

PARABLES

Bringing Hidden Things to Light



Psalms 78:2-4

I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter dark sayings of old... We will not conceal them.

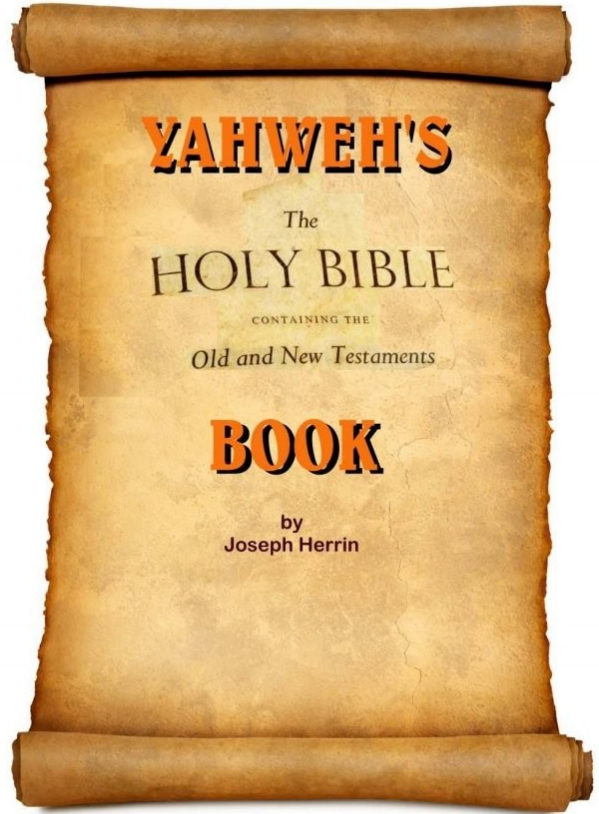
Parables Bookshelf - Series 1.18.2

This edition of the Parables Bookshelf Newsletter series continues the writing *Yahweh's Book*. In this newsletter we take a look at the languages of the Bible and how to remember them by understanding the history of Yahweh's chosen people, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

After considering the languages of the Bible, we then turn our attention to the great manuscripts from which our modern language Bibles are translated.

I pray that you would be blessed with peace and understanding as you read.

Joseph Herrin



Food for Thought

"Reading the Bible without meditating on it is like trying to eat without swallowing."

Anonymous

"The letter of Scripture is a veil just as much as it is a revelation; hiding while it reveals, and yet revealing while it hides."

Andrew Jukes

Scripture Memory

II Timothy 3:16

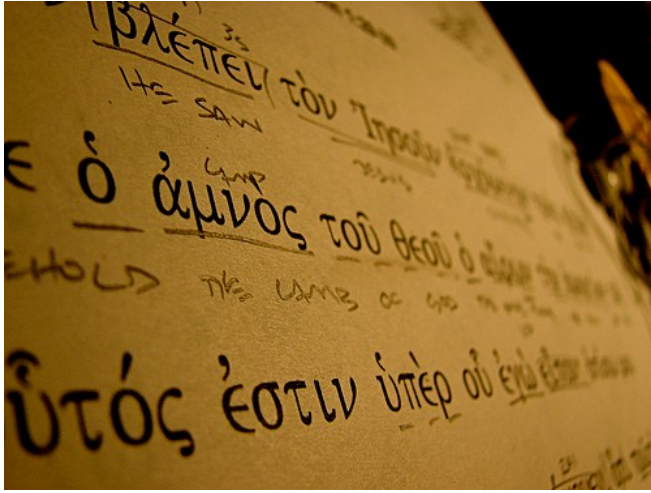
All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness...

Parables Newsletter

- Series 1.18.2
- *Yahweh's Book*
- Chapters 3-4

Yahweh's Book

The Languages of the Bible



A story is told about the first woman governor of the state of Texas, Miriam Amanda (Ma) Ferguson, who was elected to office in 1924. A debate was raging in Texas as to whether children immigrating from Mexico should receive public education courses in their native language of Spanish. Reports of the event state that Ma Ferguson brought a hasty end to the debate when she held up a Bible and declared, *"If the King's English was good enough for Jesus Christ, it's good enough for the children of Texas!"*

I have found that many Christians are confused about the languages that the people in the Bible spoke, as well as the languages in which the Scriptures were written. As a youth I was aware that the Bible was written in different languages. I had a Strong's Concordance that I began using before I was a teenager. At that age I sometimes had trouble remembering which Testament of the Bible was written in Hebrew and which one was written in Greek. Later I also learned that parts of the Bible were written in Aramaic. I had no idea what Aramaic was, or who spoke it, for churches do not typically teach such things to their members. The subject of Biblical languages is not difficult to understand. I believe following the history of God's people makes the subject of Bible languages easy to comprehend.

