
THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST

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Updated 08.13.14

(Adapted from an earlier article by Clay Jones, *The Bibliographical Test Updated*, *Christian Research Journal*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2012). Available at www.equip.org/articles/the-bibliographical-test-updated/)

SYNOPSIS

The bibliographical test examines manuscript reliability and for more than a generation, Christian apologists have employed it to substantiate the transmissional reliability of the Bible. The bibliographical test compares the closeness of the Old and New Testament's oldest extant manuscripts to its autographs (the date each book was originally penned) and the sheer number of the Biblical extant manuscripts with the number and earliness of extant manuscripts or other ancient documents like Homer, Aristotle, Herodotus and so on. Since the Bible outstrips every other ancient manuscript in sheer number and earliness to the autograph, then the Old and New Testaments have a solid basis to evaluate how accurately they have been transmitted.

However, although apologists have stayed abreast of the dates of the earliest extant manuscripts and latest New Testament Greek manuscript counts, we haven't kept up with the increasing numbers of manuscripts for other ancient authors that classical scholars now recognize. For example, although apologists rightly claim that there are well over 5,000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, they have reported the number of manuscripts for Homer's *Iliad* to be 643, but the real number of *Iliad* manuscripts now is actually more than 1,800. Further, the numbers of manuscript counts for the New Testament's translation into other languages have not remained static. Even though many numbers that apologists have employed are often significantly changed, the Old and New Testaments still have the best attested manuscript transmission of any ancient document, and the bibliographical test still remains a reliable indicator that the New Testament has been accurately transmitted to this day.

What has been overlooked in Old Testament apologetics numbers is the use of scrolls and codices.

INTRODUCTION

For over seventy years, Christians have appealed to what is called the "bibliographical test" as a means of establishing the New Testament's transmissional accuracy. The bibliographical test examines the overall number of extant manuscripts (sometimes abbreviated to MSS or MS for the singular) and the difference between the date of original writing, called the autograph, and the date of the earliest surviving, or extant, manuscript. Since we do not possess the autograph of even one ancient document, this test best determines transmissional accuracy for any ancient document.

Christians argue that if historians will consider an ancient document to have been accurately transmitted whose manuscripts are few and far between the date the autograph was penned and its earliest extant copy,

then they should accept that New Testament documents are accurately transmitted since its manuscripts are comparatively many and comparatively near their autographs.¹

**The trouble is that the numbers and dates that often appealed to
are woefully behind the new discoveries.**

CLASSIC WORKS OF ANTIQUITY

HOMER (F. 9TH OR 8TH CENTURY B.C.), *ILIAD*

Homer authored the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and for years apologists have claimed that while there are over 5,500 manuscripts of the Greek New Testament, there are, by comparison, only 643 manuscripts of Homer's *Iliad*.² For example, a recent Google query of *Homer 643 manuscripts* turned up 143,000 results, and a review of the first 100 of those results revealed that *all* of them related to whether the New Testament has been accurately transmitted.³

But things have changed: the more recent number of *Iliad* manuscripts is 1800+.

Martin L. West, Senior Research Fellow, All Souls College, Oxford, catalogued a total of 1,569 *papyri*.⁴ But, this is a *papyri only* count and not a total manuscript count.⁵ Dr. West said that he didn't believe there was a more recent non-papyri count than that found in T. W. Allen's, *Homeri Iliad* which contains 188 items.⁶ Thus 1,569 papyri, plus 188 parchment manuscripts, comes to a total of 1,757.⁷

Martin L. West, *Studies in the Text and Transmission of the Iliad* (München/Leipzig: K.G. Saur, 2001). See especially 87-129 (papyri), 139-57 (medieval MSS). West notes that the total number of papyri (1569) is misleading because of various factors (email from West, 21 Aug 2013). He also notes that the 37 early medieval MSS are in addition to the 188 medieval MSS that T.W. Allen counted (see T.W. Allen, *Homer: The Origins and the Transmission* [Oxford, 1924]; idem, *Homeri Ilias* [Oxford, 1931]), but, West notes, Allen included documents that are not properly MSS of the *Iliad*. Thus, the total number of MSS of the *Iliad* extant today is less than 2000. (Correspondence from Dan Wallace to Josh McDowell, October 15, 2013.)

