Greek N.T.
3. Quotations of Scripture in the writings of early Christians
  - a. Greatest value is from authors who wrote in Greek and quoted directly from the Scriptures
  - b. Somewhat less valuable if the author wrote in Latin, Syrian, or some other language.
  - c. In order to be useful:
    - i. Must determine if the text of the writer has been accurately preserved
    - ii. Must determine if the writer was actually quoting or simply commenting on a scripture

## Textual Variations

1. There are variations in the Greek text of the New Testament that have arisen over the last 1900 years.
2. The number of Greek ms (5,366 as of 1976) from different centuries and different geographic locations helps the textual critic to scientifically determine the original text to a very high degree of accuracy.
  - a. In many cases scholars are able to determine when and why a variation occurred and then demonstrate what the original text was.
  - b. It has been estimated that, at present, the New Testament is 99.5% pure, and that the 0.5% of the text about which there is any question is of a trivial nature that does not affect our understanding of God's word.
  - c. As time progresses and more manuscripts are studied, the accuracy of the New Testament can only become greater.

## History of the New Testament Text

A.D. 55-300	Period of Free, Unrestrained Copying by Various Individuals
A.D. 300-800	Standardization of Text in Various Geographical Locations, Employment of Trained Copyists
A.D. 800-1500	General Revision and Standardization of Expanded Byzantine Text by Trained Monastic Copyists
A.D. 1500-1650	Development of Popular Printed Greek Text (or Textus Receptus) Base on Late Byzantine Manuscripts
A.D. 1650-1880	Discovery of Many More Ancient Manuscripts, Collection and Study of Variant Readings
A.D. 1880-Present	Further Discoveries and Reconstruction of Text Based on Vast Manuscript Evidence from All of Christian History

1. Beginning during the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. some attempts at standardization of the text in various geographical locations began to emerge.
  - a. Alexandrian Text
  - b. Caesarean Text
  - c. Western Text
  - d. Byzantine Text
2. Manuscripts continued to be perpetuated according to the four geographical areas until the 9<sup>th</sup> century.
3. Beginning with the 9<sup>th</sup> century the monks who copied the text of the New Testament achieved a great degree of uniformity and standardization in what is called the Byzantine textual tradition.
  - a. There was an attempt to alleviate ambiguity in the text by making what was implicit explicit.
    - i. Matthew 16:20
      1. “he was the Christ” in earlier ms
      2. “Jesus was the Christ”
  - b. There was an attempt to erase seeming contradictions by making the texts read alike.
  - c. In cases where two prominent variants existed in the earlier textual traditions, they were both included in the text.
  - d. In a few cases, the marginal comments of early scribes were incorporated into the text, resulting in the addition of non-original material. (These have been called “spurious passages” in the King James version, and are sometimes printed in italics).
  - e. In spite of these factors, the text of the New Testament remained about 95% pure.
  - f. These variations did not change the message of Christ or God’s commands for his church, and did not affect one’s ability to understand and obey God’s word.
4. The Byzantine text remained the standard text until after the printing press was invented.

## The Textus Receptus

1. The printed Greek New Testament that was popular in the 16<sup>th</sup> century is commonly known as the Textus Receptus, or “Received Text”.
  - a. Derived from a few of the late Byzantine miniscules.
  - b. Substantially the same as our modern critical Greek text, except it is considered by some modern textual scholars to be slightly less pure.
2. Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam
  - a. Early in the 16<sup>th</sup> century
  - b. Began to prepare for the publication of a printed Greek N.T.
  - c. Commissioned by publisher Johan Froben in 1515.
  - d. Erasmus made a quick trip to Basle in July of 1515 and found some late medieval ms which, with a certain amount of correction, could be used as a printer’s copy.
  - e. He lacked a complete ms of Revelation and was forced to rely on the Latin Vulgate for the final verses instead of the Greek text
    - i. Thus some readings were introduced that have never been found in Greek ms.
    - ii. 1 John 5:7-8
      1. Erasmus was reluctant to include the Trinitarian statement from Latin Vulgate “the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one, and there are three that bear witness on the earth”
      2. He was charged with negligence for his reluctance.
      3. His explanation was that he could not find the passage in any Greek ms.
      4. A Fransiscan monk is suspected to have prepared such a ms from the Latin Vulgate
      5. Erasmus reluctantly included the passage with a lengthy note indicating his suspicions regarding its origin.
  - f. By March, 1516 Erasmus’ Greek New Testament was hurried into production printing with numerous typographical errors.
  - g. The text was based on half a dozen miniscule ms, the oldest and best of which was from the 10<sup>th</sup> century.
3. Robert Estienne of Paris
  - a. Produced a Greek N.T. using both the work of Erasmus and the Greek text of Spanish Cardinal Francisco Ximenes from the



Complutensian Polyglot (multi-lingual) (Of or pertaining to Complutum (now Alcala de Henares) a city near Madrid; as, the Complutensian Bible.)

