

# Jesus in Galilee: Popularity and Misunderstanding

## *Can We Trust the New Testament Books?*

NT220  
LESSON 03 of 03

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I. In this lesson, we will discuss the development of the New Testament text with regard to the sources of the text and its canonicity. We will also begin to examine the New Testament settings in terms of the geography of the New Testament world, Palestine, and Jerusalem.

## II. Development of the New Testament Text

The New Testament was originally written, as it is well known, in Greek. The Greek of the New Testament is Koine (common dialect), the stage in the development of the language from the classical Attic to the modern idiom. It prevailed from c. 300 B.C. to the sixth century A.D. Koine was the form of the language used, when Greece had attained its greatest territorial expansion, as the lingua franca of the Mediterranean world. The Greek, in general, used by Gentiles in the Koine period was the same as that in which the New Testament was written.

Manuscript evidence for the text of the New Testament is vastly more abundant than for any other ancient document. The oldest known manuscripts of the works of some of the Greek classical authors are copies made 1,000 years or more after the author's death. The number of manuscripts of the ancient classics is also limited: about 50 manuscripts of the works of Aeschylus (389-314 B.C.), 100 of Sophocles (496?-406 B.C.), and only one each of the Greek Anthology and the Annals of Tacitus (Roman historian, 55?-117?). Of the New Testament, however, there are more than 5,000 manuscripts of part or all of the Greek text, 2,000 Greek lectionaries, 8,000 manuscripts in Latin, and 1,000 additional manuscripts in various ancient versions.

New Testament manuscripts are categorized according to a system initiated by J. J. Wettstein (1751), which has since been expanded to include (1) papyrus manuscripts; (2) uncials (manuscripts written in all capital letters); (3)

### Manuscript Evidence for the New Testament:

5,000 Greek Texts  
2,000 Greek Lectionaries  
8,000 Latin Manuscripts  
1,000 Miscellaneous Manuscripts

## Manuscript Categorization:

1. Papyrus Manuscripts
2. Uncials
3. Minuscules
4. Ancient Versions
5. Patristic Citations
6. Ancient Lectionaries

minuscules (manuscripts written in cursive letters); (4) ancient versions, such as Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, etc.; (5) patristic citations (quotations from early church fathers); and (6) ancient lectionaries (books of liturgical lessons for the church year).

### A. Papyrus Manuscripts

The papyrus manuscripts of the New Testament are its earliest extant witnesses and are therefore significant for the study of early Christian history and determination of the original text. Discovered primarily in the twentieth century in Egypt, papyri now number close to 100. Under the present international system of enumeration of manuscripts, papyrus manuscripts are designated by the letter “P” followed by a numerical identification. The oldest extant fragment (P52), found in a mummy case, contains a small portion of John 18 and has been dated to c. 125.

Several papyrus manuscripts come from c. 200: P32 (fragments of Titus), P64/67 (fragments of Mt 3; 5; 26), P46 (sections of Ro 5-7; Heb 1; 1 and 2Co; Eph; Gal; Php; Col; 1Th), and P66 (about two-thirds of John). P75 (also c. 200, now in the Bodmer Library in Geneva) contains most of Luke and more than half of John. P45, P46, and P47 constitute the so-called Chester Beatty Papyri, purchased by Beatty in Egypt in the 1930s. Together, they contain fragments of all the New Testament books. Of more recent discovery are the Martin Bodmer papyri (P66, P72, P74, P75—previously mentioned), which have been published since 1954. All have lacunae—places from which the manuscript material, and thus the text, is missing. There are also papyrus manuscripts of the Old Testament and of many literary works from antiquity (of which Homer is the most frequently attested).

