

# From Papyrus to Pixels: Chapters in the Development of the Bible

First Presbyterian Church / taught by Jeff Miller, October 2021

This lesson series is intended to help us understand and appreciate that . . .

- When we read the Bible, we are actually reading *a translation* of the Bible.
- The story of how the Bible came to be is long and complicated. It involves the biblical authors themselves, as well as scribes, rabbis, church leaders, archaeologists, and translators. It involves the study of the Bible, of church history, and of the long history of writing and printing.
- Nevertheless, the Bible has been handed down faithfully and is impressively accurate in its current form.
- None of the numerous English Bibles available today can be called the best in every way. But some are much better than others, and it's worth our time to investigate the several options.

## Looking Back to Last Week ~ Why English Bibles Differ

- Ancient manuscripts differ.
- Translators and/or publishers want to provide a smooth, unified Bible.
- The English language and the cultures where English is spoken change over time.
- Translators frequently have to choose between “what it says” and “what it means.”
- For better or worse, translators make assumptions.
- A reason not mentioned last week: The Bible's meaning, power, beauty, and nuance sometimes cannot be fully represented in a single English translation.

## Lesson Two ~ Something Every Christian Should Do at Least Once

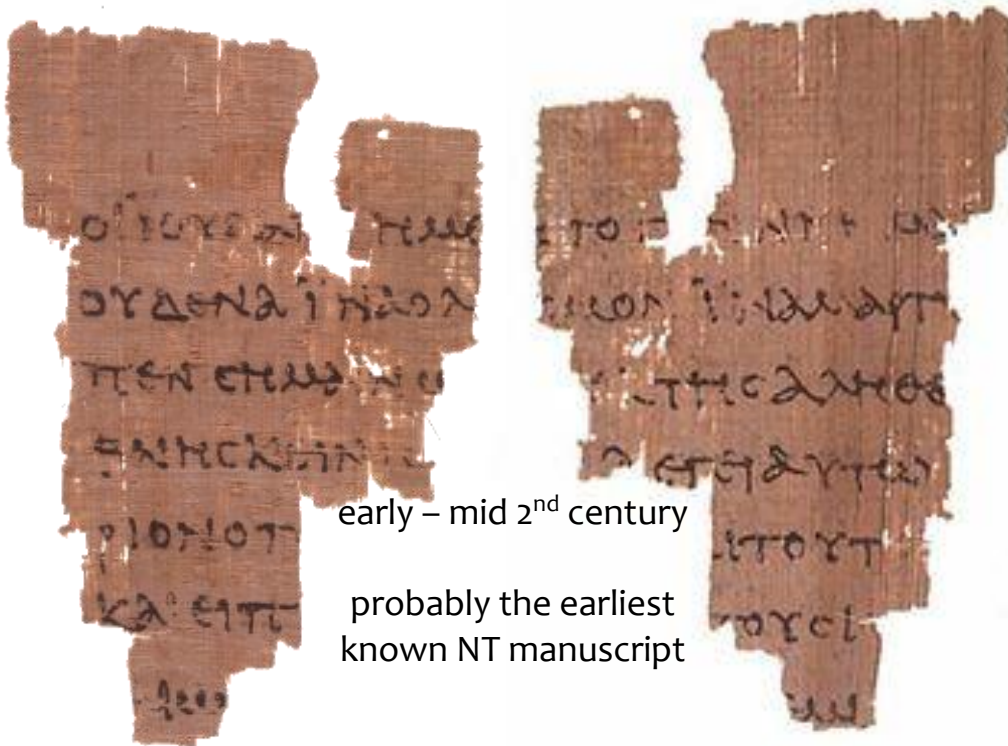
Not many Christians spend time looking at Bible manuscripts—and that's fine. But I believe every Christian who can should take the time to do so, at least once. It's helpful to get a feel for what the Bible was before it became a collection of numerous books, printed in English, bound together in one cover.