When Yahweh first created mankind, there was only one language. We are not told what language Adam and Eve spoke. I have heard some suggest that it was Hebrew, but I am not persuaded by the arguments. (You may understand my objections after reading more on the history of the Hebrew language.) For the first 1500 years of mankind's existence all humanity spoke the same language. It was after the flood of Noah that Yahweh confused the speech of man. After the flood men began to multiply. Yahweh had instructed them to scatter across the earth, but man disobeyed. They congregated at Babel where they attempted to build a great city and a tower to reach to the heavens.

Genesis 11:6-9

And Yahweh said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So Yahweh scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there Yahweh confused the language of the whole earth; and from there Yahweh scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.

From this time onward mankind was divided into people groups based upon the languages that they spoke. This was the beginning of the various "tongues and tribes and nations" of mankind.

To grasp well the history of Bible languages, a very good place to start is with Abram/Abraham. When Yahweh chose a specific people to be His unique possession in the earth, He began by calling forth one man to be the head and progenitor of this people. This man was Abraham.

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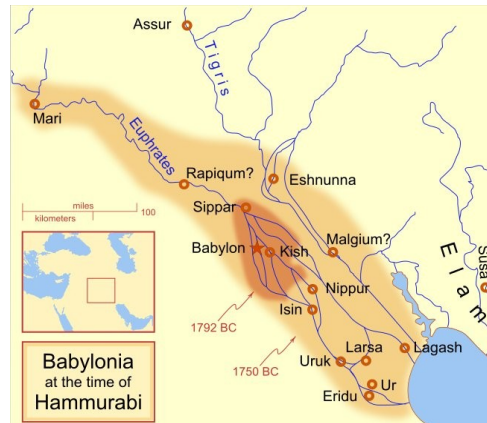
We know that Abraham's descendants are identified as Hebrews. The Hebrews are a distinct race of people, all descending from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet many Christians are stumped when asked what people group Abraham belonged to before Yahweh called him. Abraham wasn't always a Hebrew. He belonged to one of the major families of mankind. The Bible tells us plainly which one.

Deuteronomy 26:5

And you shall answer and say before Yahweh your God, "***My father was a wandering Aramean***, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation."

Yes, Abraham was formerly an Aramean. He lived among the descendants of Aram. The language these people spoke was Aramaic. Aramaic is not one single language, but it is a family of languages. As often occurs, a people who speak one language become fragmented. In their isolation from other groups who speak the same language, differences begin to enter in. New words are adopted. Various expressions become unique to one people group. At times even the alphabet and spelling of words may change. If the differences in these related languages are relatively minor, they are referred to as dialects. However, if the changes are such that others who speak the original language can no longer understand the evolved speech of a group of people, the dialect may be referred to as a distinct language.

Hebrew, Syriac, and Phoenician are all Aramaic languages. Abraham was born around the year 2,000 B.C.. He lived for 175 years, which places him about a century before Hammurabi. As previously mentioned, Abraham was born into the people of Aram. The Arameans settled along the Euphrates River in an area that became known as Babylonia.



You will notice a city down toward the bottom of the map that is named Ur. The Bible declares Ur to be the ancestral home of Abraham.

Genesis 11:27-28

Now these are the records of the generations of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran; and Haran became the father of Lot. And Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans.

Because the Arameans were not the only family of people to dwell in this area, Aramaic was not the exclusive language spoken. Another common language in Babylonia in the time of Abraham and his forefathers was Akkadian. During a period of about a thousand years from the time of Abraham until the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods (934 B.C. - 539 B.C.), a great influx of Arameans came into this area. Consequently Aramaic became the common language of the land. It was during the Neo-Babylonian period around 600 B.C., that Judah was led away into Babylonian captivity. Daniel was carried into Babylon during this time, so it is not surprising that portions of the book of Daniel were written in Aramaic, rather than Hebrew. The book of Ezra was also written during the time of the Babylonian exile and the Jews return from Babylon. It too contains sections that were written in Aramaic. Of approximately 23,000

Yahweh's Book

verses in the Old Testament, roughly 250 of them are written in Aramaic. The remainder are written in Hebrew.

