

# NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

▶ THE SEARCH FOR  
SACRED TEXTS

*"If you are dealing with  
antiquities, you must get  
your hands dirty."*

EITAN KLEIN  
ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES  
AUTHORITY

IN THE  
CLOAK-AND-DAGGER  
WORLD WHERE  
RELIGION MEETS  
ARCHAEOLOGY,  
SCIENTISTS,  
COLLECTORS, AND  
SCHEMERS ARE  
RACING TO FIND  
SACRED TEXTS.

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# The Bible Hunters



By ROBERT DRAPER | Photographs by PAOLO VERZONE  
Graphics by FERNANDO G. BAPTISTA and MATTHEW W. CHWASTYK

Dominican Father Jean-Michel de Tarragon studies archival photographs at the French École Biblique in Jerusalem. Its scholars led the search for the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest biblical texts ever discovered.

**PREVIOUS PHOTO**

Hand copied around 1400, a Wycliffe New Testament on exhibit at a Christian theme park in Florida gets white-glove treatment. English theologian John Wycliffe championed translating the Bible from Latin into the common language, an innovation church officials denounced.

VAN KAMPEN COLLECTION ON DISPLAY AT THE HOLY LAND EXPERIENCE, ORLANDO, FLORIDA



A conservator at the Israel Antiquities Authority prepares a fragment of the Dead Sea Scrolls for display. Seen here upside down, the fragile document is being placed between layers of mesh that are first pinned, then sewn together around the fragment.



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# The heat is merciless among the barren hills of the Judaean desert near the shore of the Dead Sea.



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But it's mercifully cool inside the cave where Randall Price lies on his stomach, staring at the crevice where just yesterday he discovered a 2,000-year-old bronze cooking pot.

"This cave was robbed by Bedouins maybe 40 years ago," explains Price, an American archaeologist and research professor at Liberty University in Virginia. "Fortunately for us, they didn't dig very deep. Our hope is that if we keep digging, we hit the mother lode."

Anyone who's heard of these famed caves near the ancient Jewish settlement of Qumran knows what mother lode Price has in mind. In 1947 young Bedouin goat herders peered into a nearby cavern and made one of the biggest archaeological discoveries of the 20th century:

Searching for more Dead Sea Scrolls, Israeli archaeologist Oren Gutfeld peers into a cave where he found bits of ancient parchment. "It was blank," he says, "but next time maybe it won't be."

seven rolled parchments covered in ancient Hebrew script, the first of the famous Dead Sea Scrolls. Members of the separatist Qumran sect likely stashed the scrolls in the cave around A.D. 70, as Roman troops closed in to crush the First Jewish Revolt. Hundreds more scrolls eventually would come to light. Dating as far back as the third century B.C., they are the oldest biblical texts ever found.

The Qumran caves are in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, and many people consider Price's work illegal under international law. But that hasn't dissuaded him or the dig's Israeli director, Oren Gutfeld of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, from pursuing a research agenda derived from an earlier, equally controversial exercise.

In 1993, after signing the Oslo Accords—which provided a framework for returning disputed territories to Palestinian control—the Israeli government launched Operation Scroll, an urgent survey of all the archaeological sites the country potentially stood to lose. The inventory was rushed and cursory, and the surveyors found no new scrolls. But they mapped dozens of caves that had been damaged by earthquakes and possibly overlooked by Bedouin treasure hunters. The one cataloged as Cave 53 caught the attention of Price in 2010 and later Gutfeld, who described it as a "juicy" cave. "They found lots of pottery from a range of periods of time—from early Islamic to Second Temple to Hellenistic," he says. "There's



Conservator Emma Nichols examines a Hebrew text at the Cambridge University Library, which houses some 200,000 Jewish manuscripts discovered at a medieval synagogue in Cairo.

Licensed by the Israeli government to sell antiquities, Khader Baidun visits a storage room below one of his family's shops in Jerusalem's Old City. To help stop the sale of looted objects, dealers must now register artifacts in a digital database. But secrecy persists, one seller says. "It's an old custom not to mention names or sums."



reason to hope something else might be there.”

Two years ago, during their initial probe of Cave 53, the archaeologists discovered a small roll of blank parchment and broken storage jars—tantalizing evidence that the cavern might have housed scrolls. Today, after nearly three weeks of digging, their finds are arrayed across a folding table outside the cave. They include Neolithic arrowheads, an obsidian blade from Anatolia, and the bronze cooking pot. But no scrolls. And so the digging continues.

**P**EOPLE OF MANY FAITHS venerate religious relics. But for those who believe that God speaks through words written down by prophets and apostles in past ages, ancient texts are foundational to their faith. From artfully adorned medieval manuscripts to humble fragments of papyrus, revered texts represent tangible links to God’s appointed messengers, whether Muhammad, Moses, or Jesus Christ.

Reverence for holy writ is integral to the faith of evangelical Christians, who have become a driving force behind the search for long-lost biblical texts in desert caves, remote monasteries, and Middle Eastern antiquities markets. Critics say that the evangelical appetite for artifacts is fueling demand for looted objects—a charge borne out to some degree by recent investigations and by reports from legitimate dealers.

“Evangelicals have had a tremendous impact on the market,” says Jerusalem antiquities seller Lenny Wolfe. “The price of anything connected to the lifetime of Christ goes way up.”

Whatever their religious commitments, wealthy collectors and deep-pocketed benefactors have long played a supporting role in the search for ancient exotica. Among those helping to underwrite Price and Gutfeld’s Qumran expedition is a foundation established by Mark Lanier, a well-heeled Houston lawyer and avid collector of theological texts. Another archaeological dig, this one at Tel Shimron in Israel, is being supported by the new Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C. The museum’s chairman, Steve Green, is president of the craft store giant Hobby Lobby and one of the biggest supporters of Christian causes in the United States. His enthusiasm for Bible hunting is unabashed.

“There’s a lot to find out there—imagine how much more there could be,” Green tells me when I meet him inside the gleaming, \$500 million,

430,000-square-foot museum. “We’re excited about turning over every rock.” But as Green, a devout Southern Baptist, has come to learn firsthand, not everyone in the Bible-hunting business is a saint. Turning over rocks may uncover scrolls but also snakes.

**E**NCOUNTERING SERPENTS and other dangers—burning deserts, blinding sandstorms, armed bandits—went with the territory trodden by pioneering Bible hunters of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Egypt was among their favorite destinations; its dry climate is ideal for preserving fragile manuscripts. Many of the trailblazers were sturdy scholar-adventurers, and accounts of their travels and discoveries conjure up images from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

Take, for example, Konstantin von Tischendorf, a German scholar who in 1844 made a long, dangerous journey through Egypt’s Sinai desert to the world’s oldest continuously inhabited Christian monastery, St. Catherine’s. There he encountered “the most precious biblical treasure in existence.” It was a codex—an ancient text in book form instead of a scroll—dating to the mid-fourth century. Known today as the Codex Sinaiticus, it’s one of the two oldest Christian Bibles surviving from antiquity, and the oldest complete copy of the New Testament.

