

The Transmission of the Greek New Testament

Papyri, Uncials, and Minuscules

The first thing that needs to be realized is that during the period when the New Testament was written, ordinary writing was done on pressed sheets of **papyrus fibers**. This plant was commonly used in Egypt and around the Mediterranean Sea for writing purposes...and it was inexpensive. Most literature from the period was collected into scrolls which could be rolled up into a bundle and would be unrolled when the time came to read them. OT manuscripts, written on leather parchment, were bundled this way. However, for reasons still unknown to us, the New Testament writings are *not found in the scroll format*, but in **codex** or book form. That is, sheets of papyrus would be arranged into a book, which was sewed together similar to the way modern books are made. It may be that blank codices were easy to come by.

By the fourth century, parchments made from animal hide came into widespread use. Parchment was far more durable than papyrus but had some obvious drawbacks: to transcribe the entire NT onto parchment would require the killing of a good sized flock of sheep or goats! Therefore, parchment manuscripts could only be commissioned by those who were very wealthy. In later centuries (IX on), paper came into use, eliminating the need to slaughter animals for parchment.

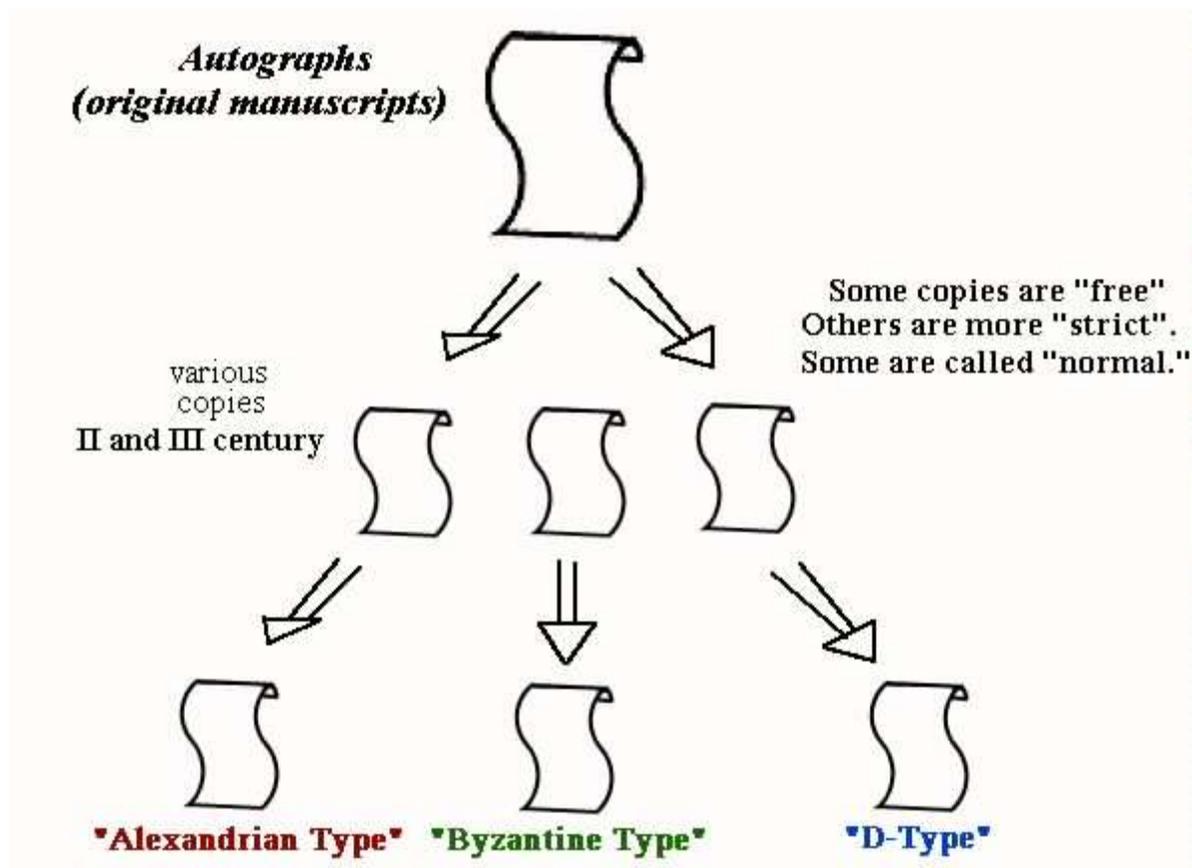
All of the Greek New Testament originals were written in **ALL CAPITAL LETTERS** with no spaces and probably no punctuation, and all of the earlier manuscripts are in this style, whether on parchment or papyrus. This is because the Greek alphabet did not have punctuation until at least the II century, and there were no minuscule (lower case) letters until much later. The surviving manuscripts on papyrus are classed by themselves: **papyri**. The parchment manuscripts written in all capitals are called **uncials**, and those written later (IX century on) using upper and lower case letters are called **Minuscules**. Various commonly written words were often abbreviated. These are mistakenly called *nomina sacra*, "sacred names," but it is not only special names and titles which were abbreviated this way.