SOPHOCLES (c. 496—406 B.C.), TRAGEDIES

¹ For example, see John Warwick Montgomery, *History and Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1964), 26-29; Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Nelson, 1999), 33-45. I (Clay Jones) am indebted to and in awe of these men and others who first researched the bibliographical test without the use of computers!

² All older numbers from McDowell, *New Evidence*, 38.

³ 8/26/11.

⁴ Martin L. West, *Studies in the Text and Transmission of the Iliad* (München: K. G. Saur, 2001), 86.

⁵ Even though "manuscript" literally means "handwrite," scholars like West sometimes use "manuscript" to refer only to non-papyri manuscripts. Papyri manuscripts they only call "papyri."

⁶ Clay Jones personal correspondence with Dr. Martin L. West October 30, 2010. Correspondence from Daniel Wallace to Josh McDowell October 15, 2013. Thomas W. Allen, *Homeri Ilias* (1931; repr., New York: Arno, 1979), 11-55. Personal correspondence with Dr. West on 10/30/10. West would add 32 early medieval MSS to Allen's 188 medieval MSS. See T.W. Allen, *Homer: The Origins and the Transmissions* [Oxford, 1924].

⁷ West also lists 142 Homeric papyri (glossaries, commentaries, *scholia minora*) and 47 witness papyri ("miscellaneous papyri and inscriptions in which verses of the *Iliad* are quoted"), *Ibid.*, 130.

Sophocles was a Greek playwright best known for his drama *Oedipus the King*. The count for the manuscripts of Sophocles remains at around 193.⁸ The earliest dates from the tenth century except for some fragments from the third century BC.⁹

HERODOTUS (C. 484—C 425 B.C.), *HISTORY*

Herodotus, the “father of history,” produced one of the great narrative histories of the ancient world. There are 49 papyrus fragments of Herodotus, and there are about 60 other non-papyrus manuscripts (up from 8).¹⁰ The oldest papyri date from the first century AD. POxy 1375 (I or II), POxy 1619 (end of I AD), *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* vol. 1, p. 471f. (I or II), British Library 1109 (Greek papyri in the British Museum III p.57 Milne, *Catalogue of the literary papyri in the British Museum* no. 102) (I or II). (Correspondence from Dan Wallace to Josh McDowell October 15, 2013.)

THUCYDIDES (C. 460–C. 404 B.C.) *HISTORY OF THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR*

Thucydides chronicled the Athenian war against the Peloponnesians. The text of Thucydides is still based primarily on eight manuscripts but some papyri fragments exist with a 3rd century B.C. date.¹¹ These papyri narrow the previously reported date by 1150 years!

PLATO (428/427—348/347 B.C.), *TETRALOGIES*

Plato wrote seven Tetralogies.¹² The Plato Microfilm Project lists 210 manuscripts¹³ rather than 7. The oldest surviving manuscript was copied by John the Calligrapher in 895 leaving the gap unchanged.¹⁴ (December 6, 2013, we had the privilege of discovering a portion of a 2nd c B.C. fragment from Plato’s *Republic*.)

DEMOSTHENES (384–322 B.C.), *SPEECHES*

Demosthenes was an Athenian statesman and orator whose speeches reveal much about life in 4th-century Athens. There are at least 340 MSS for Demosthenes (up from 200) dating from the tenth or late ninth century and some rather unhelpful fragments which date to the first century B.C.¹⁵

⁸ Alexander Turyn, *Studies in the Manuscript Tradition of the Tragedies of Sophocles* (Rome: L’erma di Bretschneider, 1970), 5-9., See also Luigi Battezzato, *History of Scholarship: A Selection of Papers from the Seminar on the History of Scholarship held annually at the Warburg Institute*, Christopher Ligota and Jean-Louis Quantin, eds., (New York: Oxford, 2006), 92.

⁹ Turyn, 102. See also, *The Complete Sophocles*, Peter Burian and Alan Shapiro, ed., (New York: Oxford, 2010), 189.

¹⁰ Leuven Database of Ancient Books, <http://www.trismegistos.org/ldab/search.php>. Accessed 2 February 2011. See also R. A. McNeal, *Herodotus: Book I* (New York: University Press, 1986), xiii.