The discovery made Tischendorf “the most famous and most infamous textual scholar in history,” notes biographer Stanley Porter. According to his own account of events, Tischendorf first spotted some pages from the codex in a basket of old parchment the monks planned to burn. He rescued the pages and requested permission to take the entire codex back to Europe for study. The monks, alerted to its value by the foreign scholar’s excitement, would part with only a few dozen pages.

Tischendorf made the arduous trek back to St. Catherine’s in 1853 but left with little to show for it. He returned a third and final time in 1859 after securing the sponsorship of the Russian tsar, considered the “defender and protector” of the Eastern Orthodox Church, to which the Sinai monastery belongs. This time Tischendorf’s doggedness paid off. After signing a pledge to return the codex once he’d made exact copies, he delivered it to his royal patron in St. Petersburg.

From there the chain of events becomes tangled in controversy and accusations of

imperialist power plays. The monks eventually “donated” the codex to the tsar, but whether they did so willingly or under pressure is still debated. In any event, the priceless Bible remained in St. Petersburg until 1933, when Joseph Stalin’s government, facing financial crisis and famine, sold it to the British Museum for the equivalent of nearly half a million U.S. dollars.

Tischendorf wasn’t the first manuscript hunter to visit the remote monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai, nor would he be the last. Those who followed in his steps included Agnes Smith Lewis and Margaret Dunlop Gibson, Scottish twins and self-taught scholars who between them mastered some dozen languages. In 1892 the plucky Presbyterian sisters, both middle-aged widows by then, crossed the Egyptian desert on camelback and arrived at St. Catherine’s. They’d been tipped off that works in ancient Syriac—a dialect of Aramaic, a language Jesus spoke—were stashed in a dark closet. The sisters were eager to investigate.

With the monks’ permission, they examined several volumes, including a dirt-encrusted codex that hadn’t been cracked open for decades, perhaps centuries. Using their camp kettle to steam the grimy pages apart, they found that it was a biography of female saints dated A.D. 778. Then sharp-eyed Lewis noticed a faint underwriting beneath the top layer of text and realized that it was a palimpsest—a manuscript that had been partially erased and reused. Studying the text beneath the text, she was staggered to see that it was a translation of the four Gospels. Dating roughly to the early 400s, the Codex Sinaiticus Syriacus, as it’s known today, is one of the oldest copies of the Gospels ever discovered.

Rather than try to “borrow” the Syriac codex—which remains at St. Catherine’s to this day—the sisters took photographs of each page with a camera they’d brought along to document their discoveries. They also used a chemical solution in

**‘Evangelicals have had a tremendous impact on the market. The price of anything connected to the lifetime of Christ goes way up.’**

LENNY WOLFE,  
ANTIQUITIES DEALER

a successful attempt to enhance the faded under-text of the palimpsest. Their work anticipated by more than a century the use of multispectral imaging and other technologies to reveal ancient biblical texts hidden beneath more recent writing. (See “Digital Revelations,” page 61.)

The remarkable manuscripts brought to the world’s attention by Tischendorf and the Scottish sisters were made of costly parchment or vellum. But the vast majority of texts from Christianity’s earliest centuries were written on papyrus, the paper of the ancient world.

In 1896 Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt, rookie archaeologists from Oxford University, were prospecting for artifacts at the long-buried Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus when they made an extraordinary find: an ancient garbage dump filled with layer upon layer of papyri. Over the next decade Grenfell and Hunt dug through a papyrus-filled pit some 30 feet deep and shipped half a million documents back to Oxford. Researchers have been painstakingly piecing together the fragments ever since.

Most of the papyri are the prosaic paperwork of everyday life: bills, letters, tax assessments, a deed from the sale of a donkey. But about 10 percent of the hoard is literary, including bits of works by classical authors such as Homer, Sophocles, and Euripides. Some of the most dramatic finds—such as lost gospels that didn’t make it into the New Testament—have shed light on the formative years of the Christian faith. And more than a century after their discovery, thousands of fragments have yet to be studied closely. How many revelations await in those many boxes of ancient trash is anyone’s guess.

**F**OR CLOAK-AND-DAGGER DRAMA, the Dead Sea Scrolls trump all other biblical discoveries. According to one version of the story, the Bedouin goat herders sold the seven parchments they’d found to two antiquities dealers in Bethlehem. A scholar from Jerusalem acquired three of the scrolls following a clandestine meeting through a barbed wire fence. A dealer named Khalil Iskander Shahin, also known as Kando, sold the four remaining scrolls to a Syrian archbishop in Jerusalem, who reportedly paid the equivalent of \$250. In 1949, spooked by the Arab-Israeli War, the bishop smuggled the scrolls to the United States in hopes of selling them to a museum or university. After getting no (Continued on page 69)



# THE BIBLE'S STORY

The Bible took shape—in form and word—over centuries of study, debate, technological progress, and worship. From handwriting on papyrus and parchment to words printed by mechanical press, these sacred texts have been passed on in many formats.



Medieval scribes were often monks who could spend weeks, months, or years working by hand on a single manuscript.

1000 B.C.

500

B.C. A.D.

A.D. 500

1000

1500

## CONSTRUCTING THE CANONS

The "divine library" is the work of more than 35 authors spanning at least a millennium. Determining which writings should be included in the official canon of holy Scripture took hundreds of years.

**OLD TESTAMENT**  
Hebrew Scriptures are written. Agreement on authoritative books takes several more centuries.

**The Apostles decree at the Jerusalem Council that obeying Jewish ceremonial law isn't essential for non-Jewish followers of Jesus.**

**NEW TESTAMENT**  
Accounts of Jesus' life and teachings and records of followers are ascribed to his Apostles and their associates.

Claiming hidden knowledge of the divine, the "Gnostics" write additional books under the names of Jesus' Apostles.

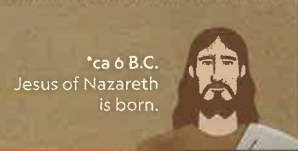
**The Council of Laodicea** (in modern Turkey) rules that only texts confirmed to be Scripture can be used in worship.

**The Council of Hippo** (in modern Algeria) issues a list of the 27 books of the New Testament—in use today—as canon.

The rift between the eastern patriarch and western pope reaches a climax, leading to the Great Schism in 1054.



Moses and the Ten Commandments



\*ca 6 B.C. Jesus of Nazareth is born.

RELIGION OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

JUDAISM

CA A.D. 50

CA 200–100 B.C. The Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, is completed.

CA 200 Muratorian canon includes 22 of the New Testament books.

382 St. Jerome begins Latin Vulgate translation.

CHRISTIANITY

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

1455 Gutenberg Bible

EASTERN ORTHODOXY

JUDAISM

Era of writing Point of divergence Translation or religious text

## MANUSCRIPT EVOLUTION

For thousands of years sacred Scripture was laboriously copied character by character. Tradition and location influenced what materials were used.

