

Lesson 17: Archaeology and the Bible Text

For this class we will focus on the Bible Text that has been physically recovered primarily the Dead Sea scrolls (thus dealing with the Old Testament) and Early Christian manuscripts (the New Testament and some Old Testament).

Dead Sea Scrolls: What are They?

The Dead Sea Scrolls have been called the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times. They were discovered between 1947 and 1956 in eleven caves along the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. This is an arid region 13 miles east of Jerusalem and 1,300 feet below sea level. Unquestionably, the "library," which is the greatest manuscript find of the twentieth century, demonstrates the rich literary activity of Second Temple Period Jewry and sheds insight into centuries pivotal to both Judaism and Christianity.

The Dead Sea Scrolls can be divided into two categories—biblical and non-biblical. Fragments of every book of the Old Testament (Hebrew canon) have been discovered, except for the book of Esther. The texts are most commonly made of animal skins, but also papyrus and one of copper. They are written with a carbon-based ink, from right to left, using no punctuation except for an occasional paragraph indentation. The Dead Sea Scrolls are comprised of the remains of approximately 825 to 870 separate scrolls, represented by tens of thousands of fragments. Now identified among the scrolls are 21 fragments of Isaiah, 30 fragments of Deuteronomy and 36 fragments of the Psalms. The virtually intact Isaiah Scroll, which contains some of the most dramatic Messianic prophecy, is 1,000 years older than any previously known copy of Isaiah. In addition to the biblical manuscripts, there are commentaries on the Hebrew canon, paraphrases that expand on the Torah, community standards and regulations, rules of war, non-canonical psalms, hymnals and sermons. Most of the texts are written in Hebrew and Aramaic, with a few in Greek.

Biblical

Those works contained in the Hebrew Bible. All of the books of the Bible are represented in the Dead Sea Scroll collection except Esther.

Non Biblical - Apocryphal or pseudepigraphical

Those works which are omitted from various canons of the Bible and included in others.

Non Biblical - Sectarian

Those scrolls related to a pietistic commune and include ordinances, biblical commentaries, apocalyptic visions, and liturgical works.

The Dead Sea Scrolls appear to be the library of a Jewish sect, considered most likely the Essenes. Near the caves are the ancient ruins of Qumran, a village excavated in the early 1950's that shows connections to both the Essenes and the scrolls. The Essenes were strictly observant Jewish scribes, who appear Messianic and apocalyptic in thinking. The library appears to have been hidden away in caves around the outbreak of the First Jewish Revolt (66-70 A.D.) as the Roman army advanced against the Jews. Based on various dating methods, including carbon 14, paleographic and scribal, the Dead Sea Scrolls were written during the period from about 200 B.C. to 68 A.D. Many crucial biblical manuscripts (such as Psalm 22, Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 61) date to at least 100 B.C. As such, the Dead Sea Scrolls have revolutionized textual criticism of the Old Testament. Phenomenally, we find the biblical texts in substantial agreement with the Masoretic text, as well as variant translations of the Old Testament used today.

Dead Sea Scrolls and Book of Isaiah - Evidence from Archaeology

The Great Isaiah Scroll was discovered in Cave 1 in 1947. It was identified as the Biblical Book of Isaiah in 1948, and purchased by the Syrian Orthodox Church at that time. Israel reacquired the Great Isaiah Scroll in 1954 to study it and preserve it as a national treasure. A second partial Isaiah scroll (1QIs-b) was also discovered in Cave 1 in 1947. Since that time, approximately 17 other fragments of Isaiah scripture have been discovered in other caves at Qumran.

As far as dating, it appears that pieces of the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIs-a) have been carbon-14 dated at least four times and produced calibrated date ranges between 335-324 BC and 202-107 BC. There have also been numerous paleographic and scribal dating studies conducted that place 1QIs-a at a date range of approximately 150-100 BC.

This scroll, dating to approximately 100 B.C. was found to be identical to the Modern Hebrew Bible in over ninety five percent of the text. The remaining five percent consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen or variations in spelling. Prior to that discovery, the earliest manuscript of Isaiah was the Masoretic Text, dating to 900 A.D. Realize, then, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls moved the dating back more than a thousand years! And that without any appreciable change in the text.

Nelson Glueck, renowned Jewish archaeologist, wrote:

"It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference."

William F. Albright, one of the world's most renowned archaeologists, stated:

"There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition."

And again ...

"The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible by important historical schools of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, certain phrases of which still appear periodically, has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history."

