

# How We Got Our Bible

## Part Three: The Text of the New Testament

- I. The Nature of New Testament Manuscripts
  - A. Early biblical manuscripts were written on papyrus.
  - B. By the 3d century parchment (leather) became the standard paper for biblical manuscripts.
  - C. Writing was done with pen and ink. The ink was usually brown or black.
  - D. Initially New Testament books were written on Scrolls.
  - E. Around the beginning of the 2d century the codex (modern book) became the main book format.
- II. The Styles of Writing in New Testament Manuscripts
  - A. Cursive (minuscule) Handwriting
  - B. All-Capitals (uncial)
  - C. Because of the cost of parchment many documents were scraped and washed to be reused for other literature. These are called Palimpsests. They are biblical manuscripts that are written on reused parchment. Of the 263 uncial manuscripts of the New Testament 63 are palimpsests.
  - D. In the early centuries of Christianity the gospels were divided into regular readings for services. Scribes marked the beginning and end of these readings so the lector (reader) knew where to begin and end. These manuscripts of the gospels are called lectionaries (Lindisfarne Gospels).
  - E. The advent of monasteries created a class of monks who became scribes. They worked standing at a writing desk in a room called a scriptorium. This was difficult and tedious work. Some monks even added little sentences at the end of manuscripts such as, “The end of the book; thanks be to God.”
  - F. The monks also added footnotes called colophons which include the name of the scribe and sometimes the date and place of writing.
  - G. The approximate date of writing of a given manuscript can be determined by paleography—the study of handwriting styles.
- III. Classifications of New Testament Manuscripts
  - A. A large number of New Testament manuscripts are available.
    1. Comparatively Large Number of Manuscripts: Home’s *Iliad* has only 643 extant (known) manuscripts today; Ceasar’s *Gallic War* (54 BC) has only 9 or 10; Plato’s writings have no manuscript within 1200 years of writing available.
    2. There are about 5500 extant partial or complete manuscripts of the New Testament. Some of them date to the early 2d century.
  - B. Categories of New Testament Manuscripts
    1. Papyri (P): P46
    2. Uncials (Capital Letters and 0#): Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph, 01); Codex Vanticanus (B, 03); Codex Alexandrinus (A, 02); Freer Gospels (032).
    3. Minuscules (#): 1 & 2 used by Erasmus, Family 13, generally later dates than uncials and papyri.
    4. Lectionaries (l#): None of them contain revelation, but primarily the gospels.