

# Scripture: It Can Be Trusted!



May 2021

# The Canon of Scripture

**“For Christians, accepting the thirty-nine-book Old Testament canon is relatively easy. One might say, ‘Jesus and his apostles affirmed the Jewish canon of the Hebrew Scriptures in their day. As a follower of Jesus, I affirm the same.” (40Qs, 58).**

# What is the History of the Canon?

**1<sup>st</sup>  
Century**

**2nd  
Century**

**3rd  
Century**

**4th  
Century**



**“By the middle to the end of the second century there was widespread agreement on almost 80% of the New Testament documents. But beyond that we see ample evidence of the church fathers quoting from these various documents as authoritative for faith and practice. The basic shape of the New canon was in place by the end of the second century and was widely agreed upon among a vast range of churches through both the East and the West.” (Harmon, 7)**

# What is the criteria for Canon?

**Orthodox**

*Conformity  
to the rule of  
faith*

**Apostolic**

*Written by  
an apostle or  
a close  
associate of  
an apostle*

**Catholic**

*Widespread  
acceptance  
by the  
church*

**What is the application  
of this canon discussion?**

# The Transmission of Scripture



# The Issues

**“It is one thing to say that the originals were inspired, but the reality is we don’t have the originals—so saying they were inspired doesn’t help much, unless I can reconstruct the originals.... Not only do we not have the originals, but we also don’t have the first copies of the originals, or copies of the originals. We don’t even have copies of the copies of the originals, or copies of the copies of the copies of the originals. What we have are copies made later—much later. In most instances, they are copies made many centuries later. And these copies differ from one another, in many thousands of places... these copies differ from one another in so many places that we don’t even know how many differences there are. Possibly it is easiest to put it in comparative terms: there are more differences among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.” (Ehrman, [Misquoting Jesus](#), 10)**

“Bart Ehrman co-authored with Bruce Metzger the 4th edition of [The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration](#). Ehrman and Metzger state in that book that we can have a high degree of confidence that we can reconstruct the original text of the New Testament, the text that is in the Bibles we use, because of the abundance of textual evidence we have to compare. The variations are largely minor and don't obscure our ability to construct an accurate text. The 4th edition of this work was published in 2005 - the same year Ehrman published *Misquoting Jesus*, which relies on the same body of information and offers no new or different evidence to state the opposite conclusion.” (STR website)