Hebrew Scriptures were copied onto scrolls of animal-skin parchment or, occasionally, papyrus. Synagogues today continue to use handwritten scrolls.

Hebrew is read right to left.



Sheets were sewn together, end to end.



Pottery jars found in caves near the Dead Sea may have kept several of the ancient scrolls intact for centuries.

24 ft

Great Isaiah Scroll  
Dead Sea Scrolls  
Second century B.C.

DETAIL ACTUAL SIZE HEBREW

ALAMY/STOCK PHOTO

\*THE SYSTEM OF DATING USING A.D.—ANNO DOMINI, OR "IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD"—WAS DEvised IN THE SIXTH CENTURY AND ESTABLISHED THE BIRTH OF JESUS AS THE PIVOT POINT OF HISTORY. MORE RECENT SCHOLARSHIP SUGGESTS THAT JESUS WAS BORN A FEW YEARS EARLIER.

B.C. A.D.

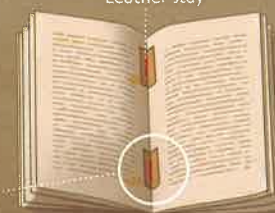
SCROLL

CODEX

## Early codices

Early Christian texts were written mostly on papyrus and bound into single- or multi-quire codices, often with one column of text per page.

Single quire  
Leather stay



Multiple quires



Stitching

## Later codices

Parchment grew more popular in the fourth century. Manuscripts tended to be larger, longer, and, starting in the fifth century, ornamented.

Gospels and Acts Codex  
Chester Beatty Papyri  
Third century A.D.



GREEK

LATIN

CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY

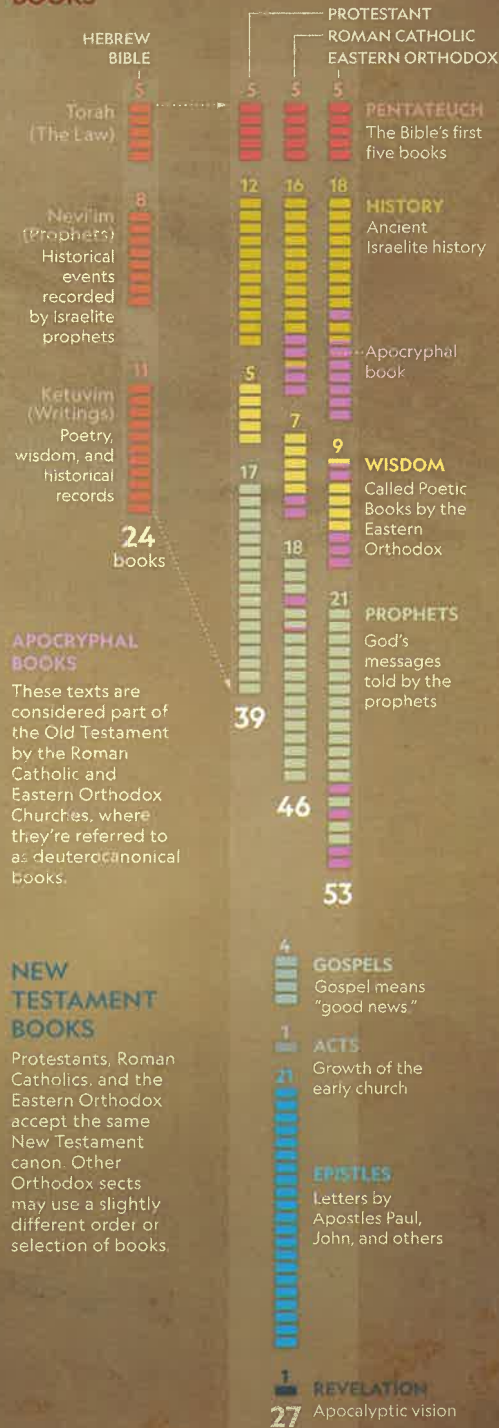
BIBLIOTECA MEDICEA LAURENZIANA DIGITAL REPOSITORY

## SCRIPTURE SHARED

Jews and Christians share many sacred writings, but Jews don't regard the New Testament as Scripture. Neither Jews nor Protestants recognize the books of the Apocrypha as Scripture.

### OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS

The 24 books of the Hebrew Bible are rearranged in Christian Old Testaments.



### APOCRYPHAL BOOKS

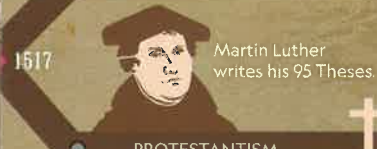
These texts are considered part of the Old Testament by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, where they're referred to as deuterocanonical books.

### NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

Protestants, Roman Catholics, and the Eastern Orthodox accept the same New Testament canon. Other Orthodox sects may use a slightly different order or selection of books.

Reformers object to some Catholic doctrine and plead for changes in practice, ritual, and theology.

### ROMAN CATHOLICISM



### PROTESTANTISM

1611 King James Bible

### PRINTED BOOK



A variety of pigments, as well as gold leaf, were used to illustrate and illuminate text.

Codex Amiatinus  
Early eighth century

**I**N PRINCIPIO  
CAELUM ET  
TERRA ADTEM ERAT IN  
TENEBRAE ERANT S

## DIGITAL REVELATIONS

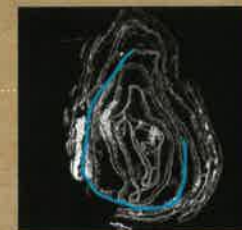
Powerful imaging tools are enabling researchers to see inside scrolls too fragile to unroll and recover texts too faint to see, making thousands of illegible manuscripts readable again.

### READING THE ASHES

Computer scientist Brent Seales devised software to virtually unfurl a charred scroll discovered decades ago at the site of En Gedi in Israel.



- 1 A CT scanner reveals the scroll's internal structure in thin slices. Bright spots are denser points, such as ink containing metals.
- 2 Using the CT data, software creates a 3D model of a single wrap of the scroll and assigns density values to each point.



One of the five wraps (blue)

- 3 Software sorts the density values to produce a sharper rendering of the text.
- 4 The 3D model and text data are mapped to a plane to create a flattened, 2D image.
- 5 Repeating the process for all five wraps reveals 35 lines from the Book of Leviticus. Dated to the third or fourth century, this is the oldest Hebrew text outside of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

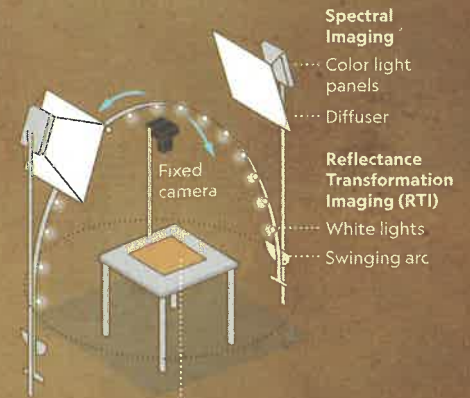


5 pieces



### THE BIG REVEAL

Digital archaeologist Todd Hanneken combined two imaging technologies that detect traces of color and texture to dramatically enhance faded texts.