Millar Burrows, renowned Professor of Archaeology at Yale University, exposed the cause of persistent unbelief:

"The excessive skepticism of many liberal theologians stems not from a careful evaluation of the available data, but from an enormous predisposition against the supernatural."

Manuscripts and Caves

OT Books	Sum	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	11
Genesis	19	*	*		*		*		*	*!
Exodus	17	*	*		*			*		
Leviticus	13	*	*		*		*			
Numbers	7				*					
Deuteronomy	30	*	*		*		*			
Joshua	2				*	*				
Judges	3	*			*					
1-2 Samuel	4	*								
1-2 Kings	3				*	*	*			
Isaiah	21	*			*					
Jeremiah	6		*		*					
Ezekiel	6	*		*	*					
Minor Prophets	8				*	*Amos				
Psalms	36		*	*	*!	*	*		*!	
Proverbs	2		*		*?					
Job	4				*					
Song of Songs	4						*			
Ruth	4	*								
Lamentations	4			*		*				
Ecclesiastes	2									
Esther	0									
Daniel	8	*					*			
Ezra	1				*					
Nehemiah	1				*					
1-2 Chronicles	1									

* Portion of Book found

! Deviations from traditional order

? Some doubt about identity

The writers of the New Testament make several references to the written word. The following is some of the Biblical references. To the New Testament writers, the scriptures or writings refer to the Old Testament. The Hebrew Bible was divided into three sections; The Law, The Prophets and the Writings or Psalms.

A. Scriptures on the Written Word

1. Reference to "The Law, The Prophets and The Writings"
 - a. John 1:45 -- "... *We have found Him of whom [Moses in the Law](#) and also [the Prophets](#) wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*"
 - b. Luke 24:44 -- "... *that all things written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.*"
 - c. Romans 15:4 -- "*For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction,*
2. Reference to "The Law"
 - a. John 5:46-47 "*For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?*"
 - b. Luke 10:26 -- "*And He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?'"*
3. Reference to "The Prophets"
 - a. Luke 4:17 -- "*And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book, ..."*
 - b. Acts 13:29 -- "*And when they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.*"
3. Reference to Writing to New Testament Christians - John
 - a. John 20:30-31 -- "*Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; ..."*
 - b. 1 John 1:4 -- "*And these things we write ..."*
 - c. 2 John 12 -- "*Having many things to write to you, I do not want to **do so** with paper and ink;"*
 - d. 3 John 13 -- "*I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write **them** to you with pen and ink;"*
 - e. Rev. 1:3, 11, 19 -- "*Blessed is he who reads ... and heed the things which are written in it ... 'Write in a book what you see, and send **it** to the seven churches' ... 'Write therefore the things which you have seen ...'"*

4. Reference to Writing to New Testament Christians - Luke
 - a. Luke 1:3-4 -- *"... to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you might know the exact truth ..."*
 - b. Acts 1:1 -- *"The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach,"*
 - c. Acts 21:25 -- *"But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote ..."*

3. Reference to Writing to New Testament Christians - Paul
 - a. 1 Cor. 4:14 -- *"I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you ..."*
 - b. 1 Cor. 14:37 -- *"... let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment."*
 - c. 2 Cor. 1:13 - *"For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand,..."*
 - d. 2 Cor. 13:10 -- *"For this reason I am writing these things while absent ... for building up and not for tearing down."*
 - e. Gal. 1:20 -- *"(Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.)"*
 - f. Phil. 3:1 -- *"... To write the same things again is no trouble to me ..."*
 - g. 2 Thes. 3:17 -- *"I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write."*
 - h. 1 Timothy 3:14 -- *"I am writing these things to you, hoping to come ..."*
 - i. Philemon 19 -- *"I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand ..."*

3. Hebrews & Peter
 - a. Hebrews 13:22 -- *"... for I have written to you briefly."*
 - b. 2 Peter 3:1 -- *"This is now, beloved, the second writing to you ..."*

B. New Testament Manuscripts

- 1) By around A.D. 100, God had given all the information to man that He was going to give (**Jude 3; Rev. 22:18-19; II Pet. 1:3**).
- 2) Immediately upon completion of these writings, copies were necessary (**cf. Col. 4:16; I Thess. 5:27**).
- 3) The only means of duplication until the fifteenth century (in A.D. 1454 Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press) was by manual handwriting.
- 4) It is by these handwritten copies, handed down through the centuries, that we have the text of the Bible today.

C. Description of the Kind of New Testament Manuscripts

There are several things to determine when looking at a New Testament manuscript; when was it copied, how was the manuscript used and what is the value of the manuscript in translation.