# Responding to the Issues

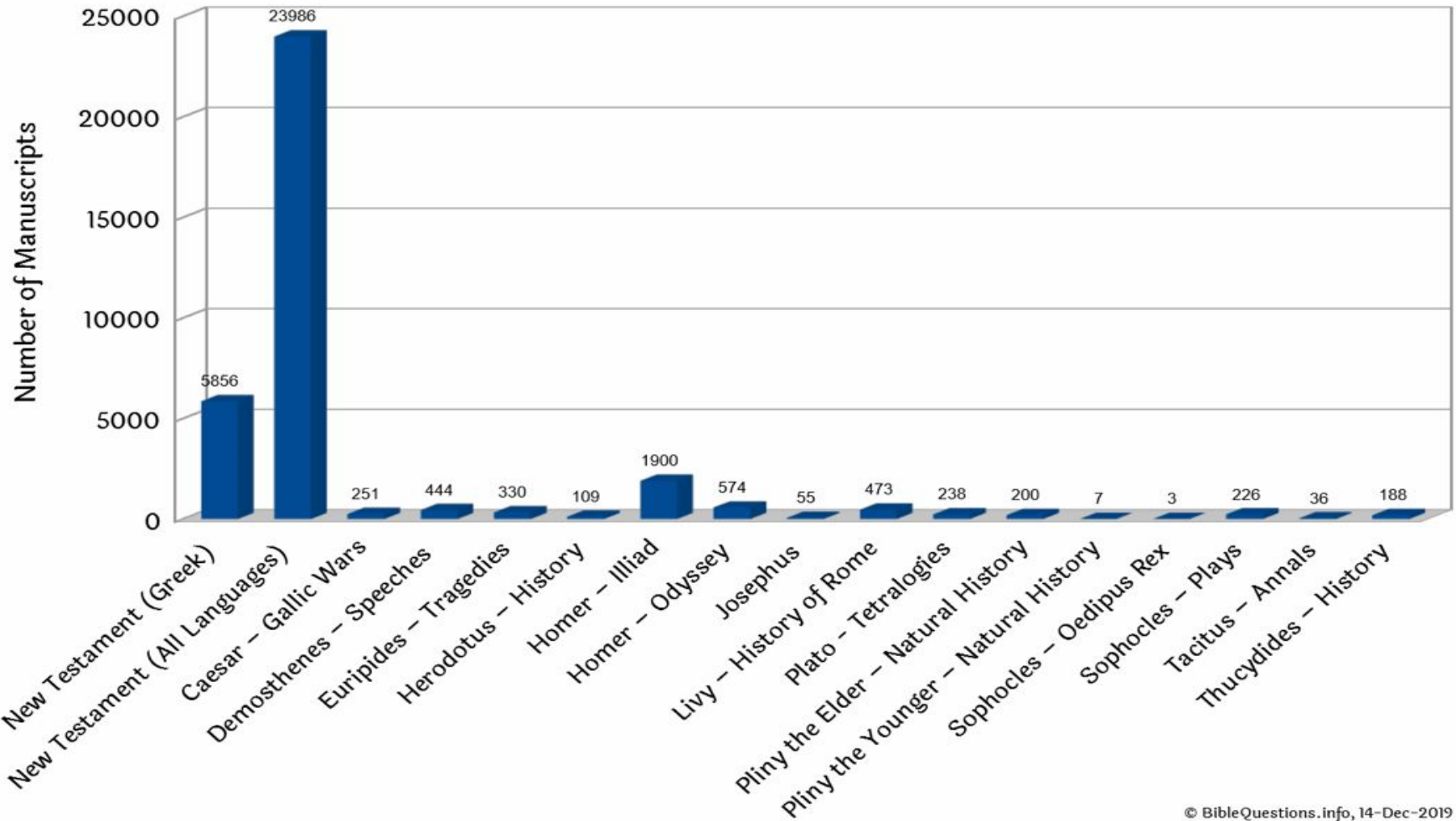
**Consider the Massive  
Volume of NT Manuscripts.**