If we follow the life of Abraham, we can readily identify the languages of the Old Testament. Abraham was an Aramean who spoke Aramaic. Abraham was directed by Yahweh to leave the land of his forefathers and travel to a far distant land. Over time, as Abraham's descendants dwelt in the land of Canaan where they were cut off from other speakers of Aramaic, their speech began to change. The influence of the Canaanite languages had an impact on the language of the Hebrew descendants of Abraham. As time passed the language spoken by the Hebrew people in Canaan became so distinct that Aramaic and Hebrew were considered separate languages.

We see evidence of the profound changes that occurred in the Hebrew's speech in an account found in the book of II Kings. About 1300 years after Abraham's descendants had been dwelling in Canaan, King Sennacherib of Assyria laid siege to Jerusalem in the days of King Hezekiah. Sennacherib's commander, the Rabshakeh, came out to speak to the Jews, taunting them. The Rabshakeh spoke openly in Hebrew, taunting the people of Jerusalem. One of Hezekiah's ministers urged the Rabshakeh to speak to Hezekiah's servants in Aramaic, for the common people of Judea no longer understood the language.























II Kings 18:26

Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it; and do not speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people who are on the wall."

The speech of Abraham's descendants was still

considered an Aramaic language in Hezekiah's day, but we see that it had become so differentiated from the Aramaic of the land of Assyria and Babylon that most of the Hebrews could no longer understand Aramaic. A century after this, the Jews were taken captive into the land of Babylon. There they were once more subjected to the Aramaic language. It became a matter of necessity for the Jews to speak Aramaic so that they could dwell in Babylon, conduct business, and converse with their Babylonian neighbors. Consequently, when the Jews returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile they were now speaking Aramaic. While in Babylon, the Jews also abandoned the Paleo Hebrew alphabet and adopted the Aramaic square script.

Paleo-Hebrew (Ugaritic) Script

	Aleph - Ox (A)		Lamed - Ox-goad (L)
	Beth - Tent (B,V)		Mem - Water (M)
	Gimel - Camel (G, GH)		Nun - Fish (N)
	Daleth - Door (D)		Samekh - Prop (S)
	Heh - Window (H)		Ayin - Eye (Aa)
	Vav - Stake (U,V,W)		Peh - Mouth (P, Ph)
	Zain - Sword (Z)		Tzaddi - Fishhook (Tz)
	Cheth - Window (Ch)		Qoph - Ear (Q)
	Teth - Serpent (T)		Resh - Head (R)
	Yod - Hand (I, Y, J)		Shin - Tooth (Sh)
	Kaph - Palm (K, Kh)		Tau - Cross (Th)

The alphabet above would have been familiar to the inhabitants of Canaan during the time Joshua led the Israelites in to conquer the land, circa 1,500 B.C..

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Aramaic (Square) Script or Biblical Hebrew

	Aleph - Ox (A)		Lamed - Ox-goad (L)
	Beth - Tent (B,V)		Mem - Water (M)
	Gimel - Camel (G, GH)		Nun - Fish (N)
	Daleth - Door (D)		Samekh - Prop (S)
	Heh - Window (H)		Ayin - Eye (Aa)
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The Alphabet above is what the Jewish people adopted while in Babylonian captivity around 600 B.C.. This shows how much a single language can change over the course of time. While the Jewish people were dwelling in Babylon, Aramaic became the every day language of the Hebrews in exile. Aramaic remained the common language of the Jews in what is referred to as “the Second Temple Period.” This time spanned between 539 B.C. when the Jews returned from Babylon, and 70 A.D. when the Temple was destroyed, along with Jerusalem, by the Roman General Titus. These years fully encompassed the life and ministry of Christ in Judea. That Christ and His disciples spoke Aramaic is evident from the New Testament Scriptures. The following verses all include examples of Yahshua speaking in Aramaic.

Mark 5:41

And taking the child by the hand, He said to her, "***Talitha kum!***" (which translated means, "Little

girl, I say to you, arise!").

Mark 7:31-34

And again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis. And they brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they entreated Him to lay His hand upon him. And He took him aside from the multitude by himself, and put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva; and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, "***Ephphatha!***" that is, "Be opened!"

