The original, handwritten twenty-seven books of the New Testament most likely disappeared within a few decades after being written. We are left with thousands of handwritten copies written in a variety of languages. Instead of being cause for alarm, the preservation of the New Testament is a living testimony to the unmatched power and providence of God. The earliest complete copies of the New Testament are Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus. (Codex refers to the book form used exclusively by Christians for making copies of Biblical writings.) Both date to the early fourth century. Here is a chart detailing the earliest New Testament manuscripts found to date: MANUSCRIPT.

Early distribution of the books which came to form the New Testament could be described as chaotic. There was no center of production, no controlled distribution or transmission, nor were there scriptoriums available for mass production. When the first century writers first penned their gospel account or letter, it was sent to the burgeoning church for which it was intended where it was read aloud for the sake of the whole congregation. Manuscripts from the pre-constantinian period include portions of every New Testament book with the exception of 2nd Timothy and John’s third epistle. The best attested book is John’s Gospel, with 16 manuscripts dated from A.D. 125 to the start of the fourth century. In all, 67 manuscripts are dated to this period.