Natural color



1 Spectral

Ink reflects some wavelengths of light better than others, depending on its composition. Spectral imaging uses 16 colored lights to sharpen contrasts.



2 RTI

RTI lights a manuscript from several angles to show highlights, shadows, and texture, even if ink is entirely absent.



3 Spectral RTI

Spectral RTI merges the images, blending texture and color in a single amplified view.

5 Great Psalms Scroll  
First century A.D.

Psalms (150)

Job (cont.)

4 Job Scroll Fragment  
First century A.D.

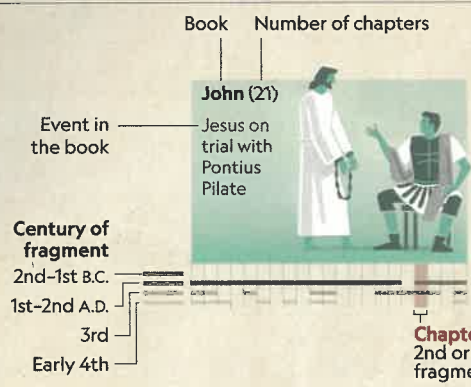
THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY,  
UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

# OLDEST TESTAMENTS

How old are the earliest surviving copies of the stories of Noah's ark, David and Goliath, the birth of Jesus? While the oldest complete Bibles come from the fourth century A.D., many portions of Scripture endure from earlier times. This chart is based on some 400 of the oldest texts, including the Dead Sea Scrolls and early Christian writings, dating from the second century B.C. to the early fourth century A.D.

## Earliest Texts, Illuminated

The 66 books illustrated here are included in Christian Bibles. Each chapter of each book is separated by vertical lines. Horizontal bars indicate the approximate time period of extant texts that contain at least a portion of the marked chapters. Many are fragmentary, such as the example at right. Unmarked chapters are known from later sources.



Reconstructed text from other sources  
Surviving text

**JOHN 18:37-38**  
(Direct translation)

"For **this I was born** and for this I came into the world, **that I might bear witness** to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." **Says to him** Pilate, "What is truth?" **And this** having said, again he went out to the Jews, and he says to them, "I do not find in him guilt."

PHOTO: THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER (VERSO)

## OLD TESTAMENT The Hebrew Scriptures; creation to the end of the Israelite kingdoms

### 1 Genesis Scroll Fragment

First century B.C.  
Found: Qumran  
Language: Hebrew

One of the oldest surviving copies of Genesis, this scroll fragment contains the first few lines of the Bible describing the creation of the world.



SHAI HALEVI, THE LEON LEVY DEAD SEA SCROLLS DIGITAL LIBRARY, ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY

**PENTATEUCH** Legal, moral, and ceremonial code traditionally ascribed to Moses

<b>Genesis (50 chapters)</b> Creation Noah's ark Tower of Babel Abraham offers Isaac	<b>Exodus (40)</b> Moses and the Ten Commandments Tabernacle	<b>Lev.</b>
<b>Leviticus (cont.) (27)</b> Aaron as high priest	<b>Numbers (36)</b> Moses sends spies to Canaan; they bring back fruit.	<b>Deuteronomy (34)</b> Moses' last words Moses dies on Mount Nebo.



### 2 Rylands Deuteronomy Scroll Fragments

Second century B.C.  
Found: Faiyum\*  
Language: Greek

Discarded and then reused as mummy wrappings, the original papyrus manuscript was likely created for Greek-speaking Jews.



THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

**HISTORY** The rise and fall of the Israelite kingdoms

<b>Joshua (cont.) (24)</b> Fall of Jericho	<b>Judges (21)</b> Samson	<b>Ruth (4)</b>	<b>1 Samuel (31)</b> Saul, Israel's first king David and Goliath	<b>2 Samuel (24)</b> David, Israel's second king
<b>2 Sam. (cont.)</b>	<b>1 Kings (22)</b> Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem	<b>2 Kings (25)</b> Fall of Jerusalem Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon	<b>1 Chronicles (29)</b> King David dances as the Ark of the Covenant is brought to Jerusalem.	<b>2 Chronicles (36)</b> Sennacherib of Assyria

### 3 Schøyen Joshua Codex

2nd or 3rd century A.D.  
Found: Oxyrhynchus\*  
Language: Greek

The 24 surviving pages of this codex are probably the oldest known manuscript of Joshua in Greek.



SCHØYEN COLLECTION, OSLO AND LONDON

**WISDOM** Songs, poetry, proverbs, and pastoral teaching

<b>2 Chronicles (cont.)</b> King Josiah finds the book of the Law.	<b>Ezra (10)</b> Second Temple	<b>Nehemiah (13)</b> Rebuilding the wall	<b>Esther (10)</b>	<b>Job (42)</b> Suffering Job confers with his wife and friends.
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### 4 Job Scroll Fragment

First century A.D.

<b>Job (cont.)</b>	<b>Psalms (150)</b>
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### 5 Great Psalms Scroll

First century A.D.

**4 Job Scroll Fragment**  
First century A.D.  
**Found:** Oxyrhynchus  
**Language:** Greek

This Greek fragment contains archaic Hebrew characters that spell the four-letter name of God. The characters יוהוה (read right to left as YHWH) became Jehovah in English.

יוהוה



SACKLER LIBRARY,  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY

**6 Chester Beatty Jeremiah Codex Fragment**  
2nd or 3rd century A.D.  
**Found:** Faiyum\*  
**Language:** Greek

The two surviving leaves contain text from the Septuagint, a translation of the Jewish Scriptures into Greek.



CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY,  
DUBLIN, IRELAND

**8 Bodmer Gospel of John Codex**  
2nd or 3rd century A.D.  
**Found:** near Dishna  
**Language:** Greek

Preserved in its ancient quires, this codex is among the earliest intact manuscripts from the New Testament yet found.



FOUNDATION MARTIN BODMER

\*EXACT ORIGIN UNKNOWN

FERNANDO G. BAPTISTA, MATTHEW W. CHWASTYK, EVE CONANT, AND TAYLOR MAGGIACOMO, NGM STAFF, AMANDA HOBBS, LAWSON PARKER, MATTHEW TWOMBLY

BIBLE QUOTATIONS FROM THE NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

**Job (cont.)** **Psalms (150)**

King David wrote many of the psalms.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
Psalm 23:1

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.  
Psalm 118:24

**Psalms (cont.)** **Proverbs (31)** **Ecclesiastes (12)**

I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.  
Psalm 145:1

Solomon the Wise

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.  
Proverbs 4:23

**PROPHETS** God's messages to the Israelite people; prophecies

**Ecc. (cont.)** **Song of Solomon (8)** **Isaiah (66)** **Jeremiah (52)**

Isaiah's vision of the throne of God

Sennacherib's army dies outside Jerusalem.

