

## ***How We Got the Bible – Christians begin to write and gather [slide 1]***

1. Fast forward 300 years from the writing of the Septuagint and we have the birth of Jesus and the beginning of the Christian era. As we said last week, Christians wrote each other extensively and they quoted scripture so much that if all our NT manuscripts disappeared we could recreate all but 11 verses of the NT.
2. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. To the early Christians, when they wrote OF scripture, they were referring to the books we call the Old Testament and, arguably, the Apocrypha. Paul certainly was in [slide 2 -- 2 Tim. 3:16,17]. There are signs that the writers of the NT books began to view some of their books as scripture within a hundred years of the death of Jesus but it is arguable whether or not they knew they were writing scripture (I think Paul thought so at times. Other times, he said it was his words he was writing: see 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 7).
3. Let's look at the manuscripts. [slide 3] They are called "manuscripts" because they were handwritten (manually scripted). The average papyrus book lasted 10yrs with normal to frequent handling. We have 5,664 partial to complete NT manuscripts in the original early Greek language and about 9000 in other translations such as Coptic, Syriac, etc.
4. To date them, we look at: [Slide 4]
  - a. Carbon dating of materials – surface and ink (rarely).
  - b. The size of the letters.
  - c. Are they all capitals or are there small letters?
  - d. Are the letters all together or are there separations?
  - e. How many columns to a page? Style of columns?
  - f. Any marks of punctuation or divisions into paragraphs?
  - g. What is the shape of the letters? Plain, simple, elaborate and complex?
  - h. Any stray marks or evidence of earlier use of the material?

5. The two main groups of manuscripts are uncials and cursives (or minuscules). Minuscules didn't come into existence until the 9<sup>th</sup> century so they are less valuable to us.
6. Of our 5,664 manuscripts, only a few have the entire NT. This is important. For hundreds of years, the church did without a complete NT. Just like the Ethiopian Eunuch, knowing and believing in Jesus was enough. The rest was detail. The myth I was taught was that the NT gave us the church. The fact is that the church gave us the NT. I cannot stress this enough. When we argue about a passage in – say – Revelation or Second Peter we have to ask ourselves “If the majority of Christians for hundreds of years after Jesus didn't have this book and, therefore, couldn't fight and divide over it, how important is it that you and I agree about the meaning of a particular verse in it?”
7. Why didn't most manuscripts contain the entire NT? [Slide 5] Two main reasons: it would have been so bulky as to have been unwieldy and the exact books hadn't yet been agreed upon (because there was no reason to agree upon them until they were persecuted for owning them).
8. When we weed out our manuscripts that are late (9<sup>th</sup> century minuscules for example), we are left with 650 uncials. Many of them were likely originally written in cursive because they were dictated to scribes. However, we don't have those – nor do we have any autographs from the original writers. When it was decided to formally preserve and share the letters and books they would have been written in uncials so that anyone could read them.
9. Remember: the older the manuscript, the better. Less time has elapsed to allow for errors to creep in. We have about 50 papyri that date from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century. In addition, we have three vellum manuscripts that date back to the years 300-450: the Vatican, Sinaitic, and Alexandrian codices. Those three are the oldest Bibles in the world.
10. An interesting side story here: [Slide 6] the Vatican manuscript is considered one of the oldest and best...and it was nearly impossible to see for hundreds of years. It was one of the original books of the Vatican

Library and immediately was locked down as are most books there. From 1448, several scholars tried to see it and most were turned away. Napoleon stole it and many other treasures of Rome and took them back to France where they stayed until 1815 when they were returned. Scholars were sometimes allowed to see it but not copy anything. Pages were turned if the scholar was judged to have looked at one passage too long! Finally, in 1889-1890 a photographic facsimile was made of the entire book and made available to scholars worldwide.

11. It is nearly complete...but not complete. It begins at Genesis 46:28, some of the Psalms are missing (106-138), and the ending from Hebrews 9:14 through Revelation are gone.
12. The Sinaitic Manuscript [Slide 7] is nearly as important as the Vatican manuscript. It was found in the Sinai desert by the amazing Constantin Tischendorf at St. Catherine's Monastery on the approach to Mt. Sinai. We will tell that story later.
13. The Alexandrian Manuscript [slide 8] is called that because it was known to have been in Alexandria for several centuries. It was brought out of Africa to Constantinople in or around 1620. It made its way to England as a gift to the new king, Charles the First, and survived a tragic fire in the British Library when Dr. Richard Bentley grabbed it and ran out with it. It is now in the British Museum on open display. It contains the books we know as the NT but also First and Second Clement, written between 95-120 AD. Clement was a bishop at Rome and his writings were considered canonical or semi-canonical for centuries. Some pages are missing, especially in the NT, and you can see the beginnings of ornamentation: serifs, red ink, etc. It dates from the 400s. By that time, errors in the text had crept in. It is generally accepted that the discovery of this text in the 1600s began the serious study of textual variants and criticism.
14. We are going to leave the subject of the formation of the canon for a later date. Now, let's look at the amazing Constantine Tischendorf [slide 9] and his work. The site with which he is most closely associated is a monastery dedicated to St. Catherine placed in a narrow gorge in the approaches to Jebel Musa (the mountain of Moses). [slide 10] It has been there since 550

AD and continues today even under serious persecution. We hope it survives the current Islamic threats as it has those of preceding centuries. Originally a fortress, it was mainly a fortress for monks who were being attacked by Saracen tribes.

15. Inside, [slide 11] you are surrounded by high walls, forced to walk in very narrow passages, covered walks, and in and around whitewashed buildings. It is as if history froze in the Byzantine era.
16. St. Catherine [slide 12] was a young woman who refused the sexual advances of the Roman Emperor Maxmimian. She was sentenced to be broken on the wheel. When the wheel broke (“as it refused her death”) she was beheaded. Angels were seen gently taking her up and out into the desert where she was laid to rest in Sinai. The monks say their monastery is where she was buried.
17. Here came a young scholar, aged 29, not as a pilgrim but as a scholar. We take up his story next week.