¹¹ The Leuven Database of Ancient Books lists 96 papyrus and parchment manuscripts. <http://www.trismegistos.org/ldab/search.php>. Accessed 2/2/2011. See also, Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, P. J. Rhodes, trans., (Oxford, OUP, 2009), 663.

¹² A tetralogy contains four books.

¹³ Plato Microfilm Project of the Yale University Library, *The Plato Manuscripts: A New Index*, Robert S. Brumbaugh and Rolun Wells, ed., (New Haven: Yale, 1968), 11-70. The 210 number does not include *Spuria*. For a thorough analysis of past catalogs of Plato see Robert S. Brumbaugh, “Plato Manuscripts: Toward a Completed Inventory” *Manuscripta*, Vol. 34, Num. 2, July, 1990, 114-121.

¹⁴ T. H. Irwin, “The Platonic Corpus,” *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, Gail Fine, ed., (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 71. Irwin further comments that “According to G. Pasquali, *Storia della Tradizione e Critica del Testo*, 2nd ed. (Florence: Le Monnier, 1952), 247, Plato is the classical author with the richest textual tradition after Homer” (71, n. 41).

CAESAR (C. 100–44 B.C.), GALLIC WARS

From 58-50 BC Julius Caesar conquered much of Gaul and described his success in *On the Gallic War*. Instead of 10, there are 251 manuscripts (a 2500% increase!) beginning from the ninth century (the majority are 15th century).¹⁶

PLINY THE ELDER (23/24–79 A.D.), NATURAL HISTORY

Pliny the Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus) authored *Natural History* which was regarded as a scientific authority up to the Middle Ages. Apologists have sometimes confused him with his adopted son Pliny the Younger (Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus). Instead of 7, there are approximately 200 MSS of his *Natural History*, mostly from the 14th & 15th centuries. However, a manuscript fragment from the end of the fifth century survives, which narrows the previous gap by 250 years.¹⁷

LIVY (59/64 B.C.—17 A.D.), HISTORY OF ROME

Livy wrote a history of Rome which survives in around 100 MSS beginning in the early fifth century and over 60 copies¹⁸ (Up from 1 partial, 19 copies).¹⁹ Daniel B. Wallace, director of The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts, explains that unlike classic texts which often have few manuscripts and many copies of those manuscripts, “New Testament scholars know of very, very few MSS that are direct copies of other MSS.”²⁰

TACITUS (56–C. 120 A.D.), ANNALS

Tacitus was a Roman orator and public official who from 14 to 68 AD chronicled the Roman Empire in his *Annals*. University of Michigan Greek and Latin professor David Potter wrote: “Tacitus’ historical works descend in two manuscripts, one for books 1-6, another for 11-16 and the surviving portions of the history.”²¹ The first is c. 850; the other is mid-eleventh century.²² From those two manuscripts spring “thirty-one fifteenth-century manuscripts” (up from 20).²³

NEW TESTAMENT

Of course, when it comes to the bibliographical test, the New Testament wins the race when others have barely left the starting gate. Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman put it in perspective:

¹⁵ Sealy, 222-223.

¹⁶ Virginia Brown, “Latin Manuscripts of Caesar’s Gallic War,” *Palaeographia Diplomatica et Archivistica: Studi in onore di Giulio Battelli* (Rome: University of Rome, 1979), 105-107.

¹⁷ Reynolds, *Texts and Transmission*, 317. See also, Hilda Battenwieser, “Popular Authors of the Middle Ages: The Testimony of the Manuscripts,” *Speculum* vol. 17, No. 1, Jan. 1942, 52-53.

¹⁸ L. D. Reynolds, “Livy,” *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics*, L. D. Reynolds, ed., (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 205-214.

¹⁹ McDowell, *New Evidence*, 38.

²⁰ Personal correspondence between Clay Jones and Daniel Wallace January 13, 2012.

²¹ David Potter, *Literary Tests and the Roman Historian* (Oxford: Routledge, 1999), 72.

²² M. Winterbottom, “Tacitus,” *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics*, R. D. Reynolds, ed., (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 406-409.

²³ R. H. Martin, “The Leyden Manuscript of Tacitus,” *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1964, 109.