Sennacherib is killed by his sons.

People of Judah go into exile.

**Jeremiah (cont.)** **Lamentations (5)** **Ezekiel (48)** **Daniel (12)**

Jeremiah witnesses the temple burning.

Ezekiel's vision

**Dan. (cont.)** **Hosea (14)** **Joel (3)** **Amos (9)** **Obadiah (1)** **Jonah (4)** **Micah (7)** **Nahum (3)** **Habakkuk (3)** **Zephaniah (3)** **Haggai (2)** **Zechariah (14)** **Malachi (4)**

Hosea and his wife, Gomer, reconcile.

Amos the shepherd

Vision of the lampstand

**39 books**  
**929 chapters**

**NEW TESTAMENT** Teachings, death, and Resurrection of Jesus; his Apostles' work and teachings

**GOSPELS** Eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life

**Matthew (28)** Jesus and Mary

**Mark (16)** Feeding of the multitude

**Luke (24)** Jesus walks on water.

**John (21)** Jesus is crucified. Resurrection

**Acts**

**ACTS** Early work of the Apostles

**Acts (cont.) (28)** Jesus ascension into heaven

**EPISTLES** Letters of instruction to early churches

**Romans (16)** Apostle Paul

**1 Corinthians (16)** For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Romans 6:23

**2 Corinthians (13)**

**Galatians (6)**

**Ephesians (6)**

**Philippians (4)**

**Colossians (3)**

**1 Thessalonians (5)**

**REVELATION** Kingdom of God comes

**1 Thes. (cont.) (5)**

**2 Thessalonians (3)**

**1 Timothy (2)**

**2 Timothy (4)**

**Titus (3)**

**Philemon (1)**

**Hebrews (13)**

**James (5)**

**1 Peter (5)**

**2 Peter (3)**

**1 John (5)**

**2 John (1)**

**3 John (1)**

**Jude (1)**

**Revelation (22)** Jesus' Second Coming

**27 books**  
**260 chapters**

**5 Great Psalms Scroll**  
First century A.D.  
**Found:** Qumran  
**Language:** Hebrew

One of the best preserved biblical scrolls from the caves of Qumran, this manuscript is one of 37 Psalms scrolls found there.



SHAI HALEVI, THE LEON LEVY DEAD SEA SCROLLS DIGITAL LIBRARY, ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY

**7 Chester Beatty Ezekiel-Daniel-Susanna-Esther Codex**  
2nd or 3rd century A.D.  
**Found:** Faiyum\*  
**Language:** Greek

Comprising 236 pages, this unusually tall, narrow codex contains both biblical and apocryphal books.



CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY

**9 Chester Beatty Epistles of Paul Codex**  
2nd or 3rd century A.D.  
**Found:** Faiyum\*  
**Language:** Greek

This well-preserved manuscript contains a collection of the Apostle Paul's letters but lacks 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus.



CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY

SOURCES: CRAIG A. EVANS, HOUSTON BAPTIST UNIVERSITY; LARRY HURTADO, PROFESSOR EMERITUS, UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH; BRENT NONGRI; LAWRENCE H. SCHIFFMAN, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY; THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS BIBLE, MARTIN AEBGG, JR., PETER FLINT, AND EUGENE ULRICH

From humble fragments of papyrus to lavishly illustrated tomes, biblical texts reflect the eras in which they were created.



Copied in Egypt and dated as early as the second century A.D., this papyrus fragment is among the oldest known surviving texts from the New Testament. Just a few lines in Greek from chapter 18 of the Gospel of John appear on each side.

THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

**BELOW**

This Arabic translation of the Gospels was published in 1590 in Rome by Ferdinand de' Medici, a wealthy former cardinal, in hopes of converting Muslims to Christianity.

A woodcut depicts the Visitation, when the Virgin Mary goes to see Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist.

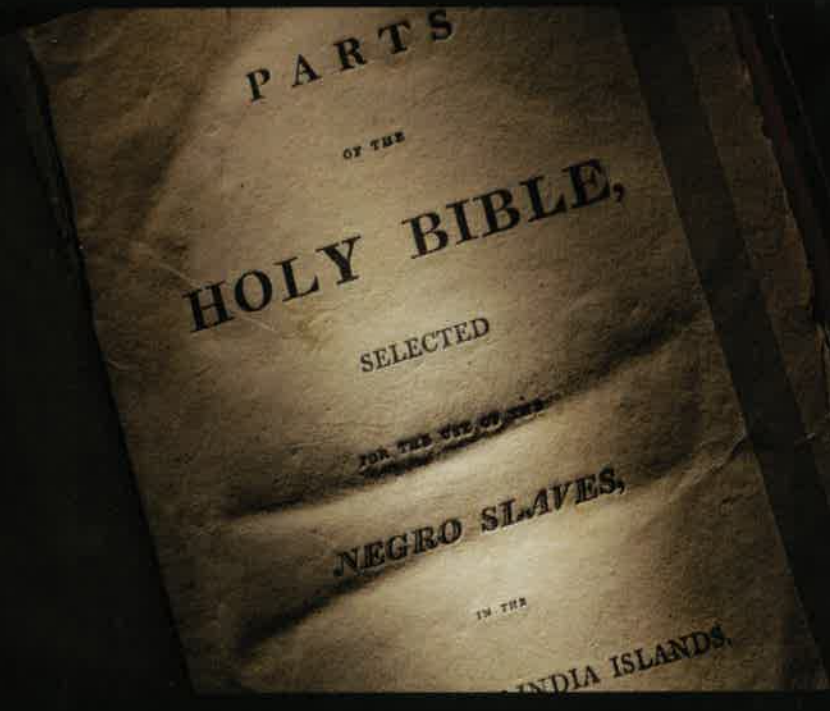
HILL MUSEUM AND MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY, SAINT JOHN'S UNIVERSITY, COLLEGEVILLE, MINNESOTA

**BOTTOM**

So-called slave Bibles, like this one published in 1808 for the British West Indies, included only selected portions of the Old and New Testaments. References to freedom and

escape from slavery were omitted; those encouraging obedience and submission were highlighted.

FSR UNIVERSITY COLLECTION, MUSEUM OF THE BIBLE, WASHINGTON, D.C.



The entire Bible has been translated into over 670 languages; the New Testament alone can be read in more than 1,500 additional languages.