1. Determine the age by looking to see if the date was recorded (several hundred are dated). Undated manuscripts are dated by looking at the handwriting (large or small letters, are the words written all together or are there spaces, how many columns, what is the appearance of the columns, any spacing between paragraphs, what is the form of the letters, and are the letters plain and simple or elaborate and complex).

- a. **Uncials** – the oldest surviving form of handwritten manuscripts are capital letters with no spacing and wrapping of the words to the next line.
PAULASERVANTOF JESUSCHRISTCALLEDTOBE

ANAPOSTLESEPARATEDUNTOTHEGOSPELOFG

ODWHICHHEPROMISEDARETHROUGHTHEP
- b. **Cursives** or **Minuscules** – is the handwriting found in the larger group of manuscripts and is in a running style that was not introduced until about 790 AD with the UNCIAL continuing to be used for 200 years.
2. How the manuscript is also helpful in dating the manuscript and in determining it's value in translation.
 - a. **Codex** – The most valuable manuscripts are almost complete bibles bound as books and will contain most of the Old and New Testament.
 - b. **Palimpsest** – manuscripts that have been scraped again or the ink washed off in order to reuse the parchment.
 - c. **Papyri** - usually incomplete portions of the New Testament written on papyrus that have been unearthed from the sands of Egypt within the last one hundred and fifty years.
 - d. **Early Church Fathers** – It has been estimated that the whole New Testament can be reconstructed from references from the Early Church Fathers in the second and third centuries.
 - e. **Lectionary** - a Latin root word meaning to read. Most eastern churches used the same passage of scripture or liturgy on a certain Sunday or ecclesiastical holiday each year, and rather than carry the entire Bible in manuscript form to the pulpit, these repeatedly used scriptures or lections were housed in a specially constructed book called a Lectionary.

D. Autograph Text

The original gospels and letters of the New Testament were written in Greek on papyrus and were penned in the latter half of the first century. While papyrus was widely used it had the disadvantage of being fragile. The original autographs of the New Testament perished within a few years of being written and due to their apostolic authority were copied and distributed. A valuable clue passed down from the early church was which works were read in worship services. For example, Justin Martyr (c. 150 A.D.) refers to the reading of the "memoirs of the Apostles" (assumedly, the Gospels) during Sunday worship services:

"And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and [the memoirs of the apostles](#) or [the writings of the prophets](#) are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things." (Justin Martyr, "First Apology", Chapter 67)

Ignatius (a.d. 70–110) wrote seven letters in which he quoted from eighteen different books of the New Testament. It has been estimated by several Biblical scholars (Bruce Metzger and Sir David Dalrymple among them) that the whole New Testament can be reconstructed from

references from the Early Church Fathers in the second and third centuries. The following astonishing table, from Josh McDowell's "Evidence That Demands a Verdict" (p. 52), shows 36,289 New Testament references from just seven Early Church Fathers:

Writer	Gospels	Acts	Pauline Epistles	General Epistles	Revelation	Total
Justin Martyr Samaria & Rome ~100 to 165 AD	268	10	43	6	3	330
Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons ~130 to 202 AD	1,038	194	499	23	65	1,819
Clement of Alexandria ~155 to 220 AD	1,017	44	1,127	207	11	2,406
Origen Egypt & Palestine ~185 to 253 AD	9,231	349	7,778	399	165	17,922
Tertullian Carthage, N. Africa ~160 to 200 AD	3,822	502	2,609	120	205	7,258
Hippolytus Rome ~170 to 235 AD	734	42	387	27	188	1,378
Eusebius Bishop of Caesarea ~265 to 339 AD	3,258	211	1,592	88	27	5,176
Totals	19,368	1,352	14,035	870	664	36,289

E. Greek Papyri

1. **Rylands Papyrus** -- (c. A.D. 130)

A fragment of a papyrus codex containing John 18:31-33, 37f showing that the latest of the four Gospels, which was written at Ephesus in the 90s, was circulating in Egypt within 40 years of its composition. It is the earliest fragment of the NT and measures 3.5 by 2.5 inches and is written on both sides.

2. **Oxyrhynchus Papyrus** -- (c. A.D. 140)

The Oxyrhynchus Papyri are a group of manuscripts discovered during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by papyrologists Bernard Pyne Grenfell and Arthur Surridge Hunt at an ancient rubbish dump near Oxyrhynchus in Egypt. In the dump of the ancient city several thousand documents were discovered and date from between 250 BC and 700 AD. The Oxyrhynchus Papyri have provided the most numerous early copies of the New Testament. These are surviving portions of codices (books) written in Greek uncial (capital) letters on papyrus. Of the 127 registered New Testament papyri, 52 (41%) are from Oxyrhynchus.