### Papyrus 52 (P52)

John 18:31-33

John 18:37-38

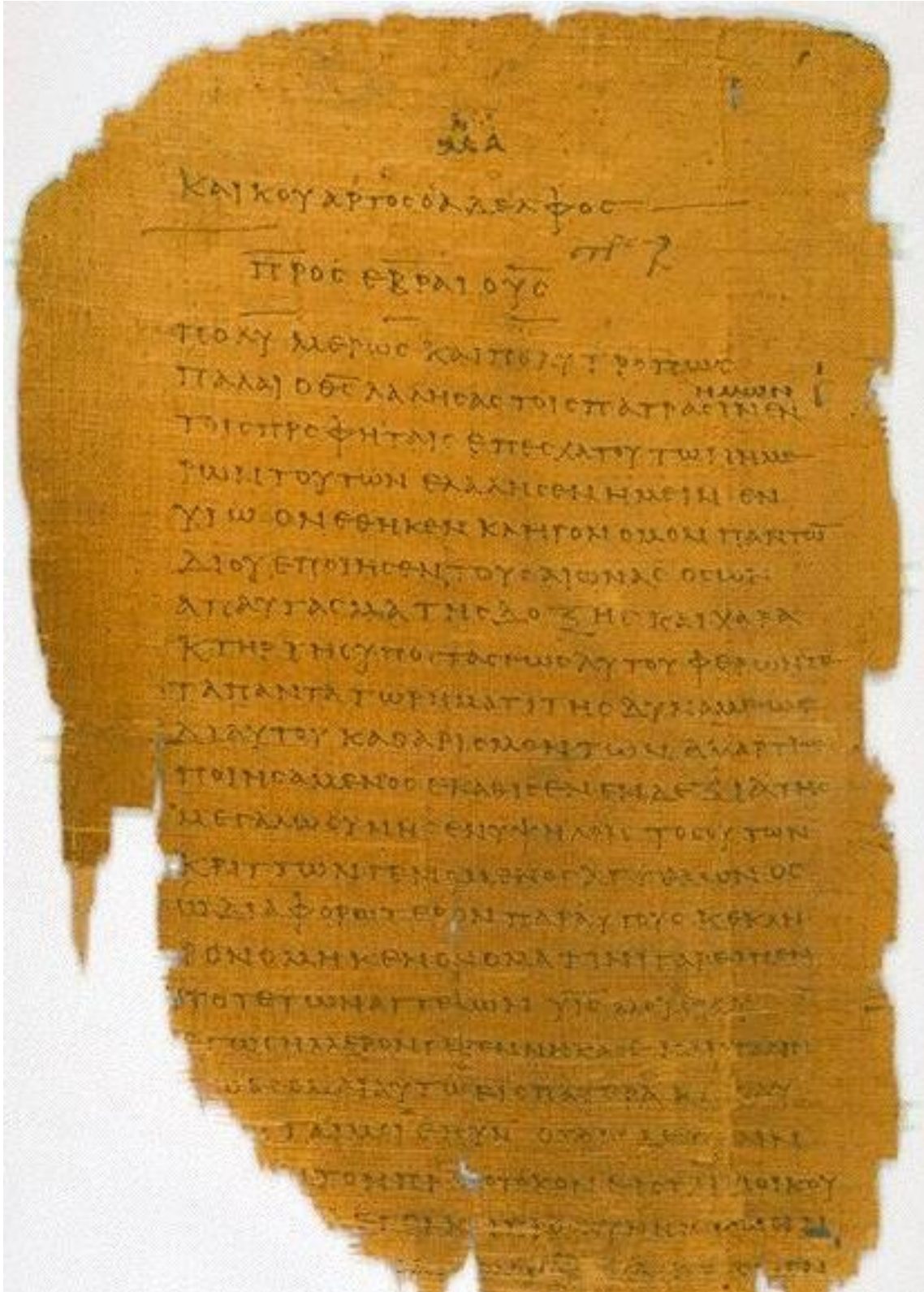


early – mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century

probably the earliest known NT manuscript

## The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri (P45, P46, P47, P97)

P45 is a fragmentary codex of the 4 Gospels & Acts from AD 200-250. P46 (pictured below and from the same era) contains 9 of Paul's letters and Hebrews. P47, from the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century, is possibly the earliest manuscript of the book of Revelation. P97 is a 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century fragment of Luke 14:7-14.



Codex W (parchment, animal skin)

