Introduction to Scripture & The English Bible
The Writing Materials of Scripture
Lesson 18

"Writing materials included almost every substance which could be used for that purpose."
~~ H. S. Miller, p. 169 ~~

I. WRITING MATERIALS AND INSTRUMENTS

Numerous materials have been used by man to write upon. Some of interest to our subject are:

A. _____.

Cuneiform (from "cuneus" meaning "wedge") was written on this medium. The letters or pictures were pressed _____ (averaging about 6" x 2 Y2") and then baked (see Ezekiel 4:1).

B. _____.

Monuments, pillars, walls, obelisks, etc. were often inscribed this way. The famous Code of Hammurabi, the Rosetta Stone, and the Moabite Stone are other examples.

See Jer. 17:1 which refers to chisel. Also, Exod. 24:12, 32:15-16; Deut. 27:2-3; Joshua 8:31-32.

C. _____.

Ostraca is pottery, often baked and discarded, used as a cheap form of writing.

D. _____.

Papyrus was one of the most important kinds of writing material in ancient days, and was a forerunner of paper (which derives its name from "papyrus"). It was used from about 2100 B.C.

Papyrus was made from the pith of the stalk of the papyrus reed (Bulrush, Isa. 18:2) by layering, pressing, and gluing the material into sheets.

Papyrus was cheap and much lighter to transport. However, it was also very fragile. It could be easily damaged when written upon, it was susceptible to moisture, and if it dried out would easily crumble. It was ideally suited to _____ _____ where most ancient papyrus documents have been discovered.

There are 97 known papyrus manuscripts of the New Testament. The most ancient is the John Ryland papyrus fragment p. 52 which includes John 18:31-33, 37-38. It was written between 98 and 138 A.D.

Papyrus remained popular until around 1000 A.D. when it was replaced with paper.

E. _____.

Parchment is specially prepared leather. The skins were first tanned, then scraped on both sides to remove hair and flesh, then stretched, dried, and polished smooth using pumice.

Parchment was used because of its enduring quality.

Strictly speaking, ***parchment*** refers to the writing material made from the skins of goats and sheep, whilst, ***vellum*** is made from calf (veal) or antelope skins.
Ink was made from carbon (soot) and gum. It was kept in an _____ Ezekiel 9:2-3,11. _____ were made from reeds, and required _____ to keep them in shape, Jer. 36:23. Pen and ink are referred to in several places in the Word of God, *Jer. 8:8; II John 12; III John 13.*

F. _____.

Paper was invented by the Chinese (c.200 B.C.). It was introduced to Christendom by the Arabs around 900 A.D. Because of this fact, it was lightly regarded by the "Church," and its use did not become popular.

II. TERMINOLOGY RELATING TO BIBLICAL WRITINGS AND MANUSCRIPTS

A. _____.

'Manu' = manual, 'script' = writing. Thus, we simply refer to manual writing, or, _____.

B. _____.

This is a continuous roll of parchment or papyrus, usually held between two sticks, which is rolled and unrolled as it is read. A typical scroll containing the Old Testament would be from 18" to 27" high and 300' long. A scroll containing Luke or Acts would be about 30' long.

C. _____.

This is simply a book. 'Codices' is plural. The early Christians quickly went to book form for the Scriptures because they were easier to carry around.

D. _____.

These were not Biblical Manuscripts per se, but were collections of Scripture lessons

arranged for congregational readings.

1 . Synaxaria - These are lectionaries prescribing set Scripture readings.

2. Menologia - These are lectionaries prescribing set Scripture readings for special religious days.

E. _____.

A manuscript written in upper case (capital) letters. Another term for this is majuscule. Usually one inch high letters were used.

F. _____.

A manuscript written in lower case script. Another term for this is minuscule.

G. _____.

This word means "rescraped," and a palimpsest manuscript is one which has had the original writing erased. Parchment was very expensive.

H. Summary.

"The Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, so far known, were written on papyrus, parchment, or paper. The autographs, both of the historical and epistolary writers, are supposed to have been written on papyrus. The great uncials copies and the most valued of the minuscules and lectionaries were written on parchment, while paper was employed largely in the making of the later lectionaries and the printed texts of the New Testaments."
~~ Rev. Charles F. Sitterly, *Praxis In Manuscripts of the Greek New Testament,* 1898, p. 15 ~~

III. DETERMINING THE AGE OF MANUSCRIPTS

Determining the age of a manuscript is usually somewhat difficult and inexact. Occasionally, a manuscript will be dated - especially the later ones. There are a number of clues which can give an indication as to the approximate age of a manuscript:

A. The Manuscript Material.

1. Papyrus Rolls - 1st Century.
2. Papyrus Codices – 2nd to 4th Century.
3. Vellum and Parchment - 4th to 8th Century.
4. Flaxen Paper – 8th to 13th Century.
5. Linen Paper - 13th Century and on.

B. The Style of Script.

1. Uncials - to 10th Century.
2. Compressed Uncials - from the 9th Century.
3. Minuscules - from 6th Century.

C. Punctuation.

1. Spaced Clauses - from 300 A.D.
2. Spaced Words - from 5th Century.
3. Dots - from 5th Century (Dots indicated a pause).
4. Commas - from Jerome, 420 A.D.
5. Colons and Semi-Colons - from 7th Century.
6. Accents and Breathings - from 8th Century.
7. Question Marks - from 10th Century.

D. Text Divisions.

The so-called "Ammonian Sections" were divisions of the Gospels into sections from the 3rd Century.

E. The Eusebian Canons.

In the 4th Century, the sections themselves were categorized into indices or canons.

Sections were listed according to their common events - a section mentioned in all four Gospels belonged to canon 1, etc. With each passage, the appropriate section and canon was noted in the margin of a manuscript.

F. The Euthalian Chapters.

In 458 A.D., the Epistles of Paul were divided into sections for public reading. In 590 A.D., the Acts and General Epistles were also divided, and noted on manuscripts.

G. Sticometry.

Scribes were paid by the line, and lines were numbered in the margin of many manuscripts from about the 5th Century.

H. General Appearance.

Ornamentation, color of parchment and ink, religious art, etc., all add clues to the age of the manuscript.