- b. Estienne's 3<sup>rd</sup> edition became for many people, especially in England, the "received text".
- c. Published in different formats by a number of individuals until Bonaventure and Abraham Elzevir of Leiden published a pocket edition in 1624.
- d. The prefaced to their 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (1633) contained the statement (in Latin) "the reader has the text which is now received by all in which we give nothing changed or corrupted."
  - i. Hence the term, Textus Receptus.
- 4. The Textus Receptus represents the work of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century scholars.
- 5. The King James version of the Bible is based on the Textus Receptus
- 6. The KJV has been of great service to the world for many years
- 7. Subsequent discoveries of ancient Greek ms have demonstrated some places where the text has been slightly expanded and its accuracy could be improved.
  - a. Acts 8:37
    - i. The ms upon which Erasmus had most depended does not contain verse 37
      - 1. <sup>37</sup>And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. (KJV)
      - 2. <sup>37</sup> *And Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. (ASV)*
    - ii. Another ms had this verse written in the margin, and Erasmus included it with the remark that it must have been omitted by a scribe.
    - iii. Understand that there were no chapter and verse numbers in the Greek text, so there would be no obvious gap in the Greek text. The present **chapter divisions** were first introduced in the Vulgate Bible in 1205 by Stephen Langton, a professor in Paris (later Archbishop of Canterbury). The present **verse numbers** were added in 1551 by Robert Stephanus, a book printer in Paris, again using the Vulgate Bible.
    - iv. Irenaeus wrote a book about 180 A.D., entitled "Against Heresies". He refers to this passage, but it is not clear

- whether he was actually quoting from the scripture or simply commenting on the confession of the eunuch.
    - v. Manuscripts earlier than the 6<sup>th</sup> century do not contain the text. The best evidence is that it is not in Luke's original writing.
    - vi. Even without Acts 8:37, we have Romans 10:9 and 1 Timothy 6:12 which refer to the good confession.
  - b. John 7:53-8:11 (the woman taken in adultery)
    - i. Not present in the earliest papyrus and uncial ms
    - ii. Later ms which include it either place asterisks beside it or cannot decide where to put it.
    - iii. Different scribes included it at different places such as John 7:52, John 21:25, John 7:36, John 7:44, or even Luke 21:38. So a problem was recognized.
    - iv. English Bibles today may place this passage in brackets, print it in italics, or print it in a footnote to show that it is recognized as not being in the oldest know ms.
  - c. Mark 16:9-20
    - i. Four different endings to Mark can be found.
    - ii. The best substantiated of these four are:
      - 1. The longer ending (verses 9-20)
      - 2. The shorter ending (verse 8)
    - iii. Both can be found in ms dating back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century
    - iv. The short ending in the Greek text would have the book ending with the Greek word γαρ, which means "for", which seems incredible.
    - v. English Bibles today may use brackets, italics, or footnotes for verses 9-20.
    - vi. The things included in verses 9-20 can be found in other places in the N.T.
      - 1. post-resurrection appearances of Jesus
      - 2. Great Commission given to the eleven
      - 3. Necessity of faith and baptism
- 8. The nature of textual criticism is to seek to determine the original reading in cases where variant readings exist, and therefore to maintain the purity of the text.
  - a. Because of the nature of the task, attention is drawn to the few passages in which significant variants exist.
  - b. The variants make up only a very small fraction of the N.T.
  - c. The vast majority is totally beyond question

9. 1 Peter 1:24-25

<sup>24</sup> For, All flesh is as grass, And all the glory thereof as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower falleth: <sup>25</sup> But the word of the Lord abideth for ever. And this is the word of good tidings which was preached unto you.

**Comparative Manuscript Evidence**

Author/Work	Date of Original	MS Available	Earliest MS
Thucidides	460-400 BC	8	900 AD
Heroditus	400 BC	Scarce	950 AD
Julius Caesar	58-50 BC	5	1100 AD
Aristotle	343 BC	5	1100 AD
New Testament	50-95 AD	20,000+	100 AD