Mark 15:34

And at the ninth hour Yahshua cried out with a loud voice, "***Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?***" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Notwithstanding Ma Ferguson’s claim that the Son of God spoke “the King’s English,” we observe

that Christ was speaking a very different language. As one might anticipate, when the Jews returned to the land of Israel after their sojourning in Babylon, the Aramaic they spoke once again began to differentiate itself from that which was spoken elsewhere. Over time it once more became distinct so that in the time of Christ the speech of the Jews was again referred to as Hebrew. Many language scholars, however, believe it is more accurate to describe the language spoken by the Judeans of Christ’s day as “the Aramaic vernacular (or dialect) of the Jews.”

This brings us now to the third and final language of the Bible, Koine Greek. The word “Koine” means “common.” In the time of Christ, Judea lay under the power of the Roman Empire. The Greek Empire preceded Rome, spreading across many of

Yahweh's Book

the same lands that Rome would eventually conquer. As the Greek Empire spread, the Greek language went with it. When Rome supplanted Greece, the Greek language had already become entrenched. It had become the lingua franca of the day. (Lingua franca is defined as “a language systematically used to make communication possible between people not sharing a mother tongue.”) The Greek language tied together people groups from all around the Mediterranean. This included the Jewish people who continued speaking Hebrew/Aramaic, while also learning Greek.

Hebrew/Aramaic was the native language spoken by the Jewish people in the time of Christ. However, many Jews were polyglots, that is to say, they spoke multiple languages. By adopting Greek as a second language, or even a primary language, the various people groups of the Roman Empire were able to communicate with one another. Although no portion of the Bible was originally written in Latin, it too was a common language in Christ's day, and many Jews would have been familiar with it. Latin was the language of Italy where the city of Rome was located. Although Rome acquiesced to embracing Greek as the common language of the Empire, Latin remained the official language of Rome. This explains why Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea, chose Latin as one of the languages to inscribe his message above the head of Christ.

John 19:19-20

And it was written, "YAHSHUA THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS." Therefore this inscription many of the Jews read, for the place where Yahshua was crucified was near the city; and *it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and in Greek.*



Inscription written first in Hebrew/Aramaic, Latin, then Greek.

Christ and His disciples undoubtedly spoke Aramaic with one another. There are many evidences of this found throughout the New Testament. Continuously, Aramaic words are inserted into the text of the New Testament. Following are a few examples of Aramaic words that are found in our Bibles today.

Abba - meaning “father.”

Raca - meaning “empty head” or “fool.”

Mammon - meaning “material wealth” or “greed.”

Rabboni - meaning “master.”

In the New Testament which was written in Koine Greek, the word for “Aramaic” is never used to describe the speech of the people of Israel. Instead, the Greek word “Hebraisti” is used to denote the language of the Jews in the time of Christ and the apostles. Nevertheless, some Bible translations render “Hebraisti” as *Aramaic* rather than *Hebrew*, for the language of the Jews was truly a dialect of Aramaic. Following is an example of the differences one might find in various Bibles.

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John 19:16-17

And they took Jesus, and led him away. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the **Hebrew** Golgotha:

KJV

John 19:16-17

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in **Aramaic** is called Golgotha.

English Standard Version

To summarize, the entire Bible was written by descendants of Abraham. Thus, the languages of Abraham's descendants were employed to write the Scriptures. Abraham was an Aramean. He was born into a nation of people who spoke Aramaic. When Abraham was called to leave his father's house and travel to Canaan, he took the Aramaic language with him.

Over the course of centuries, isolated from their Aramean forebears, the language of the descendants of Abraham began to change until it was unrecognizable to those who spoke Aramean. The language the Hebrew people spoke was identified as their own language, being called Hebrew.

When the Jewish people were taken back to the land of their forebears, being led into captivity in Babylon, they were once more introduced to Aramaic. In Babylon the Jews adopted the Aramaic language and Alphabet, and upon their return to Judea they took Aramaic with them. Aramaic remained the language of the Jewish people until the time of Christ, though it once more began to differentiate from the Aramaic of other people groups. Thus, the language of the Jews in Christ's day is interchangeably called both Hebrew and Aramaic.

The vast majority of the Old Testament is written in Hebrew, with less than 2% of its text being written originally in Aramaic. When Jerusalem and Judea fell under the rule of Greece, and later of Rome, they were introduced to the Greek language. Many Jews were multi-lingual, speaking both their native Hebrew tongue as well as Greek. This proved very helpful when the disciples of Christ were commissioned to take the gospel to the nations. Since the Jews were familiar with Greek, and it was the lingua franca of the Roman Empire, the New Testament was written in Greek and spread rapidly.