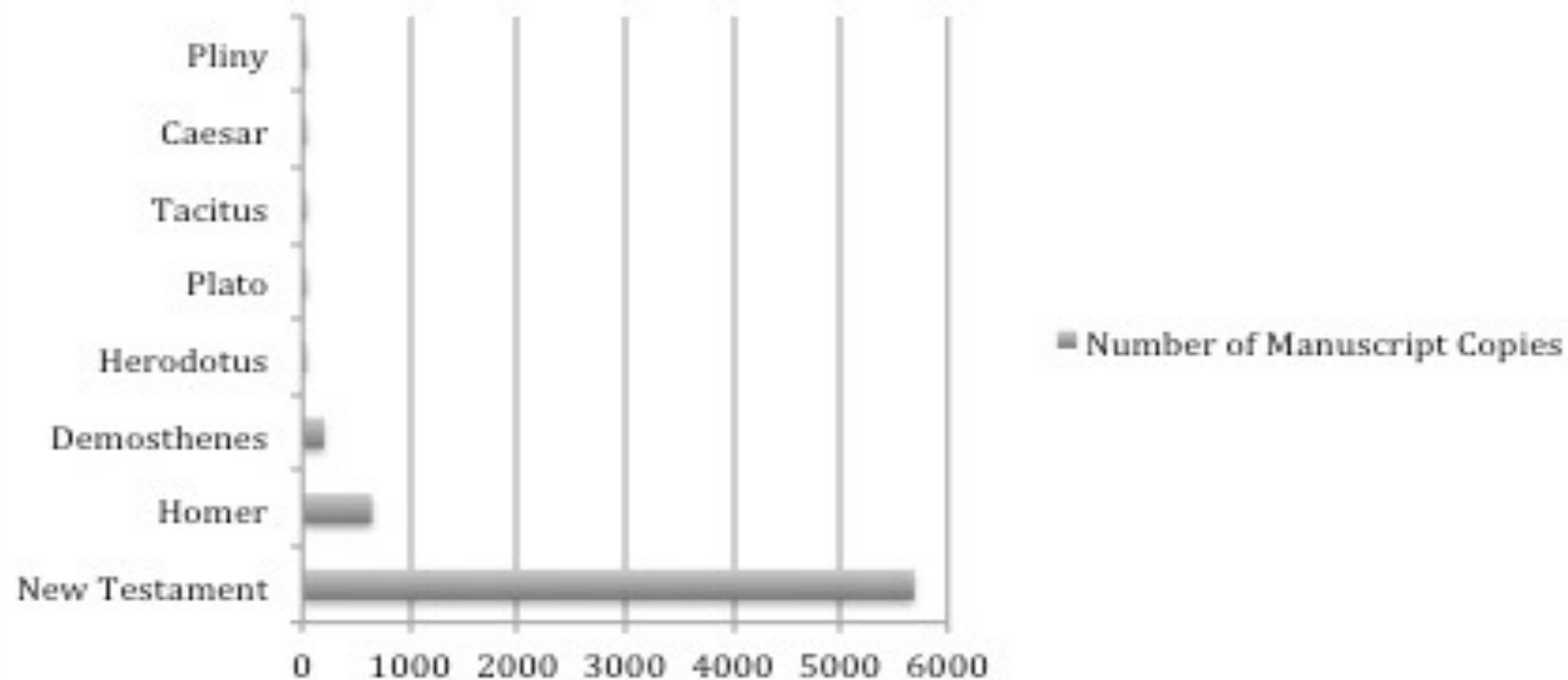
**“The New Testament is the best attested collection of writings from the ancient world. Hands down. It’s not even close.” (Harmon, 9)**

**Consider the Date of  
the NT Manuscripts.**

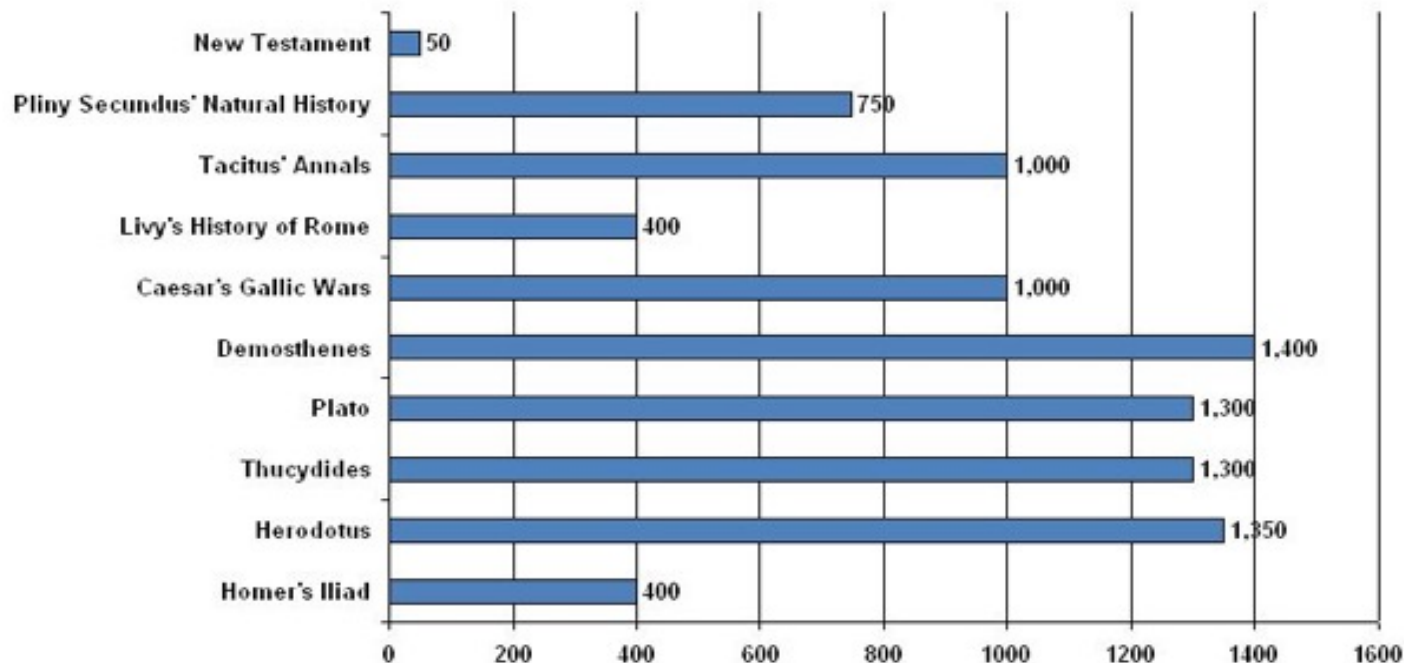
## Number of Manuscripts for Ancient Works