**FIRST ROW**

1) The Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, from 1530, translated into English by William Tyndale; 2) book of hours and Psalter (book of Psalms) from the 1300s; 3) annotated Bible printed in Strasbourg, France, in 1481; 4) Codex Climaci Rescriptus written in Aramaic in the sixth century, then over-written in Syriac in the late ninth or early 10th century

**SECOND ROW**

5) Ninth-century Coptic Psalter; 6) Latin New Testament circa 1300; 7) illuminated Morris-Cockereil Latin manuscript from 1225; 8) Torah scroll

**THIRD ROW**

9) Eliot "Indian Bible" translated into Wampanoag, 1663, first complete Bible printed in U.S.; 10) handwritten and illuminated Saint John's Bible, 2011; 11) Seville Bible in Hebrew, 1468; 12) parchment Ashkenazi Torah scroll, late 13th century



**FOURTH ROW**

13) Text detail from a Gutenberg Bible printed in 1455; 14) pocket-size Latin New Testament circa 1300; 15) German translation of Old Testament, 1560; 16) Greek New Testament, late 10th or early 11th century

**FIFTH ROW**

17) Greek New Testament from 1519, edited by Desiderius Erasmus, second edition; 18) ninth-century fragments of the Gospel of John; 19) Plantin Polyglot Bible showing Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, and Latin from Antwerp, Belgium, circa 1570; 20) Ethiopian Psalter from the 18th or 19th century

Vari Kampen Collection, on display at the Holy Land Experience, Orlando, Florida: 1, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16; Museum of the Bible, Washington, D.C.: 2, 4, 12; Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota: 3, 5, 6, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20; Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota: 10

only is excellent, and his praise above  
earth.

13 He shall exalt the throne of his  
saints shall praise him: even the chieftains  
of Israel, even the people that serveth him.

*Cantate Domino. Psalm.*

**O** Sing unto the Lord a new song,  
an original congregation of saints praise him.

2 Let Israel rejoice in him that  
made the children of Zion be joyful in the  
land.

3 Let them praise his Name in the  
land: let them sing praises unto him with  
cymbals.

4 For the Lord hath pleasure in his  
people: he will help the meek hearted.

5 Let the saints be joyful with  
glorious triumph in their beds.

6 Let the praises of God be in their  
hearts: a two edged sword in their hands.

7 To be avenged of the heathen  
in the people.

8 To bind their kings in chains,  
and their nobles with linkes of iron.

9 That they may be avenged of  
the wicked: such honour haue all his  
saints.

*Cantate Domino. Psalm.*

**P**raise God in his holinesse,  
in the firmament of his power.

2 Praise him in his noble actes  
according to his excellent greatnesse.

3 Praise him in the sound of the  
trumpet: praise him upon the lute and harpe.

4 Praise him in the cymbals:  
praise him upon the strings and pipe.

5 Praise him upon the well tuned  
organ: praise him upon the loud cymbals.

6 Let every thing that hath breath  
praise the Lord.

**F I N I S.**

**THE NEW TESTAMENT**



Publication of the King James Bible in 1611 set the standard for English Scripture for some 300 years. This volume from the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., is one of only two surviving first editions of the King James Bible's New Testament.



(Continued from page 53) takers, he placed a classified ad in the *Wall Street Journal* on June 1, 1954. An Israeli archaeologist, working through an American intermediary, arranged to purchase the scrolls for the Israeli government for \$250,000. All seven of the original scrolls now reside in their own wing of Israel's national museum in Jerusalem.

As word of the scrolls' discovery spread, a team led by archaeologist and Dominican priest Roland de Vaux descended on Qumran in 1949. By 1956 de Vaux and local Bedouin had found 10 more "scroll caves" containing scores of manuscripts, many of them disintegrated into thousands of fragments. It took decades for scholars, working in seclusion and secrecy, to reassemble and translate the tattered parchments. The long delay in publication spawned conspiracy theories that the powers that be—the pope? Zionists?—were deliberately suppressing the scrolls' contents.

Finally, by the mid-2000s, the translators finished publishing the bulk of their findings. The scrolls included legal texts, apocalyptic and ritual treatises, accounts of life in the Qumran sect, and remnants of 230 biblical manuscripts. Scholars were thrilled to learn that among them was a nearly complete copy of the Book of Isaiah from the Hebrew Bible. Its content was virtually identical to another copy of Isaiah dated almost a thousand years later. The Great Isaiah Scroll would become Exhibit A for scholars who defend the Bible against claims that its text was corrupted by scribes who, over centuries of copying by hand, introduced a multitude of mistakes and intentional changes. (More about this contentious debate later.)

**T**HE HISTORY OF BIBLE HUNTING is one not only of buried treasures but also of fool's gold. As archaeologists began excavating in the Qumran caves, other Bedouin did their own digging and sold what

they found to Kando. His greatest purchase was the nearly 30-foot-long Temple Scroll, the longest of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In 1967, during the Arab-Israeli Six Day War, Israeli intelligence officers seized the Temple Scroll from Kando's home, claiming it as government property. After the incident Kando reportedly started furtively moving his remaining scroll fragments to relatives in Lebanon and later to a bank vault in Switzerland.

In 2009 Steve Green began buying rare Bibles and artifacts at an unprecedented pace, eventually acquiring some 40,000 objects—one of the largest private collections of biblical material in the world. His multimillion-dollar shopping spree inevitably led him to the Kandos' doorstep. (Kando's son William took over the family business after his father's death in 1993.)

"Steve Green came to see me many times," William Kando tells me through a cloud of cigarette smoke the morning we meet in his Jerusalem shop. "He's an honest man, a good Christian. He offered me \$40 million for my Genesis fragment. I refused. Some people say it is priceless." Green, through a spokesperson, says Kando set the price at \$40 million, and he opted not to purchase it. Instead he bought more affordable scroll fragments.

The merchant offers me more coffee, then fumbles through a ledger. "Here, you can see," he says, pointing to a notation that he had sold seven Dead Sea Scroll fragments to Green in May 2010.

Today the Museum of the Bible has five scroll fragments on display. When I visit the museum a day before its official opening, I notice a sort of disclaimer accompanying the exhibit acknowledging that the fragments might be fakes. Kando indignantly denies that his family sold inauthentic fragments, suggesting that any forgeries must have come from less reputable dealers.

