

Making Money from the Bible

David Parish looks at how the Bible was produced in the Christian era, starting from the first century papyri, and traces the prices charged, first by scribes, then by monastic houses, then by printers. The earliest Bibles were too expensive for the merchant class, but by the late middle ages wealthy families could buy them. Finally, with the the printing press, ordinary labouring families could afford them.

At every major Christian Conference one of the features is a vast bookstore selling everything that the well-informed Christian would need: themed bookmarks, the latest ‘best seller’ from Phil Yancey, Max Lucado or John Lennox, notebooks for journaling and a vast array of Bibles of every shape, size and price.

We take it for granted that we can have any one of the six most popular modern versions as well as the King James Bible. There will be niche Bibles in special editions for men and women and youth. There will be study Bibles with wide margins for all our insightful notes.

One of the best-sellers in America at present is the ‘Patriot’s Bible’, with its selective re-telling of American History in the interleaved pages of notes, together with quotes from the Founding Fathers. The British do not come off very well in this version!

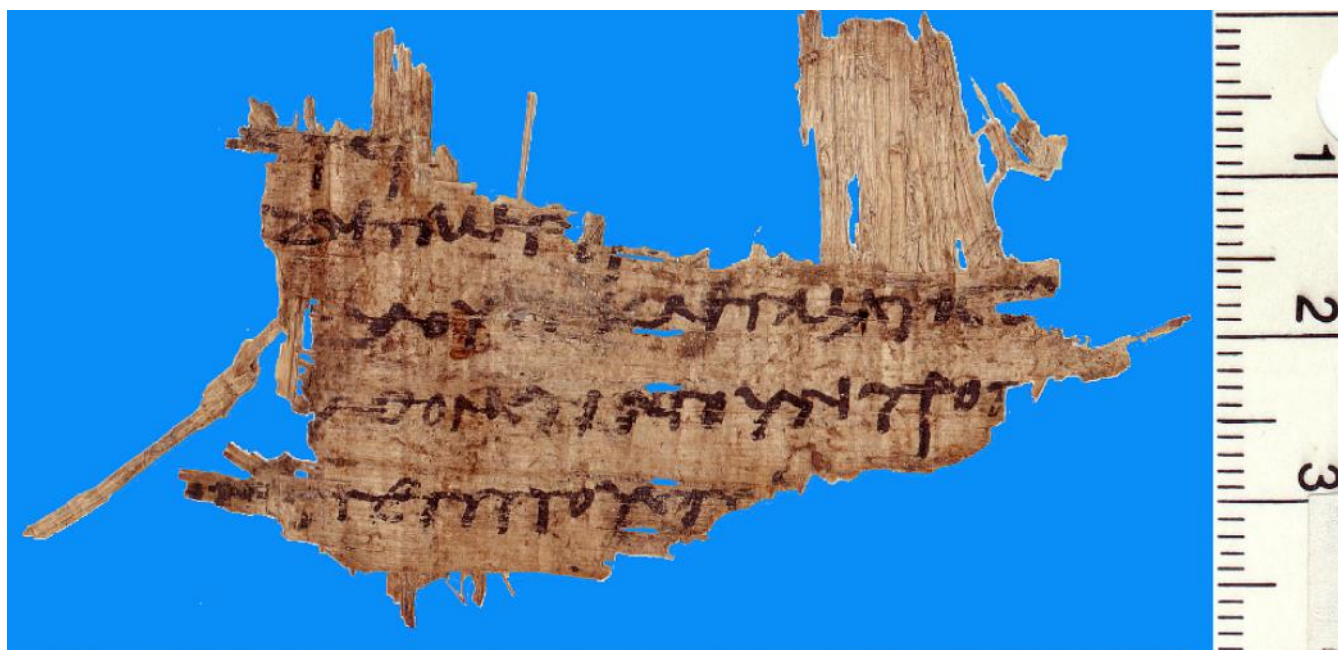
The Early Church

In all of this we hardly think about how the early church managed to get copies of the Greek and Hebrew versions of the Jewish Bible, which is what Paul and the other apostles used.

In the first century there were no major publishing houses with the

economic might of today’s Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press in the UK, and Zondervan, part of the News International Group, and Nelson, part of the Thompson Group, in the USA.

Despite this by the end of the second century there were at least several thousand gospels, parts of Paul’s letters and those of other apostles in circulation. The number is based on the fact that in various libraries around the globe today there are fragments of around 5000 of those letters and lectionaries dating from the first to the tenth century. There are five fragments from the first and



1st century gospel papyrus fragment, from a 2007 report by Professor Robert A. Kraft, University of Pennsylvania