## Number of Manuscript Copies



# Time Gap Between Original and Earliest Existing Copies\*



*"In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest extant manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament"*

(Fredric G. Kenyon, director and principle librarian of the British Museum, 1901)

\*Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 1999, pp. 37-38



**“There are about 2,500 manuscripts in existence today. The earliest of these is from 400 B.C., which sounds great until you realize that Homer wrote the Iliad around 900 B.C., a gap of 500 years.” (Harmon, 9)**

**“... the New Testament documents have more manuscripts, earlier manuscripts, and more abundantly supported manuscripts than the best ten pieces of classical literature combined.”  
(Geisler, 225)**

**“If we’re going to discount the text of the New Testament, we should shut down our classics departments in universities around the country. We would have to reject the content of most of the works we use to understand ancient history. The idea that we don’t know the text of the New Testament documents is simply something close to crazy. We’ve got by far more manuscript evidence for the text of the New Testament than any other ancient work. And its’ by miles, it’s not just close.” (quoted by Driscoll, 144)**

**Consider the Nature of the  
Manuscript Variants!**

**“Erhman’s number, however, is not based on 400,000 different instances in the Bible but on the number of copies that have been made of whatever text he is arguing is in dispute. So, if there was a problem in Matthew 16:4, for instance, and it had been printed in thirty different original manuscripts, Erhman counts that not as one problem but as thirty.” (Clark, *The Problem of God*, 68)**



**“Another New Testament scholar, Craig Blomberg, points out that based on Ehrman’s own logic of counting a single mistake and multiplying it by the amount of times it was published, one could argue: ‘There are 1.6 million errors in the first printing of Ehrman’s book, since someone counted 16 typos and there were 100,000 printed!’” (Clark, *The Problem of God*, 68)**



# Romans 5:1

English  
Translation

*“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God...”*

Textual  
Variant

*“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, **let us have** peace with God...”*

**“we find that the vast majority of these variants involve mere changes in spelling, grammar, and style, or accidental omissions or duplications of letters, words, or phrases,” (Blomberg, Making sense of the NT: Three crucial questions, Kindle location 237-238)**

**“Overall, 97 to 99 percent of the original Greek New Testament can be reconstructed beyond any reasonable doubt. Moreover, no Christian doctrine is founded solely, or even primarily, on any textually disputed passage.” (Blomberg, Kindle 242-244)**

**“The variant readings about which any doubt remains among textual critics of the New Testament affect no material question of historic fact or of Christian faith and practice.” (quoted by Boa and Bowman, page 82)**

**Consider the OT for a  
Moment**



**“The bottom line is that the books of the New Testament are the most reliably copied and handed down documents in the history of the world. With a high degree of confidence, we can reconstruct the very word of the authors over 99% of the time, and in the remaining one percent we can always determine what it is likely author wrote.” (Harmon, 11).**

**“Our fundamental argument is that although the original New Testament text has not been recovered in all its particulars, it has been recovered in all its essentials. That is, the core doctrinal statements of the New Testament are not in jeopardy because of any textual variations. This has been the view of the majority of textual critics for the past three hundred years.” (Wallace, Dethroning Jesus, 72).**