

“Your new birth was not from any perishable seed, but from imperishable seed, the living and enduring Word of God. For all humanity is grass, and all its beauty like the wild flower’s. As the grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of the Lord remains for ever. And this word is the Good News that has been brought to you”—1 Peter 1:24,15 NJB

“This disciple is the one who testifies to these events and has recorded them here. And we know that his account of these things is accurate”—John 21:24 NLT

Almighty God promised to preserve his word, and he has done just that!

The Rylands Papyrus 457 (P52) is the oldest copy yet discovered of any portion of the New Testament, having been paleographically dated back to the first half of the second century CE, about 125-135 CE. A tiny fragment of a codex (a leaf-form text, like a modern book, in contrast to a scroll) of the Gospel of John, it contains parts of [John 18:31-33](#) on one side and [John 18:37-38](#) on the other side. It was acquired in Egypt in 1920 and is now in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England.

Despite its tiny size (less than 3.5 in. [9 cm] from top to bottom), this papyrus fragment is highly significant. It testifies that by the first half of the second century the Gospel of John was already being read in Egypt, far from Ephesus in Asia Minor, the most likely place of its composition by the apostle John. It seems unlikely that John’s Gospel could have been composed any later than the end of the first century, the late 90’s, since it would have taken time for it to have been accepted and disseminated so far from its place of origin. The manuscript, of which P52 is a fragment, must have been copied within 25 to 30 years of the composition of the Gospel itself. It gives us strong evidence that John’s gospel was written by the apostle John prior to the end of the first century. John’s gospel itself gives us strong clues that he wrote it himself ([John 19:35](#); [20:30,31](#); [21:24](#)).

The importance of this tiny manuscript fragment is noted below:

“Small therefore as it is, it suffices to prove that a manuscript of this Gospel was circulating, presumably in provincial Egypt where it was found, about the period A. D. 130-150. Allowing even a minimum time for the circulation of the work from its place of origin, this would throw back the date of composition so near the traditional date in the last decade of the first century that there is no longer any reason to question the validity of the tradition”—The Bible and Modern Scholarship, 1949, page 21, by Sir Frederick Kenyon

If we take into account that in some pieces of Greek or Latin literature the oldest manuscript available is dated to over a thousand years after the composition of the original text, that is in reality an extremely short period of time. An enormous number of Greek New Testament texts exist, and they give us good reason to be confident that the New Testament we read today accurately reflects what was in the original manuscripts.

One Source of this article is: New International Version Archaeological Study Bible