In contrast with these figures [of other ancient works], the textual critic of the New Testament is embarrassed by a wealth of material. Furthermore, the work of many ancient authors has been preserved only in manuscripts that date from the Middle Ages (sometimes the late Middle Ages), far removed from the time at which they lived and wrote. On the contrary, the time between the composition of the books of the New Testament and the earliest extant copies is relatively brief. Instead of a lapse of a millennium or more, as is the case of not a few classical authors, several papyrus manuscripts of portions of the New Testament are extant that were copied within a century or so after the composition of the original documents.²⁴

It is extremely difficult and laborious to track classical and Biblical manuscripts, but one of the best sources is the Leuven Database - www.trismegistos.org/ldab/. Two challenges are that, 1) all databases are not usually current with new discoveries, and 2) most databases don't take into their calculations the many manuscripts in private collections. Plus most databases don't take into consideration the scrolls.

When it comes to Homer's work, it is difficult to calculate for there are constantly new discoveries. Also numbers used for Homer's Iliad do not include at least 5 in the Green family's collection, a number in other private collections, and the 12 manuscripts (destined for museums) from a friend of ours.

The following is an example of databases being outdated. I [Josh] just got an email from a friend that says yesterday he uncovered 7 more biblical manuscripts.

One needs to be careful in comparing the survival and dating of an abundance of biblical manuscripts with classical works.

God has done an "exceptional" work in preserving such an abundance of biblical manuscripts.

Dr. Scott Carroll, Director and Senior Research Scholar of the Manuscript Research Group, comments about caution in sharing the wrong conclusions.

It is implied that an unspoken reason for the preservation of manuscripts is supernatural over against the loss of non-inspired works, but it is a bit more involved. Most classical works were in a region that could promise preservation on papyrus and were then recopied in Egypt and disseminated (not like the Christian monastic system).

These texts were systematically copied and studied at the library in Alexandria which burned partially in the first century BC, and then the texts were also systematically destroyed by Christians in the fourth century and Muslims in the seventh and eighth centuries. Christians are in part to blame for destroying around 1 million classical scrolls, and the fact that any classical texts survive in large numbers is remarkable. Centuries later, we often use the dearth of evidence to show the superior preservation of the Bible.

Early classical works were written primarily on papyrus, a highly perishable medium, as was the scroll format. Christians quickly transitioned to the codex [book format] and to parchment and vellum, which were much more durable and suitable for the codex and thus, these factors hastened the decline of classical works.

²⁴ Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* 4th ed., (New York: Oxford, 2005), 51.

We also keep in mind that classical works were copied, only if by chance, by monks after the fifth century. They were left in the hands of the 'enemy' so to speak to preserve and perpetuate – which they did but not as aggressively.

One might argue it was only by divine appointment that Biblical manuscripts survived, but nevertheless, the above provide an important context in one's comparison of Biblical and classical works.

Surprisingly, we know some classical authors who were extremely popular, like Menander, but whose works for a variety of factors were not copied in great numbers (or did not survive as such). A Christian comparison would be Origen's Hexapla, which has no surviving manuscripts and yet is of extreme importance.

As for the dating and the tabulation of evidence, the wrong data or making the wrong assumptions can lead to unintentional and misleading conclusions. Case in point – when we say that the collected works of Plato do not appear until the medieval period, it is really comparing apples and oranges with New Testament evidence. After all, we are not comparing this with the first complete New Testament (Codex Sinaiticus circa 350) or better to the earliest complete Bible (Codex Amiatinus circa 8c) – making the collection of some of Plato's works dated to 895 not seem so bad.

The Republic exceeds the length of the New Testament, and they did not collect such things in books. It required a codex and these were preserved in scrolls early on. The fact is, there is abundant and early evidence for Plato's individual works (most). The Republic has about 70 papyri alone (Scott Carroll discovered one of the earliest ones yesterday), and the Death of Socrates is second to the Republic, with around 27 papyri.