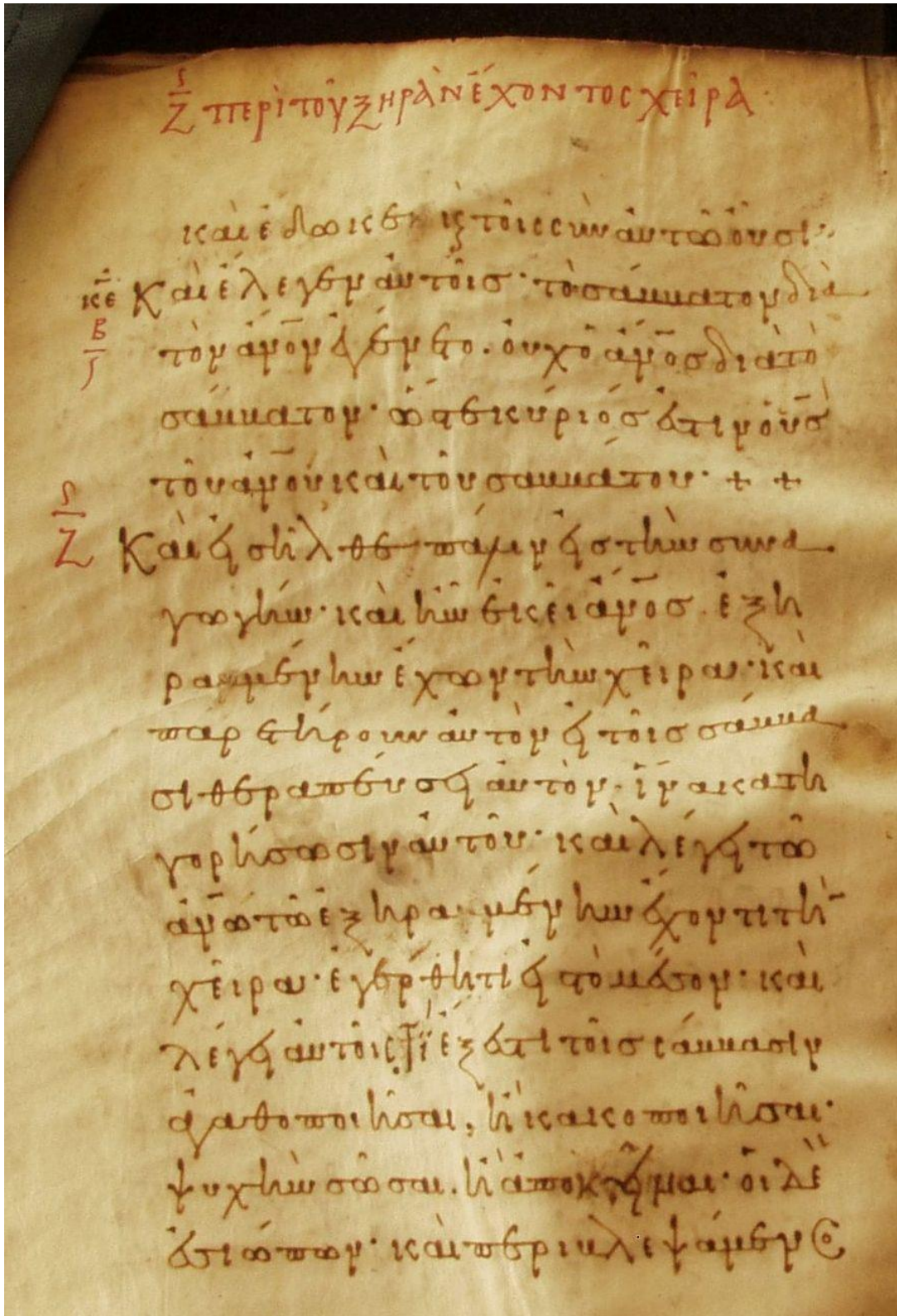
The four gospels, ≈ AD 350 – 450 / The Lord's Prayer pictured here

[www.csntm.org](http://www.csntm.org)

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ΜΗ ΒΑΤΤΑ ΛΟΓΕΤΑΙ ΩΣ ΠΕΡ ΟΙΣ ΕΧΟΥΝΤΕΣ  
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ΜΙΣΘΟΝ ΑΥΤΩΝ ΕΥΔΕΝΗΣΤΕ ΥΜΕΙΣ

A 10<sup>th</sup> Century Manuscript of Mark 3



**English translations**  
come from Hebrew Old Testaments and Greek New Testaments,  
which in turn come from numerous ancient manuscripts.



#### **How Accurate are Modern Editions of the Greek New Testament?**

- They differ from one another in very small ways, so obviously they are not 100% accurate.
- **Common Misconception 1:** We know that our Bibles are 99.99% accurate because there are so crazy many manuscripts and they are so crazy early!
  - a. Appeals to the large number of manuscripts are common and are sometimes overstated. The numbers I'm talking about are 5,500 (the approximate number of Greek NT manuscripts) and 20,000 (the very approximate number of NT manuscripts in all languages).

But many of these manuscripts are not used in making our Bibles!

- b. Watch out for extremely inaccurate claims such as this one, which I got from a Facebook post in the fall of 2016: “. . . But we DO have tens of thousands of copies of the original documents dating around 150 A.D. all within a 98% similarity. Using these we Can get as close to the original as possible.”

- **Common Misconception 2:** We are so crazy far removed from the original text that our translations are woefully inaccurate!

Watch out for extremely inaccurate claims such as this one: “No television preacher has ever read the Bible. Neither has any evangelical politician. Neither has the pope. Neither have I. And neither have you. At best, we’ve all read a bad translation—a translation of translations of translations of hand-copied copies of copies of copies of copies, and on and on, hundreds of times.”

~Kurt Eichenwald, *Newsweek*, December 2014

- a. Counting variants: 400,000-ish (!)

The famous Daniel Wallace describes it this way:

~What variants are meaningful?

~What variants are viable?

~How many variants are both meaningful and viable?

About .25%, hence about 1000

The not-so-famous Jeff Miller describes it this way:

~Which affect transcription?

~Which affect translation?

~Which affect meaning?

~Which affect doctrine?

- b. One way to get a feel for where we are:

| UBS <sup>1</sup> , 1966 | UBS <sup>5</sup> , 2014 |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 687 “C” ratings         | 361 “C” ratings         |
| 120 “D” ratings         | 7 “D” ratings           |

- c. From 1993 to 2014, the UBS text changed 33 readings. Only one was of any substance. It’s in Jude 5, where the question is whether “The Lord” saved the people out of Egypt or “Jesus” saved the people out of Egypt.