

Early Bible Information

The earliest known complete list of the 27 books of the New Testament is found in a letter written by Athanasius, a 4th-century bishop of Alexandria, dated to 367 AD. The 27-book New Testament was first formally canonized during the councils of Hippo (393 – this took place years' after the Council of Nicaea, which I have written about in detail in I Am Lazarus) and Carthage (397) in North Africa.

We are quite fortunate that like much of the literature of Antiquity, the books of the New Testament were preserved until the invention of printing as handwritten copies. Compared with other contemporary writings, an exceptionally large number of manuscript copies of the books of the New Testament have survived. While only a few late copies have survived of even the most important works, more than 5,000 manuscripts or manuscript copies of New Testament books are known to exist, either in private collections or preserved in museums.

The oldest manuscripts containing the whole New Testament are from the 4th century. The oldest known fragment of the New Testament is from the first half of the 2nd century, a copy of a passage from John's Gospel, which Lazarus collects from John and Polycarp.

New Testament manuscripts can be roughly dated by using two methods: first, on the basis of the writing material and second, the style of writing.

The material of most manuscripts is parchment stretched and smoothed from leather. The oldest parchment manuscripts are written on large size in majuscule or uncial letters. Later smaller and more delicate cursive script was used, minuscule letters.

The most important manuscripts of the whole New Testament are parchments written in majuscules. From a still earlier phase come a number of papyrus manuscripts. This writing material was prepared from the reed plant of the same name, and its most important producing country was Egypt.

The branch of study which attempts to ascertain the most original textual form of the biblical writings by comparing different manuscripts, is called textual criticism.

Source – Wikipedia and Author research.