Among the Christian papyri

Canonical	Non-Canonical
Matthew 1 (3rd century: P2 and P401)	Shepherd of Hermas (3rd or 4th century: P404),
Matthew 11–12 and 19 (3rd to 4th century: P2384, 2385)	the Apocalypse of Baruch (4th or 5th century: P403)
Mark 10-11 (5th-6th century: P3)	Gospel according to the Hebrews (3rd century AD: P655);
John 1, and 20 (3rd century: P208)	A work of Irenaeus, (3rd century: P405).
First Epistle of John (4th-5th century: P402)	Early Christian hymns, prayers, and letters also found among them
Romans 1 (4th century: P209)	Gospel of Thomas, also known as the Sayings of Jesus, probably dating ca. AD 150, actually contains an account of notarial expenses, indicating that the Gospel had been used as scrap for calculations
Many parts of other canonical books	

3. **Corpus Paulinum** -- (2nd century A.D.) a collection of Paul's writings

4. **Bodmer Papyrus II** -- (c. A.D. 200)

Written about 200, it contains the first 14 chapters of John and large portions of the last 7 chapters

5. **Chester Beatty Papyri** -- (3rd century)

A group of 12 papyrus codices from an Egyptian graveyard containing most of the Old and New Testaments: One codex includes the 4 Gospels & Acts (200-250 AD), another the letters of Paul to churches and Hebrews (200 AD), and the book of Revelation (250 - 300 AD).

F. Uncial Codices (see Manuscripts, Texts and Versions)

1. **Codex Vaticanus (B)** -- (4th century A.D.)

2. **Codex Sinaiticus (S)** -- (middle 4th century A.D.)

3. **Codex Alexandrinus (A)** -- (5th century A.D.)

4. **Washington Codex (W)** -- (4th or 5th century A.D.)

5. **Codex of Ephræmi (C)** -- (5th century A.D.) -- a *palimpsest* -- see Ephrem (Who's Who)

6. **Codex Bezae (D)** -- (c. A.D. 600) -- see Beza, Theodor (Who's Who)

7. **Codex Amiatinus** -- (7th century A.D.)

8. **Koridethi Codex** -- (c. 9th century A.D.)

Christians Scribal Practice

Early Christianity was a distinctively “bookish” movement among the new religious movements of the Roman imperial period. Texts were central, and Christians devoted impressive resources to composing, copying, and circulating them. Only a very few early Christian manuscripts have the stichometric counts that we usually judge to be evidence of a professional copyist. The features of early Christian manuscripts reflect generally skilled and experienced copyists, but it is another question as to whether they did the work for hire. The main claim is that certain formal features (or copying conventions) characterize copies of canonical Gospels in the 2nd/3rd centuries that were prepared for “public” (liturgical) use. Copies of these same texts prepared for private/personal usage tend to lack these formal features. The formal features that characterize copies of canonical gospels intended for public/liturgical use also distinguish these from copies of other early Christian texts, especially non-canonical gospels. These formal features include (1) a preference for a particular codex size/shape (third-century gospel codices the same width as 2nd century copies, but taller), (2) various “reader’s aids” such as punctuation, sense-unit demarcation, and careful copying with few ligatures, generous line-spacing, and a “bookhand- intended for legibility and often used in transcribing official documents” or tending in that direction.

Charlesworth offers an analysis of the textual variants in 2nd/3rd century copies of the canonical gospels contending that they show a generally high level of faithful copying. There is no evidence of a “wild” freedom in copying these texts, no indications of major insertions or deletions or re-arrangement of the text in the extant early papyri. So, he reasons, the text of the canonical gospels conveyed in our early MSS likely preserves substantially the “original” text, with only minor variations that don’t affect significantly the sense of the text.

