

**Mount Olive Baptist Church**  
**Bible Study Series: *How We Got the Bible***  
**Session 4 – “Manuscripts of the New Testament” (Chapter 3)**

## **I. New Testament Structure**

### **1. Gospels (Matthew – John)**

The Gospels present the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They serve as the theological and historical foundation of the New Testament, bearing witness to who Jesus is and what He accomplished.

### **2. History (Acts)**

Acts recorded the life of the early church.

Written by Luke, Acts shows how the Holy Spirit empowered believers and moved the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). It bridges the ministry of Jesus and the mission of the Church.

### **3. Pauline Epistles (Romans–Philemon)**

These letters were written by the Apostle Paul to churches, leaders, and individuals.

They address doctrine, worship, unity, discipline, and Christian living, often responding to real problems and real questions in the early church.

### **4. General Epistles (Hebrews–Jude)**

These writings were addressed to broader audiences within the early church.

They emphasize perseverance, holiness, faithful living, and sound doctrine for believers facing pressure, persecution, and temptation.

### **5. Prophecy (Revelation)**

Revelation is apocalyptic literature written to persecuted believers.

It proclaims the ultimate victory of Jesus Christ and assures the church that God remains sovereign over history.

## II. The Languages of the Bible

### Three Original Languages

#### 1. Hebrew – Most of the Old Testament

- Written right to left
- Originally without vowels

#### 2. Aramaic – Common language after the exile

- Portions of Daniel and Ezra
- Language spoken by Jesus

Examples:

- *Talitha cumi* (Mark 5:41)
- *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani* (Mark 15:34)

#### 3. Greek (Koine) – Language of the New Testament

- Common, everyday Greek
- Enabled the worldwide spread of the gospel

God chose **reachable languages**, ensuring His Word could be heard, shared, and understood by ordinary people.

## III. In Praise of Ancient Scribes

### Who Were the Scribes?

- Highly trained professionals
- Copied Scripture with care and precision
- Used reed pens, ink, rulers, and parchment

### Their Contribution

- Preserved Scripture before printing presses
- Ensured accuracy across generations

God entrusted His eternal Word to disciplined minds and faithful hands.

### Transition to Chapter 3 – Why Manuscripts Matter

If scribes copied Scripture by hand for centuries, an important question emerges:

- How do we know what the original text said?
- How was the Bible preserved before printing presses?
- Why can we trust the New Testament text we read today?

Chapter 3 answers these questions by introducing us to **New Testament manuscripts**.

#### IV. Chapter 3 – *How We Got the Bible* - What Is a Manuscript?

A **manuscript** is any document written by hand.

- New Testament manuscripts were written in Greek
- The original autographs no longer exist, since papyrus decays over time

**Key Truth:** Though the originals perished, **God's Word was not lost**. Early Christians made many copies, spreading Scripture throughout the Roman world.

#### V. Dating New Testament Manuscripts

Scholars determine the age of manuscripts by examining:

- Handwriting style
- Letter size and shape
- Punctuation and spacing
- Column structure

This process is known as **paleography**.

#### VI. Two Major Types of New Testament Manuscripts

##### A. Uncials

- Written in large capital letters
- No spaces between words
- Very little punctuation
- Date mainly from the 3rd–5th centuries

##### B. Minuscules

- Written in smaller, cursive-like script
- Easier to read
- Appear from the 9th century onward
- Make up the majority of manuscripts

Earlier manuscripts generally carry greater weight for textual accuracy.

#### VII. The Great Uncial Manuscripts

- **Codex Vaticanus** – 4th century, among the most accurate NT manuscripts
- **Codex Sinaiticus** – One of the most complete early Bibles
- **Codex Alexandrinus** – Includes additional early Christian writings

These manuscripts demonstrate how carefully Scripture was preserved and transmitted.

#### VIII. Why Manuscripts Strengthen Our Faith

- The New Testament is the best-attested book of the ancient world
- Variations exist, but no Christian doctrine is threatened
- Textual study increases confidence, not doubt

God trusted fragile ink, fading parchment, and faithful people to carry an eternal Word.