### B. Uncials

“Uncial” is a technical term for third-to tenth-century codices of the Bible written in majuscule, or capital letters, on parchment or vellum. Technically, papyrus manuscripts are also uncials, but are designated, instead, by the material on which they are written. The uncial style of writing was ordinarily reserved for formal and literary documents. The Gospels, Acts, and some other books of the New Testament

## Uncials:

**A technical term for third-to tenth-century codices of the Bible written in majuscule, or capital letters, on parchment or vellum.**

### Codex Vaticanus:

also referred to as (B)

**A fourth-century vellum manuscript containing a large portion of the New Testament, which has been housed in the Vatican Library since at least 1481..**

### Codex Sinaiticus:

also referred to as (a)

**A fourth-century vellum manuscript of portions of the Old Testament and the whole New Testament**

### Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis:

also referred to as (D)

**A fifth-century Greek-Latin manuscript of the Gospels and Acts**

were probably written in the literary, uncial hand. Although the autographs of Paul's letters were most likely written in the cursive hand of private correspondence, they were probably copied very quickly in uncials as literary works. At any rate, even the earliest known manuscripts of the New Testament are in uncial form. Four of the most important uncials of the New Testament and certain extracanonical writings (in whole or part) are Vaticanus—also referred to as (B), Sinaiticus (a), Bezae (D), and Alexandrinus (A).

1. Codex Vaticanus is a fourth-century vellum manuscript which has been housed in the Vatican library since at least 1481. The text is Alexandrian (or Neutral), and because of its antiquity, state of preservation, and text-type it is extremely valuable as a textual source. Unfortunately, the manuscript ends at Hebrews 9:14. The books missing, in addition to the balance of Hebrews, are Philemon, the Pastoral Epistles, and Revelation. Also absent from the text are the longer ending of Mark (16:9-20) and the "pericope de adultera" (Jn 7:53-8:11). The General Epistles precede the letters of Paul and follow the Acts of the Apostles.
2. Codex Sinaiticus is a fourth-century vellum manuscript of portions of the Old Testament and the whole New Testament. The text is Alexandrian. Absent from the text is the longer ending of Mark and the pericope de adultera. The Pauline Epistles follow the Gospels, then Hebrews, the Pastoral Epistles, Acts, the General Epistles, and Revelation, followed by the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas.
3. Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis is a fifth-century Greek-Latin manuscript of the Gospels and Acts. It received its name from Theodore Bezae and the University of Cambridge to which he presented it in 1581, having acquired it from St. Irenaeus' monastery in Lyon, France. Its origin is unknown, but it is probably western Mediterranean. The text is filled with innumerable orthographic and grammatical errors, but is of

## Codex Alexandrinus:

also referred to as (A)

**A fifth-century manuscript of the Greek Bible presently housed in the British Museum**

## Minuscules:

**Manuscripts written in small, cursive letters, first used for codices of the Bible c. A.D. 800 until the invention of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century**

interest because of its omissions in Luke and its additions in the book of Acts, which is one-tenth longer than the Neutral text.

4. Codex Alexandrinus is a fifth-century manuscript of the Greek Bible, presently housed in the British Museum. The text-type in the New Testament is both Byzantine (Gospels) and Alexandrian (Acts and Epistles). Most of Matthew is missing, as are John 6:50-8:52 and 2 Corinthians 4:13-12:6. The manuscript includes 1 and 2 Clement and contains, along with P47, one of the best texts of the book of Revelation.

## C. Minuscules

“Minuscule” denotes a manuscript written in small, cursive letters, first used for codices of the Bible c. A.D. 800 until after the invention of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century. This style predominated after the tenth century and now constitutes more than nine-tenths of all known manuscripts. The earliest dated manuscript of the New Testament bears the year A.D. 835. The most important minuscules are known as Family 1 and Family 13. Manuscripts are designated by Arabic numerals without a preceding zero (for example, 1, 118, 131, 209, etc.), extending at present to c. 2700 for the New Testament. The following are some of the most significant minuscules:

1. Codex 1 is a twelfth-century codex now in Basel, one of five or six manuscripts used by Erasmus in preparing his first edition of the Greek New Testament. Manuscripts 118, 131, 209, and 1582 have texts very similar to that of 1, and the five manuscripts together are known as Family 1.
2. Codex 13, written in the thirteenth century, is now in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. The closely related manuscripts of 13, 69, 124, 346, 543, and a few others are known as Family 13.
3. Codex 33, a ninth-century manuscript, also at Paris, has been called the “Queen of the Cursive” because of the superior quality of its text.