I know of extensive papyri of Demosthenes' most famous speech, *On the Crown*, that survived within a generation of the composition of the speech! I know of an extensive fragment of a play by Menander that dates within decades of his death. And the list would abound and is constantly changing with new discoveries. Because of transitions in biblical studies, many reputable scholars are out of touch with such things in classical studies.²⁵

GREEK MANUSCRIPTS

Many Christian apologists base the number of New Testament manuscripts on the work of Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland of the Institute for New Testament Textual Research in Münster. A great source for manuscript study is also the Leuden Database. The latest tally from 4 February 2010: minuscules = 2926; majuscules (uncials) = 322; papyri = 128; lectionaries = 2462 for a total of 5,838.²⁶ The earliest New Testament Greek MS as of 2012 is the John Ryland's Papyrus (P⁵²) which Bart Ehrman dates to "125-130, plus or minus twenty-five years."²⁷ (It appears there has been discovered a portion of a Mark manuscript, ca 85-125 AD. One must wait for this discovery to go through peer review and publishing before we know for certain of the dating.) For me (Josh), my all-time favorite manuscript is P52 (The John Ryland manuscript) and the small fragment of John found in Egypt. Currently, it is the earliest published record of Scriptures. If you ever go to Manchester, England, make sure to stop at the John Ryland library. It is a great experience.

²⁵ Correspondence from Dr. Scott Carroll to Josh McDowell, October 31, 2013.

²⁶ The Institute for New Testament Textual Research, http://www.uni-muenster.de/INTF/KgLSGII2010_02_04.pdf. Accessed 9 January 2012.

²⁷ Bart D. Ehrman, *The Textual Reliability of the New Testament: Bart D. Ehrman and Daniel B. Wallace in Dialog*, Robert B. Stewart, ed., (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 19.

A COMPARISON OF ANCIENT WORKS WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT (BOTH OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS)*

Numbers in () are the previously reported dates.²⁸

Author	Work	Date Written	Earliest MSS	Time Gap	Old #	New
Homer	<i>Iliad</i>	800 BC	c. 400 BC	400	643	1,800+
Herodotus	<i>History</i>	480-425 BC	1 st C AD	1,350	8	109
Sophocles ²⁹	Plays	496-406 BC	3 rd C BC	100-200	100	193
Plato	Tetralogies	400 BC	895	1,300	7	210
Caesar	<i>Gallic Wars</i>	100-44 BC	9 th C	950	10	251
Livy	<i>History of Rome</i>	59 BC-17 AD	Early 5 th C	400	1 Partial, 19 copies	90 & 60 copies
Tacitus	<i>Annals</i>	100 AD	1 st half: 850, 2 nd : 1050 (1100 AD)	750-950	20	2 + 31 15 C copies
Pliny, the Elder	<i>Natural History</i>	49-79 AD	5 th C frag: 1; Rem. 14-15 th C	400 (750)	7	200
Thucydides	<i>History</i>	460-400 BC	3 rd C BC (AD 900)	200 (1,350)	8	96
Demosthenes	Speeches	300 BC	Some frags from 1 C. BC. (AD 1100)	1,100+ (1,400)	200	340
Greek N.T. Manuscripts		50-100 AD	AD 130 (or less) ³⁰	50	5366	5,838
Greek New Testament Early Translations						18,524
Old Testament						42,000+ **
Biblical Manuscripts, Scrolls and Translations:						
New Testament Greek Manuscripts						5,838
New Testament Early Translations						18,524
Old Testament Scrolls, Codices						42,000
TOTAL BIBLICAL MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCES						66,362

*All these numbers can be obsolete by publication date

** The traditional listings of Old Testament manuscripts normally leave out all the abundant scroll evidence. It is not easy to determine the exact number of extant scrolls. The following are intelligent estimates:

²⁸ McDowell, 38.

²⁹ McDowell only listed Sophocles in the original *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Arrowhead Springs, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1973), 48.

³⁰ Daniel Wallace reports that a new fragment from the Gospel of Mark will probably date to the first century AD. Daniel B. Wallace, "Earliest Manuscript of the New Testament Discovered?" <http://www.csntm.org/> Accessed 3/26/2012. (It will probably take a year for documentation of this discovery to be made public - JDM)

Green Collection	5,000
Synagogues	20,000
Museums	1,000
Private family collections	5,000
Codices	3,000
Jewish Seminaries	5,000
Individuals	3,000
TOTAL	42,000**

**Estimates by Dr. Scott Carroll, correspondence with Josh McDowell, November 15, 2013. Of the 42,000 scrolls and codices, approximately 25,000 are from the 19th-20th centuries, while 17,000 are earlier.