Examples (for Older and Newer Browsers)

<p>Example of a Greek Text in <i>Uncial</i> style (earlier browsers)</p>
<p>ΕΝΑΡΧΗΗΝΟΛΟΓΟΚΑΙΟΛΟΓΟΣ</p>
<p>Example of the same text in <i>Miniscule</i> style (earlier browsers)</p>
<p>Εν αρχη ην ο λογος, και ο λογος</p>
<p>Example of a Greek Text in <i>Uncial</i> style (newer browsers)</p>
<p>ΕΝΑΡΧΗΗΝΟΛΟΓΟΚΑΙΟΛΟΓΟΣ</p>
<p>Example of the same text in <i>Miniscule</i> style (newer browsers)</p>
<p>Εν αρχη ην ο λογος, και ο λογος</p>

The Development of Text Types

As far as we can tell, most or all of the earliest copies were done in what is called a "**free**" style. People copied liberally, perhaps correcting what they saw as mistakes, and even adding comments in the margin. Some copies are called "**normal**" because they are not exactly free, but then again they do not appear to fall into the third category of "**strict**" copies. Strict copies, like their name suggests, have little or no paraphrasing, comments, etc.; the copyist was trying to preserve the exemplar exactly. Strict copying would become more common as time passed.



Copying freely and then more strictly tended to produce local variations in the text. As more copies were made, as time passed, the text of the New Testament came to settle down into roughly two or three **Text Types**. Each text type preserves certain variants in the text, and as even more time passed, manuscripts which are partly of one text type and partly of another would appear. The formation of Text Types is generally assigned to the **fourth century**. After this time, it became more common to make multiple copies from a single exemplar in scriptoria. Aland writes: *"Until the beginning of the fourth century the text of the New Testament developed freely. It was a 'living text' in the Greek literary tradition, unlike the text of the Hebrew Old Testament, which was subject to strict controls..."* [i.e., on account of Rabbi Aqiba's masoreh process]. He remarks that to an extent, within their text types, the text remained "living" throughout the centuries.

The **Alexandrian** Text Type seems to have largely developed around Egypt. It is the general scholarly consensus that the Alexandrian type often preserves the original reading. The typical Alexandrian manuscript is older than the typical manuscript of the other major type. Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus (B), and quite a few other uncials and Minuscules follow this type.

The **Byzantine** Text Type seems to have developed in the area of Syria. Some call this the Koine type or (when they all agree) the Majority Text. The vast majority of late miniscule manuscripts belong to the Byzantine type, including those which were used in making early translations from Greek into English. The earliest extant manuscript of the Byzantine type is Codex Q, of the fifth century.

The **D Type** may have developed in Egypt also, although it was once called "Western." The champion of the D Type manuscripts is Codex Bezae Catabrigiensis (D 05). Some people once believed that wherever the D Type reading was shorter, it represented the original reading. This is now known not to be true. However, the D Type often preserves unique readings, some of which may be the original. Some alterations in the D Type are regarded as intentional.

Note: Of the manuscripts known as of 1989, the earliest manuscript is of the style that would become the D Type dates to the III century. The Byzantine influence probably began in the IV century. As Latin became the major world language, the demand for Greek manuscripts declined. By the time the lower case alphabet came into widespread use, the majority of manuscripts being copies in Greek were from areas where the Byzantine text type was dominant. There is still some debate as to whether the Byzantine type preserves the original readings.

How did the Bible Get Divided into Chapters and Verses? *by Robert Garrison*

A very old book on my shelf entitled "An Encyclopedia of Religion" by Vergilius Ferm says under "chapters and verses of the Bible":

"In most books of scripture a natural division is traceable. **Luke**, for instance, intends the book of **Acts** to fall into seven parts, and marks the end of each of them by a formula indicating a further stage in the expansion of the church. Before the time of Christ, the Law had been divided into sections for reading in the synagogue, each of the bearing a special name, e.g. "The Bush" (**Mark 12:26**) This system was extended to the whole of the O.T., and the "Parashas" are still marked in the Hebrew Bible.