4. Codex 565, Codex Purpureus Petropolitanus (i.e., “the purple codex of St. Petersburg”), is a manuscript of the ninth or tenth century in the public library of Leningrad. It is written in gold letters on purple vellum, perhaps for Empress Theodora.

#### **D. Ancient Versions**

In textual criticism, the term “version” denotes an early translation of the New Testament from Greek into another language. The earliest New Testament versions are in Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Arabic, Ethiopic, Persian, Gothic, Georgian, and Slavonic. We will discuss the most important.

1. Old Latin (Vetus Latina) is the name given to approximately thirty manuscripts that ante-date or are otherwise independent of the Latin Vulgate (siglum: vg) that Jerome completed in A.D. 405. The Old Latin texts are highly divergent, and no single manuscript contains the whole New Testament. The oldest, Codex Vercellensis (siglum: a), dates from the fourth century. The sigla for Old Latin manuscripts are lower-case letters: a, b, c, etc.
2. Vulgate is the name given to that version of the Latin Bible recognized by the medieval church and later by the Council of Trent (1546) to be the *vetus et vulgata editio* (the old and popular edition). The Council decreed that it was to be the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church. Most of the books of this version stem from Jerome (c. 340-420), who undertook the translation of the Bible at the bidding of Pope Damasus (382). His translations, completed in 405, circulated separately until bound in a single volume in the mid-sixth century. The bound editions included some translations not attributable to Jerome. All the Old Testament is from Jerome; but of the Apocrypha only Tobit and Judith, and of the New Testament only the Gospels, can be ascribed with certainty to Jerome. The remainder comes from the Old Latin versions.



3. Coptic is the language of native Egyptian Christians, and is written in an alphabet mainly derived from Greek. As Christianity spread to these circles at an early date, it made contact with Coptic, the popular language, enriched by Greek loanwords. There are several dialects of Coptic, so there are quite different versions grouped together under the name Coptic. The earliest was undoubtedly the Sahidic version of Upper (i.e., southern) Egypt, translated from the Greek about the middle of the third century A.D., and probably undertaken at the official request of the church. This was followed by Akhmimic, which was based upon the Sahidic, and later in the fourth century by the Bohairic (Lower Egyptian), which was translated from the Greek independently of the Sahidic. For textual criticism, these versions are valuable for their antiquity.
4. Peshitta is the authorized Bible of the Syrian Church, dating from the late fourth or early fifth century and traditionally ascribed to Rabula, Bishop of Edessa (d. 435). Omitted from early manuscripts of the Peshitta are 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation, which the Syrian church did not accept as canonical.
5. Armenian. At the beginning of the fifth century, after a period in which the national Armenian church used Greek and Syriac for both literature and liturgy, the Armenian priest Mesrob (c. 361-439) invented the Armenian alphabet. This laid the basis for a national Armenian literature, and at the same time the Bible was translated. According to Armenian tradition, for which there is good evidence, the first version (c. A.D. 414) was based on the Syriac Peshitta and was very soon revised.
6. Arabic. With the victory of Islam, the use of Arabic spread rapidly, and for Jews and Christians in conquered lands it became the language of daily life. This gave rise to the need for an Arabic version, which was met by a number of versions, mainly independent and

concerned primarily with interpretation. Only a part of the version by Saadia Gaon of Egypt has survived, which was based on the Hebrew text. For the Gospels, there are many translations; the earliest may be from the pre-Islamic period. The premier codex is Vatican arab. 13, whose oldest portions are ninth century and include portions of the Gospels and all the Pauline Epistles. Evidence that the Old Syriac version was the basis for the Arabic version is found in a number of codices, e.g., Vatican arab. 13, Sinai arab. 82, Vatican arab. 82, and Berl. or. quart. 2101.