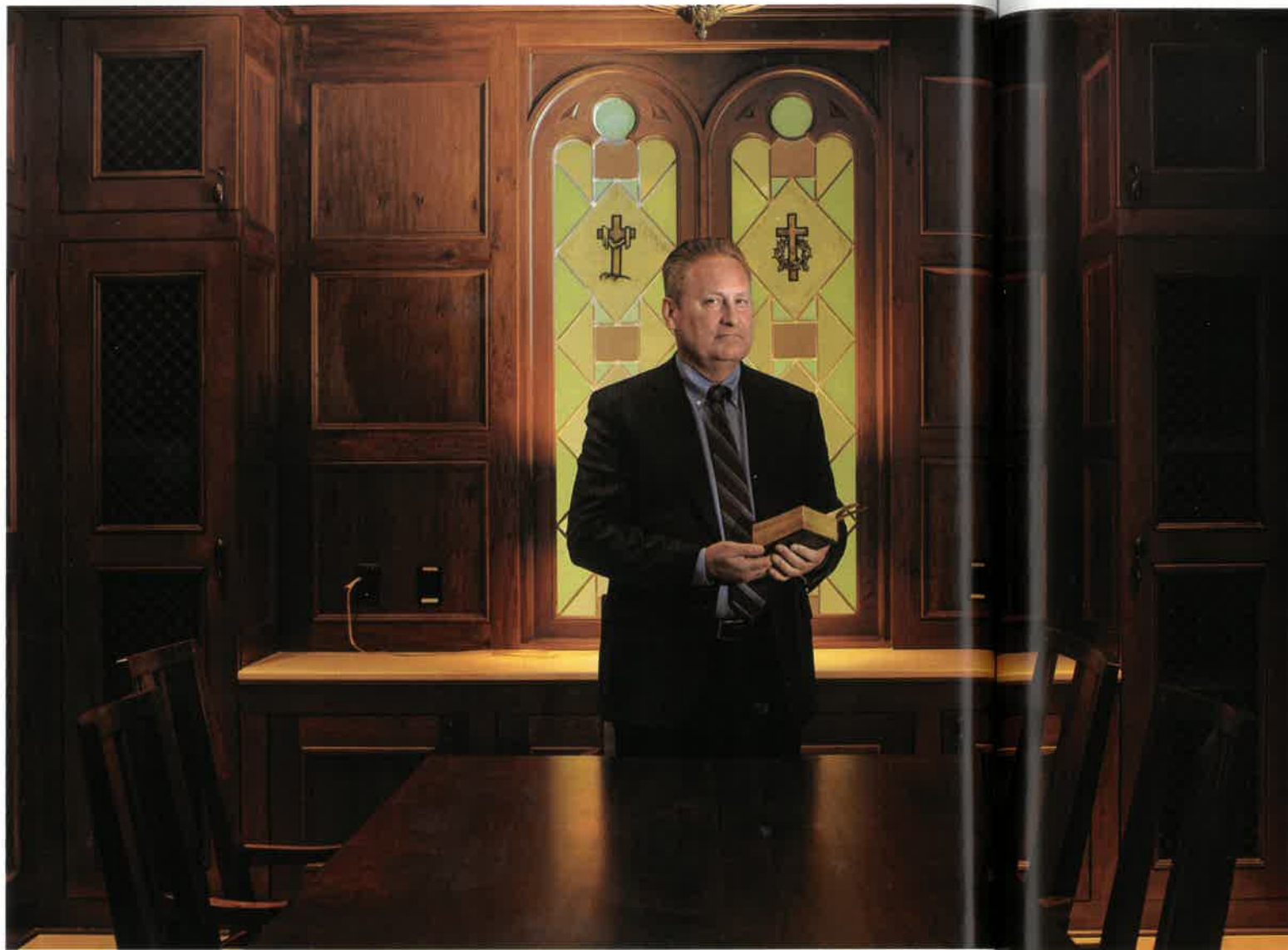
Green, for his part, seems a bit defensive when I ask about his prize acquisitions. "There've been some who've questioned some of our items, but it hasn't been conclusive," he says. "What's their evidence it's fake?" Still, Green concedes, "you would hope it would be different in the biblical world. But as it turns out, like in any other business, there are some shady people just trying to make a buck. All you can do is learn from your mistakes and not do business with them anymore."

One hundred tiny microform Bibles flew to the moon with astronaut Edgar Mitchell on Apollo 14 in 1971. The "lunar Bibles" were created by the Apollo Prayer

League, NASA employees who prayed for the astronauts' safety. Later some were set in gold and sold to collectors.

MUSEUM OF THE BIBLE,  
WASHINGTON, D.C.





One of Green's mistakes—importing thousands of clay tablets and other artifacts that, according to experts, had likely been looted in Iraq—resulted in a fine from the U.S. Justice Department of three million dollars and forfeiture of the objects. “The fact is, most antiquities are looted, and most buyers don’t ask where they came from,” says Eitan Klein, deputy director of the Israel Antiquities Authority’s anti-looting division, when we meet in his cramped office in Jerusalem. “Because in my view, if you are dealing with antiquities, you must get your hands dirty somehow.”

Klein’s phone rings. He listens, hangs up, and excuses himself, saying with a smile, “Our unit caught some looters, so I have to go.”

**B**ECAUSE THE AUTHENTIC Dead Sea Scrolls are “the most significant cultural treasure of a Jewish nature on Earth,” as curator Adolfo Roitman puts it, the sacred documents are preserved with exquisite care. Meanwhile multitudes of other biblical manuscripts are left to molder in academic storerooms or be consumed by fire, flood, insects, looters, or war in countries wracked by political upheaval. Conserving and documenting them before their secrets slip away forever is “literally a race against time,” says Daniel B. Wallace, head of the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts in Plano, Texas.

Wallace and other globe-trotting textual scholars—most notably the Benedictine monk

Father Columba Stewart of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library at Saint John’s University in Minnesota—have logged tens of thousands of miles traveling the world on an urgent mission: to digitally document ancient biblical manuscripts in archives, monastic libraries, and other repositories and make them available to scholars everywhere via the internet. It’s a daunting task. In the case of the New Testament, whose authors wrote in Greek, more than 5,500 Greek manuscripts and fragments have been found—more than any other ancient text. They total as many as 2.6 million pages, Wallace estimates, and like the Oxyrhynchus papyri, most of them have yet to receive scholarly attention.

“About 80 percent of already known manuscripts that would be of help for New Testament scholarship aren’t published yet,” says Father Olivier-Thomas Venard of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française, a Dominican research center in Jerusalem. “It’s an embarrassment of riches,” adds Venard’s colleague Father Anthony Giambrone, “which frankly makes the challenges of textual criticism insurmountable. There are just not enough specialists to work on them.”

The Institute for New Testament Textual Research in Münster, Germany, has sought to reduce the labor challenges by classifying biblical documents according to key passages, but such a system amounts to triage that wholly ignores numerous texts. A far more comprehensive solution may soon be technologically feasible, predicts Wallace, who hopes to use optical character recognition (OCR) software to digitize every volume of the Greek New Testament. “Right now it would take a scholar 400 years to read and collate all the known documents,” he says. “With OCR, we think we can do the job in 10 years.”

**Y**OU’D BE FORGIVEN for raising an awkward question at this point: Why does any of this matter? Why all the fuss about old Bibles and older scraps of Egyptian papyrus? For folks like Wallace, who teaches at an evangelical seminary, and Green, who has invested much of the family fortune in a world-class museum dedicated to the Bible, it boils down to this: Is their faith based on fact or fiction?

“When visitors to our museum see an ancient text,” Green says, “they’re seeing evidence that

**‘If you are dealing with antiquities, you must get your hands dirty.’**

EITAN KLEIN, ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY

When biblical artifacts flooded the market after the 2008 global financial crisis, Steve Green, founder and chairman of the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., went on a buying spree. He soon discovered the dark side of the antiquities trade, and paid three million dollars in a legal settlement for importing objects that experts said were likely looted from Iraq.



Billing itself a "living biblical museum," the Holy Land Experience in Orlando features period reenactors and a replica of the Dead Sea Scrolls caves.

what they believe isn't just a bunch of fairy tales."