It was not until the 13th century that Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury (the framer of the Magna Carta) introduced the present chapter divisions into the Vulgate.

Verses were added much later, and were first marked off by the printer Stephanus in his edition of the Greek N.T in 1551. Shortly afterwards, in the Antwerp Polyglot of 1569-72 the system of numbered verses were applied to the whole Bible. (see also verse division of the Bible) --- *Ernest Findlay Scott*

Verse Division of the Bible: While the vulgate was divided into chapters early in the 13th century by Stephen Langton, the further divisions of the chapters into verses was begun by Robert Estienne, (Stephanus, the Latin form of his name, used in publication), the French printer, in his 4th edition (very rare) of the Greek N.T., 1551, in which he broke the text into 7959 verse paragraphs.

This was followed by William Whittingham at Geneva in his revisions of the N.T. in 1557, and in the Geneva Bible of 1560 was extended to the O.T. and the Apocrypha. -
-- *Edgar J. Goodspeed*

Michael Vincent Scott, from www.scripturessay.com, adds:

The Old Testament was originally divided into fifty-four sections by the Jews. One section was read in the synagogue every Sabbath day (**Acts 13:15**). These sections were subdivided by the Masoretes into 669 "orders." The divisions or sections found in the Greek and Latin manuscripts are different from those of the Hebrew books, they are of unequal and arbitrary length, and very different from the chapters in our modern printed Bibles.

The books of the **New Testament** were divided at an early period into certain portions, which would appear under various names. There were originally two kinds of sections called "titles" and "chapters." The "titles" were portions of the Gospels, with summaries placed at the top or bottom of the page. The "chapters" were divisions, with numeral notations, chiefly adapted to the Gospel harmony of Ammonius. Other sectional divisions are occasionally seen in manuscripts, which appear to have varied at different times and in different churches.

The numerical division of the Old and New Testament is ascribed to a number of individuals. Some scholars believe that the chapter divisions should be attributed to the students of Cardinal Hugo of Saint Cher in 1240 AD. Cardinal Hugo was organizing a concordance of the Bible and utilized the help of his eager students to reference the verses in the Bible in a way to locate individual words quickly. Others believe that Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury (1228 AD) is responsible for the chapter divisions.

It should be noted that before the invention of printing the Bible had already passed from Latin manuscripts to many other languages and after the invention of printing many of the earlier established divisions became accepted. In early printed Bibles chapters were subdivided into seven portions, marked in the margin by the letters A, B, C, D, E, F, G, reference being made by the chapter number and the letter under

which the passage occurred. This subdivision continued long after the present verses were added, but by the seventeenth Century was modified.

The present verses differ in origin for the Old Testament and the New Testament. The earliest printed Hebrew Bibles marked each fifth verse only with a Hebrew numeral. Arabic numerals were first added for the intervening verses by Joseph Athias in 1661 A.D. The first portion of the Bible printed with the Masoretic verses numbered was published in 1509 A.D. In 1528 A.D. a new Latin version of the whole Bible with the Masoretic verses marked and numbered was published. The verses in this Bible were three or four times as long as the verses in our present Bibles.

The present New Testament verses were introduced by Robert Stephens first in his Greco-Latin Testament published in 1551 A.D., and then later Stephens published the Latin Vulgate of 1555, the first whole Bible divided into the present verses. Legend has it that Robert Stephens numbered the verses of the Bible while on horseback on a trip. His son testifies that his father did indeed number the verses of the Bible while on a trip from Paris to Lyons, but that the work was done while resting at the inns along the road.

Since this division of the Scriptures was done by man unaided by inspiration there are notable instance in which the context caused by a division into verses and chapters is destroyed. The careful Bible student will always read verses and even paragraphs before and after a statement to insure that the complete thought of a context is considered.

(Sources: Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Cyclopaedia by McClintock and Strong, The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, How We Got The Bible by Neil Lightfoot, Theological Dictionary by Rahner and Vorgrimler, The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, New Dictionary of Theology by Ferguson, Writeand J.I. Packer, Dictionary of Biblical Literacy by Cecil Murphey, The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church by J.D. Douglas)

To study in depth how the New Testament was canonized (organized as one collection of books) see: [Canonization of the NT](#)

Proceed to [Issues in Translation](#).