To try and keep up with recent counts of scrolls and manuscripts, the following sites can be of great help:

- www.csntmn.org
- <http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/liste>

The text of the New Testament is also supported by translations into other languages.

ARMENIAN—2,000+

There are over 2,000 Armenian MSS (2,587)³¹ and the number would even be greater because, in this count, lectionary manuscripts have been ignored.³² The oldest extant manuscript dates to A.D. 887.³³

COPTIC—AROUND 975

In response to my [Clay Jones] query of the number of Sahidic New Testament manuscripts, University of Salzburg professor Karlheinz Schüssler³⁴ replied, “At the moment I count Sahidic around 700 manuscripts of the New Testament, Akhmimic, 5; Nubian, 8; Fayumic, 73; Lycopolitan, 3; and Mesokemic, 7.”³⁵ He estimates Bohairic to be between 150 and 200.³⁶ Thus by his count there are approximately 975 Coptic MSS of the New Testament. Although many are as late as the 19th century, others date from “the late third century.”³⁷

³¹ Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 117.

³² Errol F. Rhodes, *An Annotated List of Armenian New Testament Manuscripts* (Tokyo: Rikkyo, 1959), v.

³³ Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 117, n. 105.

³⁴ Karlheinz Schüssler, *Biblia Coptica: Die Koptischen Bibeltex te Band 3* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2004).

³⁵ Karlheinz Schüssler e-mail to Clay Jones March 3, 2011.

³⁶ Karlheinz Schüssler email to Clay Jones March 5, 2011.

³⁷ Stephen Emmel, “The Christian Book in Egypt: Innovation and the Coptic Tradition,” *The Bible as Book: The Manuscript Tradition*, John L. Sharpe III and Kimberly van Kampen, eds., (New Castle, DE: The British Library & Oak Knoll, 1998), 39.

New Coptic manuscripts discovered December 5-6, 2013. These Coptic manuscript fragments are waiting further research and publication. I would not use these discoveries authoritatively until they have been vetted (possibly 2-4 years).

1. **Matthew 6:33 / Matthew 7:4**-reverse side. (Last half of 5c AD). **This could be the** earliest Coptic papyri of the Sermon on the Mount.

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”
(Matthew 6:33)

“Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye.” (Matthew 7:4)

2. **Mark 15:9** (350 – 430 AD). **One of** the earliest Coptic papyri of this passage.

“Pilate answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?”

3. **John 14:28** (350 – 430 AD) This could be one of the early Coptic manuscripts.

“You heard that I said to you, ‘I go away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.”

4. **Galatians 4:17**. One of the earliest Coptic papyri.

“They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them.”

5. **I John 2:21** (350 – 430 AD). **This could be** the earliest Coptic papyri of I John. Not preserved in any Greek papyri.

“I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth.”

6. **Jeremiah 33:24**. **This could be** the earliest discovered Coptic papyri of this passage.

“Have you not observed what this people have spoken, saying, ‘The two families which the LORD chose, He has rejected them’? Thus they despise My people, no longer are they as a nation in their sight”

7. A Second Century BC fragment of *The Republic* by Plato.

GOTHIC—6

Metzger and Ehrman comment that “The most nearly complete of the half-dozen extant Gothic manuscripts (all of which are fragmentary) is a deluxe copy dating from the fifth or sixth century.... It contains portions of all four Gospels....”³⁸

³⁸ Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 115.

ETHIOPIAN—600+

George Fox University professor Steve Delamarter directs the Ethiopic Manuscript Imaging Project. Delamarter summed up the Ethiopian manuscript status: “Outside of Ethiopia, there are about six hundred Ethiopic manuscripts that contain the text of one or more books of the New Testament.” Delamarter explained that “Within Ethiopia there are perhaps 5,000 yet to be discovered and catalogued. Among these are undoubtedly several hundred from the 17th century and earlier.”³⁹ Although most manuscripts are late, “at least one manuscript of the four Gospels dates to the tenth century and a couple of others date to the eleventh century.”⁴⁰

LATIN TRANSLATIONS—10,050+

OLD LATIN—50

Vetus Latina director Roger Gryson catalogues 89 Old Latin manuscripts of the New Testament. These manuscripts date from the fourth to the thirteenth centuries.⁴¹ It is important to note, however, that Old Latin MSS are counted differently than most other MSS in that a single parchment that contains, say, the Gospel of Matthew and Ephesians is counted as two manuscripts.⁴² Therefore the present count of 50 MSS is a more accurate apples to apples comparison.

