**Summary of Bible Reliability**

Feb. 1, 2024 version

# 

# Early New Testament Evidence

This summary is the result of my own tallying, going through every verse, using Metzger, UBS, Barrett, *ANF*, Adamantius, and other sources. For this summary we are going to limit ourselves to what was written or preserved prior to 325 A.D., though there is a lot of corroborating evidence after then too. There were 74 Greek and 1 Coptic New Testament manuscripts prior to 325 A.D.. There were 91 or so Christian authors, writing about 5480 pages with 9272 New Testament quotes.

Percentage of verses quoted.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **New Testament section** | **Total number of verses** | **Pre-Nicene Manuscripts** | **Pre-Nicene Writers** | **Combination of Manuscripts & Writers** |
| Gospels | 3799 verses | 2008 = 53 % | 3319 = 88 % | 3494 = 92 % |
| Paul | 2033 verses | 1489 = 73 % | 1175 = 58 % | 1727 = 85 % |
| Gospels plus Paul | 5812 verses | 3496 = 60 % | 4494 = 77 % | 5220 = 90 % |
| Rest of N.T. | 2140 verses | 1659 = 78 % | 692 = 32 % | 1854 = 87 % |
| **Total New Testament** | **7652 verses** | **64 %** | **65 %** | **89 %** |

The entire New Testament 350 was quoted by Christian writers or in Bible manuscripts by 350 A.D.

The details are all in [www.biblequery.org/Bible/BibleReliability/EarlyChristianNTQuotes.html](http://www.biblequery.org/Bible/BibleReliability/EarlyChristianNTQuotes.html) (or .docx) for exactly which New Testament verses are in which manuscripts and early Church writings.

# Early New Testament Reliability

From ancient New Testament manuscripts and church writers, we can be sure of about 97 % of every word in the New Testament, or 3 % uncertainty. Only about 1.2 % have a change in meaning.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **New Testament section** | **Total Greek Words** | **Greek Words in question** | **Uncer-tainty** | **Words with mean-ingful changes** | **Uncertainty of meaning** |
| Gospels | 65068 | 2158 | 3 % | 1117 | 1.7 % |
| Paul | 32408 | 740 | 2 % | 182 | 0.6 % |
| Gospels plus Paul | 97476 | 2898 | 3 % | 1299 | 1.3 % |
| Rest of NT | 40836 | 1046 | 3 % | 403 | 1 % |
| **Total New Testament** | **138312** | **3947** | **3 %** | **1702** | **1.2 %** |

You can see the breakdown by book at <https://www.biblequery.org/ntmss.html>. You can see the individual variants that comprise this number at [www.biblequery.org/[bookname]%20Manuscripts.html](http://www.biblequery.org/%5bbookname%5d%20Manuscripts.html) replacing [bookname] with the book’s name.

# Classifying Uncertainties

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **N.T. Uncertainty Classification** | **Uncertain word count** | **Contribution to uncertainty** |
| 1-word uncertainties | 1187 | 30 % |
| 2-word uncertainties | 289 \* 2 = 578 | 15 % |
| 3-word and 4-word uncertainties | (100 \* 3) + (51 \* 4) = 504 | 8 % + 5 % |
| 5-word and 6-word uncertainties | (39 \* 5) + (17 \* 6) = 297 | 5 % + 3 % |
| 7-word and 8-word uncertainties | (15 \* 7) + (8 \* 8) = 169 | 3 % + 2 % |
| 9-word and 10-word uncertainties | (10 \* 9) + (10 \* 10) = 190 | 2 % + 3 % |
| order of Rom 16:25-27 & 1 Cor 14:34-35 | 53 + 36 = 89 words | 2 % |
| John 7:53-8:11 & Mark 16:9-20 | 169 + 166 = 335 words | 9 % |
| Other 11+ word uncertainties | 29 words | 14 % |
| **Total uncertain words** | **3927** | **100 %** |

This is online at <https://www.biblequery.org/ntmss.html>

# Early Old Testament Evidence

Early Christians generally quoted from the Greek version of the Old Testament called the Septuagint. I have not yet summarized who quoted which verses. But we have the Dead Sea Scrolls (all written before 68 A.D.) mostly in Hebrew, with a few Greek copies. Eleven caves preserved about 95,000 fragments, 40,000 in cave 4 alone or both Biblical and non-Biblical writings.

We also have a few other manuscripts of the Old Testament.

At **Masada** was found Mas1C containing Deuteronomy 33:17-21; 34:2-6

**Nahal Hever** has XHev/Se3 of Deuteronomy 9:5-6, 21-23

The **Wadi Murabba’at** site has Deuteronomy 10:1-3; 11:2-3; 12:25-26; 14:29; 15:1 or 2, called Mur 2.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **O.T. section / Category** | **Copies/fragments** | **Earliest copy** | **Commentaries** |
| The Law | 97 | 250 B.C. | 1 |
| Parallel Torah | 1 | ? | 0 |
| Prophets | 77 | 225-175 B.C. | 7 + possibly 1 |
| Writings | 26 or so | 225-150 B.C. | 1 + possibly 1 |
| **Total O.T. Dead Sea scrolls** | **205** | **250 B.C.** | **9 + possibly 2** |
| Total non-Biblical Dead Sea scrolls | 667 |  | 0 |

Chester Beatty IX-X (Septuagint Ezekiel, Dan, Esther) Third century

British Museum MS Oriental 7594 Sahidic Coptic Deuteronomy, Jonah, Acts Third/fourth century

# Early Old Testament Reliability

This is for the Hebrew text prior to 70 A.D. at Qumran, Masada, Wadi Murabba’at, and Nahal Hever.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **O.T. section / Category** | **Verses quoted** | **Total Verses** | **Percentage** |
| The Law (Torah) | 2601 | 5817 | 45 % |
| Prophets | 3060 | 9290 | 33 % |
| Writings | 1855 | 7902 | 23 % |
| **Approx. Total O.T.** | **7516** | **23009** | **33 %** |

By 350 A.D. we have manuscripts with every verse of the Septuagint Old Testament quoted. We also have the Septuagint (LXX) Greek translation of the Old Testament. For some parts like the Torah, the translation is fairly close. For other books the LXX is not as close and some books, such as Jeremah, seems to be an abridged version.

# For Further Reading

<https://biblequery.org/Bible/BibleReliability/ExistingNTManuscripts.html> (and .docx)

<https://biblequery.org/Bible/BibleReliability/ComparingTheReliabilityOfTheNewTestamentAndTheQuran.html> (and .docx)

<https://biblequery.org/History/Archaeology/DeadSeaScrolls.html> (and .docx)

<https://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/manuscripts/greek_classics.htm>

<https://www.toughquestionsanswered.org/2012/12/11/how-do-other-ancient-texts-compare-to-the-new-testament/>

<https://truediscipleship.com/manuscript-evidence-for-the-superior-new-testament-reliability/>

Comfort, Philip W. (editor). ***The Origin of the Bible***. Tyndale House, 1992.

Martinez, Florentino Garcia. ***The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated : The Qumran Texts in English 2nd edition***. Published by E.J. Brill and Eerdmans’, 1996.

VanderKam, James C. ***The Dead Sea Scrolls Today***. Eerdmans’, 1994.

VanderKam, James and Peter Flint. Forward by Emanuel Tov. ***The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls***. Harper San Francisco 2002.

Vermes, Geza. ***The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls In English***. Penguin Books 1997. (633 pages)

by Steven Morrison Ph.D.