But how good is that evidence? Assuming for the moment that the God of the Bible actually exists and that he somehow spoke to the authors of the ancient biblical documents—do we have now what they wrote then? After all, none of their original writings, what scholars call the autographs, have been found. Their words survive only because they were hand copied countless times until the invention of the printing press in the 15th century. And even conservative scholars admit that no two copies are exactly alike.

Few publishers would bet that such questions would produce a national best seller, but that's what happened in 2005 with the publication of the cleverly titled *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*. The book's author, Bart Ehrman, argues that the "facts" about Jesus set forth in modern Bibles are based on centuries of copies, all of which say different things, so we may not know what the original texts actually said.

In person, the goateed evangelical turned atheist is even-tempered if subversively caustic. Over coffee near the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he's a professor of religious studies, Ehrman recites a host of scriptural passages that he views with scholarly suspicion. The last 12 verses of the Gospel of Mark, he says, were likely tacked on many years after the fact, as was the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, foreshadowing Jesus' birth in Bethlehem.

Many of Ehrman's assertions are debatable (literally so: he and Wallace have squared off in three public debates), but some scholars agree that Christian scribes deliberately corrupted certain passages over time. The question is one of degree.

"Broadly, I support what Ehrman is saying about this," says Peter Head, an Oxford scholar who studies Greek New Testament manuscripts. "But the manuscripts suggest a controlled fluidity. Variants emerge, but you can sort of figure out when and why. Now, it's in the earlier period that we don't have enough data. That's the problem."

The "earlier period" that Head refers to begins with the birth of Christianity in the first century A.D. and concludes in the early fourth century. And while it's true that more than 5,500 Greek New Testament manuscripts have been found, close to 95 percent of those copies

come from the ninth to the 16th centuries. Only about 125 date back to the second or third centuries, and none to the first.

None of these figures rattle Ehrman's sparring partner Wallace, who considers Ehrman a friend and refers to him by his first name.

"Bart likes to point out that we don't have any autographs, only copies," Wallace says. "But the fact is, we don't have the autographs of *any* Greco-Roman literature, except possibly one fragment from one classical author."

Wallace acknowledges that the thousands of New Testament manuscripts contain myriad differences owing to scribes' errors, but he argues that because scholars have such a wealth of texts to study and compare, they've been able to identify those errors and largely recover the original wording. He also points out that an important measure of the trustworthiness of any historical document is its nearness in time to the events it purports to record.

"On average the earliest surviving copies of Greco-Roman literature are half a millennium removed from the time of composition," he says. "But in the case of the New Testament, the earliest copies are only a few decades after the fact. That's a huge difference."

Still, the lack of Christian writings from the first century would seem to be a point in Ehrman's column—a point Wallace is eager to eliminate. Too eager, perhaps.

**D**URING A DEBATE with Ehrman in February 2012, Wallace dropped a bombshell. A manuscript fragment of Mark's Gospel had recently been discovered that was authoritatively dated to the late first century—more than a century earlier than the oldest known text from the Book of Mark. It would be the only first-century New Testament document ever discovered, and the earliest surviving Christian text. A study of the ancient manuscript would likely be published in 2013, the Texas theologian said.

The Bible-hunting world went into hyper-ventilation over Wallace's disclosure. Who discovered the Mark manuscript? Where was it being kept? Was it on the market? How many millions would it cost to buy? But five years passed, and the document had yet to see the light of day.

I begin making calls in December 2017. A month later I show up at the Sackler Library

on the campus of Oxford University, which houses the world's largest collection of ancient papyri. An Italian woman in a laboratory coat leads me through a secure area. She is Daniela Colomo, a research associate at Oxford and curator of the legendary Oxyrhynchus papyrus collection excavated by Grenfell and Hunt around the turn of the 20th century.

In marked contrast to the regal Oxford townscape, the papyrology room containing one of the most vital repositories of biblical texts is a chaotic, fluorescent-lit assemblage of strewn papers, mislaid coffee mugs, and low-tech microscopes. Colomo produces a piece of acid-free paper, folded in the manner of an envelope. A brownish fragment of papyrus, not much bigger than my thumb, lies in the middle. Squinting, hovering a foot above it, I can make out a series of scratches across the ancient scrap.

"This is Mark," Colomo says. "The date is probably late second century, early third century. We never intended to take an official position, but there were all those blogs being written, and all the rumors. So, because of all the anonymous publicity, we have to publish it soon."

Colomo and her colleague Dirk Obbink, an American papyrologist and Oxford professor, published their findings last May. The fragment, cataloged as P.Oxy. LXXXIII 5345, was among the thousands unearthed by Grenfell and Hunt that had yet to be fully examined. The Egypt Exploration Society, which sponsored the Oxyrhynchus excavation and retains ownership of the collection, issued a statement that reads in part: "This is the same text that Professor Obbink showed to some visitors to Oxford in 2011/12, which some of them reported in talks and on social media as possibly dating to the late first century A.D. on the basis of a provisional dating when the text was catalogued many years ago."

### Why all the fuss about old Bibles and older scraps of Egyptian papyrus? It boils down to this: Is faith based on fact or fiction?

The buildup and subsequent letdown over the much touted Mark fragment have obscured the actual importance of the discovery. Only two other fragments of Mark from before A.D. 300 are known to exist. Colomo chalks up the frenzy to first-century fever among some researchers who dream of unearthing a Gospel or epistle penned by an Apostle.

"Among the New Testament scholars, particularly in the States, there's this tendency to look for the earliest documents, hoping to find an autograph from people who met Jesus," Colomo says. "They tend to date a papyrus very early, using random similarities. This is not scholarly."

For his part, Wallace has apologized to Ehrman for announcing an unverified find. "I take full responsibility," he says. "I didn't vet it properly. It was naive on my part."

It may also be naive, Ehrman says, to expect a single, small fragment to settle the long-simmering debate over the Bible. "Would it change anybody's mind about anything?" he says. "My view is, almost certainly not. I've repeatedly said that if you find three or four early manuscripts from different places and they all say the same thing, then you have an argument. I just don't think that's likely."

**R**ANDALL PRICE, the Qumran excavator, is also having to come to terms with long odds. In all but the rarest cases, archaeological feats are measured in increments rather than mother lodes. His and Gutfeld's team of students, friends, and family members are wrapping things up in Cave 53 one morning in late January when a shout rings out. Price's wife, Beverlee, emerges from a natural chamber, not quite a cave itself, that the team discovered recently. In her hand is a clay object about two inches long.

Price studies it. "Yep," he slowly murmurs. "That's a rim." Meaning: the rim of what might have been a scroll jar. Chances are, whatever else the sherd belonged to has long since been carted off by Bedouin. But the Bible that Price reads and believes teaches, above all else, to have faith. And where there are scroll jars...

"Hey, come on out!" he hollers into Cave 53. "We've got some digging to do!" □

Contributing writer **Robert Draper** reported on the surveillance boom in the February 2018 issue. Photographer **Paolo Verzone** is a three-time World Press Photo award winner.