Christians and Collection/Grouping of Text Larry Hurtado comment on Michael Dormandy work

A recent survey of the contents of Christian manuscripts from the first three centuries focuses on identifying which texts were combined in the same manuscript: Michael Dormandy classifies extant manuscripts (including very fragmentary ones) as to the level of certainty that we can attain in determining whether the manuscripts contained more than one text, and, if so, what texts they contained. Dormandy coins the term “collection-evident” to designate collections of texts that combine texts that came to form part of the NT. For example, manuscripts that contained only our four NT Gospels or epistles of Paul are instances of “collection-evident” artefacts. The question behind his study was whether we see a pattern of collecting certain texts together in each manuscript, or a diversity in collections of texts, combining canonical and non-canonical texts. As he concludes, “The results are striking.” The clear majority of multi-text manuscripts from any of the early centuries are “collection-evident,” i.e., they include only texts that later became part of our NT. Manuscripts that combine what became canonical texts with non-canonical texts are “relatively rare.” Importantly, he found no instance of a combination of gospels beyond the familiar four in the New Testament. To cite him further, “It is crucial to note that . . . there is nothing even resembling an alternative Bible, that is, a set of works, different to the ones now canonical, that are regularly combined”. Noting that Codex Sinaiticus includes *Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and that Codex Alexandrinus includes letters of Clement, these are exceptional. Moreover, they are included at the end of the respective manuscript, suggesting that they may have been intended as a kind of appendix. But, in any case, there are no alternative gospel-collections, such as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Thomas. As he observes, in those early centuries, “There may be *other gospels*, but there is no *other gospel collection*”. He also confirms earlier observations that a good many early manuscripts are single-text ones, e.g., containing one Gospel. This is reflected in the varying number of extant copies of the individual Gospels, many more of Matthew and John, and very few of

Mark. As he notes, this casts doubt on David Trobisch's claim that by the late-second century the complete NT canon had been determined and circulated together. Likewise, there is little indication of letter-collections that combined what became canonical texts with others. The consistency in manuscript practice in this early period seems to reflect a widespread view among those preparing these manuscripts that certain texts belonged together. We may not be able to discern the reasons, but it is evident. In Dormandy's words, "early Christian bookmakers did not have to be told by ecclesiastical superiors what was in the canon". In sum, contra the views of some scholars, the frequent inclusion of certain texts in the same manuscript suggests that they were seen to have something in common, something that led to the NT canon. On the other hand, contra the views of other scholars (e.g., Trobisch), the numerous single-text manuscripts suggest that the circulation of the four Gospels together or complete editions of the NT in the second century is not plausible.

Christians and the Codex Format – As Summarized by Larry Hurtado

- Christian preference for the codex is readily demonstrable from data that can be obtained open-access from the Leuven Database of Ancient Books.
- This Christian preference was especially, notably strong for copies of texts used/read as scripture (copies of Old Testament writings, and Christian texts so used, over 95% codices). For other texts (theological treatises, and other kinds), early Christians were comparatively more ready to use the bookroll (about 1/3 of copies of these sorts of texts are on bookrolls).
- Modern references to the "obvious" advantages of the codex aren't matched by any statements of Roman-era writers. If so obvious, why were the early Christians the only ones to perceive them? The only ancient comments about the usefulness of the codex is in Martial's Epigrams, where he mentions a local bookseller who produced small codex-copies of his poetry, which he commends for taking on your travels. We have examples of such small/miniature codices, and equivalent bookrolls too. But the early Christian codices aren't typically such small/miniature ones. So, the Christian preference for the codex doesn't seem to be explained by a preference for pocket-sized editions for easy travel.
- And the supposedly "obvious" superiority of the codex for finding particular passages in larger literary texts seems to me shaped to much by our greater ease with the leaf-book and our lack of ease with the bookroll. Ancient Jews likewise pored over their sacred texts in minute detail and made reference to specific passages, but steadfastly preferred the bookroll.
- Likewise, speculations about the relationship of the codex and the emerging Christian canon are typically misinformed and so erroneous. The NT canon isn't the product of preference for the codex. Judaism established a canon, all the while firmly preferring bookrolls for their scriptures. And the earliest fragments of codices seem to be from single-text ones, such as P52, a remnant of a copy of the Gospel of John.
- Well into the 3rd century, Christians were experimenting with developing ways to construct codices to accommodate multiple texts, such as P46 (Chester Beatty Library & University of Michigan), a copy of Pauline epistles, or P45 (Chester Beatty Library), a copy of the four Gospels and Acts. That they were still working at how to construct codices to accommodate multiple works shows that the collecting of writings came first and the concern to copy multiple texts in one book came subsequently. In short, the codex didn't shape the emerging canon; instead, the emerging canon drove and shaped the development of codex technology among Christians. And, by the way, Christians of the 2nd/3rd centuries seem to have been at the "leading edge" in codex technology.
- So, the big question: Why did early Christians so firmly and concertedly opt for the codex? They left us no comments on the matter, so we scholars have to devise the best guesses that we can. The great papyrologist, Colin H. Roberts, believed it was likely deliberate, to give early Christian copies of texts a marked form that distinguished them from the larger book-culture of the time.