7. Ethiopic. About the middle of the fourth century Ezana, king of Aksum in Ethiopia, and his people were won over to Christianity. A translation of the Bible was probably begun shortly afterward, with the translators working from a variety of sources, even within single passages, possibly using the Syriac and Hebrew alongside the Greek. But the completion of the version took quite a long time, several centuries according to some. It is open to question how far the original version is represented in surviving manuscripts, the earliest of which is from the thirteenth century.

The value of a version in determining the original text of the Bible is limited in certain respects, since, like the New Testament autographs, all the original manuscripts of the versions are lost. Extant manuscripts must also be subjected to textual criticism to determine, as nearly as possible, the original wording of the version.

### E. Patristic Citations

Patristics is the branch of theological study that deals with the writings of the Fathers (patres). In strict usage, it belongs to those teachers who wrote somewhere between the end of the first century (when the writing of the New Testament had been almost, if not totally completed) and the close of the eighth century. This is the period commonly known as the patristic age. The leading Fathers were the authors of much work vital to Christianity. They defended the Gospel against heresies and misunderstandings;

### Early Church Fathers:

- Tertullian
- Irenaeus
- Eusebius
- Hippolytus
- Clement of Alexandria
- Origen
- Justin Martyr



## Lectionaries:

**Manuscripts of the New Testament divided into sections designated as Scripture readings for the days of the church year**

they composed extensive commentaries on the Bible, explanatory, doctrinal, and practical, and published innumerable sermons; they exhibited the meaning and implications of the creeds; they recorded past and current events in church history; and they related the Christian faith to the best thought of their age.

Patristic quotations furnish an additional basis for evaluating readings of the New Testament. So able and energetic were the early church fathers that the whole text of the Greek New Testament could probably be recovered from the quotations found in their writings. But, as in the case of the versions, some questions and cautions must be noted in the use of patristic quotations. Was it the writer's habit to quote carefully? Does he appear to have copied from a New Testament manuscript or did he quote from memory? Also, like the versions, a church father's use of a particular text is evidence that the text was known in the region where he lived and during his lifetime.

### F. Lectionaries

At a very early date, much of the New Testament was divided into sections designated as Scripture readings for the days of the church year. Later, manuscripts called lectionaries were prepared, in which the New Testament was arranged, not in its usual order of books and chapters, but in the order of these readings for each day of the year or for each Saturday and Sunday of the year. Some 2,000 Greek lectionary manuscripts are presently known, two-thirds or more containing Gospel lessons, some containing Gospels and Epistles, and the remainder containing lessons from the Epistles. An appreciable number are written in uncials, dating from the tenth century and later. Not until the middle of the twentieth century, however, was the significance of lectionaries for textual criticism properly identified. Lectionaries are designated by an italic L, or by the abbreviation Lect. and an Arabic number (e.g., l 25; Lect. 299).

## III. Canonicity

The New Testament canon is that collection of twenty-seven early Christian writings which, together with the Old Testament



canon, is recognized by the Christian church as its Holy Scripture, containing the final, authoritative deposit of divine revelation. These writings are normative for every aspect of the life of the church, be it creed, worship, or its life in the world. The first official recognition of the twenty-seven books of the present New Testament canon as being the New Testament canon of the church did not occur until A.D. 367. One might ask, “How did the church come to recognize these twenty-seven writings as divine unity?”

### A. Sources of Authority

There were four focal points of authority in the early church, all of which were ultimately important factors that cooperated to produce the substance of our present canon. These factors included the prior position of the Old Testament canon, the place of the Holy Spirit, the Word of the Lord, and the authoritative position of the apostles.