VULGATE—10,000+

The number of Latin Vulgate MSS of the New Testament remains at more than 10,000.⁴³ The earliest extant copy dates back to the 4th century. By comparison the first Latin manuscript in our possession of Homer’s *Iliad* dates from the eleventh century.⁴⁴

SYRIAC—350+

Beginning in the 5th century more than 350 Syriac Peshitta New Testament MSS survive, several of which date from the fifth and sixth centuries.⁴⁵

GEORGIAN—43+

There are at least 43 MSS beginning at the late ninth century.⁴⁶

³⁹ From a personal email exchange with the author on 3/21/11.

⁴⁰ *Early Versions*, 224-225.

⁴¹ Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 101.

⁴² Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 101. For the fourth century date see also Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 187.

⁴³ Roger Gryson, *Altlateinische Handschriften: Manuscripts Vieux Latins* (Germany, Freiburg: Herder, 1999), 19-143.

⁴⁴ J. K. Elliott, “The Translations of the New Testament into Latin: The Old Latin and the Vulgate,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, Widmen Dieses, et. al., eds. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1992), 224. See also Metzger, *The Early Versions*, 293.

⁴⁵ L. D. Reynolds, “Introduction,” *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics*, L. D. Reynolds, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), XXXIII. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland only grant that the number “must be well over 8,000.” Aland & Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 192.

⁴⁶ Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 98.

⁴⁶ Metzger, *The Early Versions*, 186-190.

A low estimate of Slavic New Testament MSS is 4,000+ (unchanged) with some estimates much higher. University of Indiana Slavic professor Henry Cooper writes: “The most thorough description of the manuscript holdings of a Slavic country to date, conducted in 1965 on the territory of the then Soviet Union, yielded in all about 1,500 entries dating before the fifteenth century. More than 99 percent of these manuscripts were translations (usually from Greek), and the vast majority of those were of Biblical books, especially portions of the gospels and the Psalms.”⁴⁷ Cooper added that “a count for the fifteenth century added 3,500 more entries.”⁴⁸ On the higher end, St. Petersburg University professor Anatolij Alexeev writes that, “For the first time in the history of Slavistics the number of selected Gospel manuscripts has reached the significant figure of over eleven hundred.”⁴⁹ Cooper suggests that Alexeev’s higher numbers, “could be so, it seems to me, only if one included sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Slavonic manuscripts: manuscript production in the Slavic world continued long after the introduction of printing in Western, Central, and Southeastern Europe. In any event the later Slavonic manuscripts are of marginal value in tracing the development of the Church Slavonic Bible”⁵⁰ The earliest manuscripts date from the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁵¹

PATRISTIC QUOTATIONS FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

All told, the sheer number of New Testament manuscripts and the earliness of the extant manuscripts give us great reason to believe that the New Testament accurately transmits the content of the autographs. But there’s more than that. Metzger and Ehrman point out the huge number of quotations available from the writings of the early church fathers:

Besides textual evidence derived from New Testament Greek manuscripts and from early versions, the textual critic has available the numerous scriptural quotations included in the commentaries, sermons, and other treatises written by the early Church fathers. Indeed, so extensive are these citations that if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament.⁵²

A good estimate of patristic quotes before 300A.D. of Old and New Testament is:

Old Testament:	49,711
New Testament:	<u>36,289</u>
TOTAL	86,000

(Josh McDowell, *New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, Thomas Nelson, 1999, p43)

⁴⁷ Henry R. Cooper, *Slavic Scriptures: The Formation of the Church Slavonic Version of the Holy Bible* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickenson, 2003), 25. Cooper is referring to the Lidija P. Zukovskaja, et al., eds., *Svodnyj Katalog Slavjano-Russkix Rukopisnyx Knig, Xranjaščixsja* [*Preliminary List of Slavic Russian Manuscripts*] (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), 177-184. I (Clay Jones) am indebted to Henry Cooper for guiding me through the literature and to Biola University Russian language professor, Amy Obrist, for her help with Zukovskaja’s article.

