

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Evidence For The New Testament: Ancient Versions and Quotes

(Jerry Fite)

Almost two thousand years have occurred since the original manuscripts of the New Testament were penned. On the surface, one might doubt that we have a reliable text of the New Testament because so much time has passed since the originals were penned, and no originals are extant today. Yet, when we examine the evidence that ancient versions and quotes present, we can trace our New Testament today within 100- 150 years of the originals.

As far back as the fifth century, a Syrian translation of the Bible emerges in abundance known as PESHITO SYRIAC VERSION. The word “peshito” means “simple”. It is believed that the various Syrian manuscripts of the Bible needed to be brought into one simple version for the Syrian speaking Christians in Syria and Northern Mesopotamia.

Through the quotes of such historians as Eusebius, we learn of some of the Syrian manuscripts from which this simple version must have emerged. Eusebius speaks of the Syrian harmony of the Gospels written by Tatian who

wrote in 170 A.D. A second text discovered in 1842 contains some of the Gospel of Matthew entitled: “The Gospel of the Separated”, suggesting that this manuscript was separated from Tatian’s four-fold harmony. In 1892, a third Syrian text was found in a monastery at Mount Sinai. It is a “palimpsest” manuscript, meaning it is a parchment that has been written upon more than once, but the original writing has not been erased completely, therefore still visible. Scholars have dated the text of all of the Syrian manuscripts to be of the second century.

These Syrians of 170 A.D. were sons and daughters of fathers and grandfathers who lived in the very days of the apostles and probably were baptized by them or their fellow laborers. The acceptance of a translation into one’s own language, so close in time to family members who were no doubt aware of the original Greek manuscripts gives us confidence that our Bibles today are in harmony with the originals.

Thirty-eight fragments of various portions of the New Testament in the Latin language form

the contents of an OLD LATIN VERSION. Tertullian, who lived 150-200 A.D., speaks of the Latin translation being in existence. It was probably made in North Africa, not Rome.

Combining the Old Syriac and Old Latin Versions, we can produce all of the books of our New Testament, except the book of 2 Peter. These translations attest to Greek manuscripts dated 200 years earlier than the Greek manuscripts that are in existence today.

Adding to this evidence are the quotations of the Scriptures from the ancients of the second, and early third centuries. When you add up quotations of Tertullian, Hippolytus, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Justin Martyr you have over 32, 000 quotes from the New Testament. If we lost our New Testaments, we could reproduce portions of the four Gospels, Acts, Pauline Epistles and Revelation from these quotes. So, we have evidence that Our New Testament today is a faithful translation of Greek manuscripts dated 100-150 years from the originals.