## | Sources of Authority:

1. The Old Testament
2. The Holy Spirit
3. The Word of the Lord
4. The Apostles

1. The Old Testament. Prior to the existence of the Christian church, Judaism already possessed what was essentially a canon of sacred writings. Jesus Himself paved the way for the church’s acceptance of the Jewish canon by His constant appeal to the Old Testament. His basic affirmation was that the Old Testament, as a whole and in its parts, had come to fulfillment in Him (Mt 5:17; cf. Lk 24:27; Jn 5:39). For the apostle Paul, the reading of the Old Testament could be meaningful only in the light of the historical Jesus (1Co 10:1-4).
2. The Holy Spirit. The church experienced the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of Christ” (2Co 3:17), and it was to Christ that all Scripture testified. Indeed, the Spirit gave to holy ones of old the inspiration (2Pe 1:21; 2Ti 3:16) that led to the production of the components of the Old Testament canon. So understood, the age of the Spirit is rather to be seen as a catalyst for the production and recognition of new Scriptures. If inspired believers of old looked forward to the Messiah’s coming, how much more could Christians filled with the Spirit use the written Word to look back on the Messiah’s advent!

3. **The Word of the Lord.** The ultimate authority of the early church was the living authority of the risen Lord Himself. On a number of occasions, Paul appeals directly to the words of the Lord (1Th 4:15; 1Co 7:10; 9:14; 11:23; cf. Ac 20:35). Similar direct appeal to the teaching of Jesus continued into the postapostolic age (cf., e.g., 1 Clem 13:2; 46:8; Didache 8:2; 9:5; Ign. Smyrn. 3:2). The exact historical background of the words of the Lord is given in the Gospels, and is very important in relation to any discussion of the canon. Jesus is clearly pictured as the teacher of a select group of disciples, who undoubtedly remembered His sayings and teachings and treasured them far more than the sayings of any other Jewish rabbi, for “No one ever spoke the way this man does” (Jn 7:46). It should be noted, too, that even the deeds of Jesus had a didactic thrust. As enacted parables, so to speak, they were likewise treasured.
4. **The Apostles.** The apostles constituted a fourth source of authority for the church from its earliest days. The authority of the apostles was already granted to them by Jesus before Easter (Mk 3:14; 6:7). After Easter, the apostles manifested this authority in their dual witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and to His work and words (Ac 1:21-23; 1Co 9:1-3). For this task, they received the gift of the Spirit.

In the final analysis, it was the historical verification of apostolic authorship, or influence, and the universal consensus of the church, guided by the Holy Spirit, that resulted in the final decision concerning what books would be considered canonical and worthy of inclusion in what we know today as the New Testament.

## **B. Development of the Canon**

Apparently, the epistles of Paul were first collected by leaders in the church of Ephesus. This collection was followed by the accumulation of the Gospels, sometime after the beginning of the second century. The so-called Muratorian Canon, discovered by Lodovico A. Muratori

(1672-1750) and housed now in the Ambrosian Library at Milan, was dated about 180. Twenty-two books of the New Testament were looked upon as canonical.

Eusebius (about 324) thought that at least twenty books of the New Testament were acceptable on the same level as the books of the Old Testament. James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, Hebrews, and Revelation were among the books whose place in the canon was still under consideration. The delay in placing these books was caused primarily by an uncertainty concerning questions of authorship.

Athanasius, however, in his Easter letter of 367 to the churches under his jurisdiction as the bishop of Alexandria, listed as canonical the same twenty-seven books that we now have in the New Testament canon. Later councils, such as that at Carthage in 397, merely approved and gave uniform expression to what was already an accomplished fact, which was generally accepted by the church over a long period of time. The slowness with which the church accepted Hebrews and Revelation as canonical indicates the care and devotion with which it dealt with this question.

## **IV. New Testament Settings (Part 1)**

To have a full, adequate understanding of the New Testament, one must have a working knowledge of Israel's closing kingdom years, the 70 years of the Babylonian exile, the postexilic era, and the period between the testaments. In the last 200 years of Israel's canonical history and the subsequent 400-year interval, many significant political and religious developments took place within the biblical world. The physical setting of the Bible is one of the best reminders to us that its message is about real people, living in real places, in real time. That is why a knowledge of geography is a key ingredient in having a true understanding of the Bible's background. The New Testament world was a Roman world. The geographical location of Palestine in ancient times was strategic, and Jerusalem was at the heart of Palestine.