⁴⁸ Cooper, *Slavic Scriptures*, 170, fn 61.

⁴⁹ Anatolij Alexeev, “The Last but Probably Not the Least: the Slavonic Version as a Witness of the Greek NT Text,” in *Methodios und Kyrillos in Ihrer Europaischen Dimension*, Evangelos Konstantinou, ed., (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2005), 248.

⁵⁰ Henry C. Cooper, *Slavic Scriptures*, 170, fn. 61.

⁵¹ *Early Versions*, 403.

⁵² Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 126.

THE FOLLOWING PAGES SHOW WHY THE TOTAL COUNTS OF BIBLICAL MANUSCRIPTS AND SCROLLS ARE CHANGING SO FAST

THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST: ITS VALUE TODAY

Although there has been an increase in the number of non-New Testament ancient manuscripts, nothing has changed regarding the applicability of the bibliographical test. Even Homer's *Iliad*, which has seen the greatest manuscript increase, is still dwarfed by the New Testament, which has more than ten times the Greek manuscripts as the *Iliad*. But then when you add the over 18,000 manuscripts in other languages, and then consider that almost the entire New Testament could be reproduced by the quotations of the early church fathers, one must conclude that there simply is no ancient work attested to as well as the New Testament.

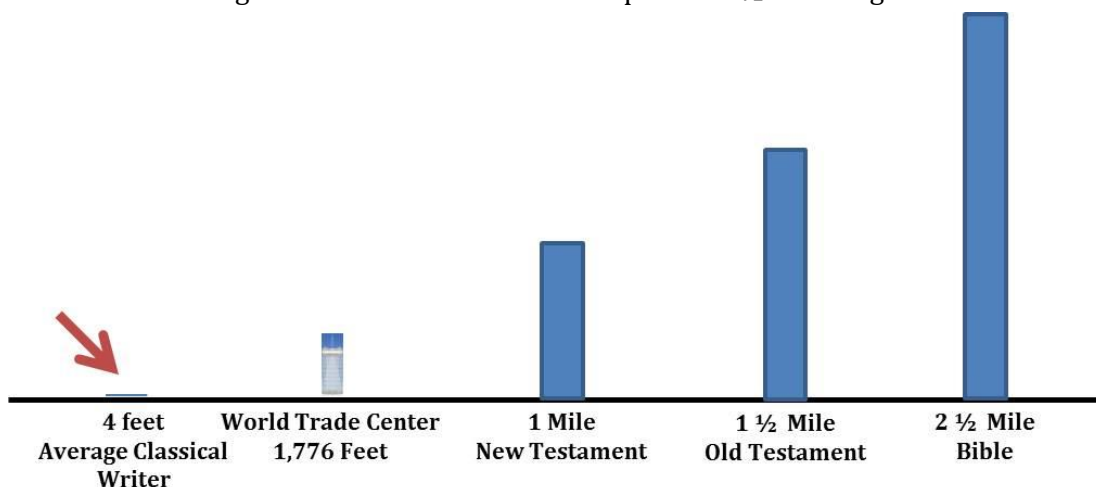
This troubles skeptics because if they reject the transmissional reliability of the New Testament, then they must also consider unreliable all other manuscripts of antiquity. As John Warwick Montgomery has often related: "Some years ago, when I debated philosophy professor Avrum Stroll of the University of British Columbia on this point, he responded: 'All right. I'll throw out my knowledge of the classical world.' At which the chairman of the classics department cried: 'Good Lord, Avrum, not that!'"⁵³

THE NEW TESTAMENT IS A MILE HIGH

THE BIBLE IS 2½ MILES HIGH

How high do you think the stack of New Testament manuscripts would be? Think about this – of just the 5,800+ Greek New Testament manuscripts – there are more than 2.6 million pages. Combining both the Old and New Testament (the Bible) and there are more than 66,000 manuscripts and scrolls.

Do you think it would hit a ten foot ceiling? A 4-foot stack of manuscripts for the average classical writer compares to over one mile high of New Testament manuscripts and 2½ miles high for the entire Bible.



⁵³ John Warwick Montgomery, *Human Rights and Human Dignity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 139.