### **A. A Roman World**

The Mediterranean world in the first century was a Roman world. The empire extended from Babylon in the east to Spain in the west and from northern Europe to North

**“... the cross-roads of ancient civilization.”**

Africa. Ever since 265 B.C., when Rome gained control of Italy, it had sought to extend its political influence. When it destroyed Hannibal (247-183 B.C.) and the Carthaginian Empire, it absorbed Spain and North Africa. Moving toward the east, through war and voluntary surrender, it was able to annex Macedonia, Achaia, Asia Minor, Syria, and Judea. Its northern border was extended with the conquest of Gaul. In the year of the birth of Caesar Augustus, the Roman general Pompey was able to take the supposedly impregnable fortress of Jerusalem. By the year 14 B.C. Jerusalem was part of a province governed by a Roman prefect, whose capital was named Caesarea (Maritima).

### **B. Palestine**

The geographical location of Palestine in Bible times was strategic. Of that, G. T. Manley writes, “Palestine lay on the cross-roads of ancient civilization. The highway from Egypt to Syria and beyond, which ran through Palestine, was one of the most important roads in the ancient world both for commerce and for strategy, and its importance has not yet disappeared” (The New Bible Handbook, p. 425).

Palestine lies within the region between the Mediterranean Sea and the Arabian Desert (34°-36° east longitude) and between Sinai and the mountains of Lebanon (29°30'-33°30' north latitude), within the southern portion of the Temperate Zone. Situated at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, it is part of the Levant (the Levantine states are usually considered Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine or Israel). Palestine is located at the southwestern end of the Fertile Crescent, the fertile lands extending along the Tigris-Euphrates Valley and the Levant.

### **C. Jerusalem**

Jerusalem is situated on the central mountain ridge of Palestine, almost exactly opposite of the northern tip of the Dead Sea, thirty-six miles east of the Mediterranean Sea and sixteen miles west of the Dead Sea (as the crow flies). The city's altitude is between 2,100 and 2,526 feet above sea level. Just north of the city Mount Scopus rises to about 2,690 feet, and just south of the city Jebel Mukabbir (Hill of Evil Counsel) rises to 2,936 feet. East of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley, the Mount of Olives reaches an



elevation of 2,684 feet.

The basic area of the city resembles a square with no definite top line. The eastern side is marked by the ravine of the Kidron Valley. The western and southern sides of the square are formed by the Valley of Hinnom. The rectangular area between the valleys is marked by deep ravines on the east and south, and shallower ones on the west. Thus any attack on the city would normally come from the north, and any growth of the city had to be toward the north and northwest.

It is exceedingly difficult for modern visitors to visualize what Jerusalem was like just before and during the Herodian period (at the time of Christ). (1) First, the walls of the Old City are not where they were then; at least the southern wall is much further north, and the northern wall is probably much further north as well. As a result, the Old City has shifted somewhere between 1,000 to 2,000 feet north of the site of the Herodian city. (2) Secondly, the Haram (Islamic sacred area) does not give a true picture of the temple area. It is larger, occupying the enlarged temple platform built by Herod, and much more open than it was when Herod began his building. (3) Third, the Central Valley has been almost completely filled in. Its location is still identified as el-Wad, the street with shops, running through the city from the Damascus Gate to the Dung Gate. (4) Fourth, the modern level is considerably higher than it was in the first century. At the southwest corner of the Haram, the modern ground level is about sixty-six feet above the level of the Herodian street, and the original bed of the Central Valley (about where the wall of the Old City abuts the south wall of the Haram), was about 100 feet lower. As a result, no clear picture emerges of the Upper City on the west and the deep ravine that separated it from the Lower City (David's City) on the east. (5) Fifth, the filling of St. Anne's Valley (done to complete the rectangular shape of the temple platform), the alteration of the topography around the Antonia, and the quarrying of stone have all changed the northeast end of the Old City. The best way to get a clear idea of what the Herodian city was like is to visit Avi-Yonah's scale model of Jerusalem on the grounds of the Holy Land Hotel in the western suburb of Jerusalem.



We will continue to learn more about the New Testament settings in our next lesson.