We understand, therefore, that the Bible was NOT written in English. It was written in ancient languages known unto the descendants of Abraham, the wandering Aramean.

The Manuscripts of the Bible



Dead Sea Scrolls - Isaiah Scroll

The followers of Yahshua owe a great debt to the Hebrew people. The Bible exists because Yahweh inspired Hebrew men to record His words for mankind. Although the Bible has One primary Author, that being the Spirit of God, it has numerous human authors. We are told in the Scriptures that Yahweh's Spirit inspired holy men of old to record His words. These men were all Jews. The apostle Paul affirms this in his epistle to the Romans.

Yahweh's Book

Romans 3:1-2

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

The word “oracle” may be unfamiliar to modern believers. In the day in which Paul wrote, the word “oracle” was well understood. Temples were built for the various Greek and Roman deities, serving as

*Yahweh has appointed
oracles to speak His
words ...*

centers of worship for these pagan gods and goddesses. It was common to appoint an individual at these temples to hold a sacred role as the spokesperson, or mouthpiece, of the deity. People would come from far and wide to inquire of these individuals. They were even sought out by the rulers of nations who hoped to receive counsel from the gods. These temple servants who spoke for the deity were referred to as “oracles.” Somewhat confusingly, the words they spoke were also referred to as “oracles.”

Yahweh has appointed oracles to speak His words as well. We recognize these individuals today more readily as “prophets.” Moses is declared to be a prophet. He is also said to have been entrusted with the oracles of God.

Acts 7:37-38

“This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'God shall raise up for you *a prophet* like me from your brethren.' This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and *he received living oracles to pass on to you.*”

The manner in which Yahweh moved upon these

men to proclaim His words is aptly defined by the word “inspiration.” The apostle Paul attests to the Bible being written through means of men being *inspired* by the Spirit of God.

II Timothy 3:16

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness...

The word “inspiration” came into English via the Latin word *inspirare* which means “inflare; blow into.” This is an interesting derivation. One can imagine a man sitting by a small stack of kindling that is smoldering. In an attempt to get the material to combust, to erupt into flames, he would blow upon it. Suddenly flames would appear, light and heat would be produced, as the breath of man exhaled upon the material caused it to ignite. Even as the breath of man “inspires” a fire to burst forth, so too does the breath of Yahweh inflame the soul of man.

One can readily see the similarity between the words “spirit” and “inspiration.” Throughout the Bible words for breath and wind are commonly used to describe both the spirit of man and the Spirit of God. On the day of Pentecost in the book of Acts, there was a sound as of a mighty, rushing wind. Then tongues of fire appeared over the heads of the 120 individuals gathered in obedience to Yahshua’s command. These individuals were “inspired.” The Spirit came upon them and manifested as tongues of flame above their heads.

A prophet can aptly be described as a man set aflame by the Spirit of God. Jeremiah used a term related to fire to describe the sensation of containing the words of God within his being.

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Jeremiah 20:9

But if I say, "I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name," then in my heart *it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones*; And I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it.

I believe what Jeremiah described in these words was the common experience of many prophets. When the Holy Spirit moved upon them, the words of God would be like a fire within them seeking to erupt. The divine breath seeks a way to be expressed, to go forth as a purifying flame altering everything that it touches.

Isaiah 55:11

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

When Yahweh set forth to deliver to mankind a book of divine authorship, He sent His Spirit upon appointed men who acted as conduits of His words. These "oracles," or "prophets," were borne along with the Spirit who entrusted to them the message of Yahweh.

II Peter 1:21

For no prophecy ever originated because some man willed it [to do so - it never came by human impulse], but men spoke from God who were borne along (moved and impelled) by the Holy Spirit.

[Amplified Bible]

We can be sure when Moses set out in obedience to Yahweh to write the first five books of the Old Testament, that his writings were marked with the breath of God. These were divine writings, and the message of Yahweh was communicated faithfully.

This is true of all of the writings contained in the Bible and designated as holy Scriptures. The most recent of these anointed writings are nearly 2,000 years old, and the oldest of them are about 3,500 years removed from this present day. Understandably, none of the original autographs of these "holy prophets" (Luke 1:70) remain to this day. The animal skins, papyrus, or other material upon which the Scriptures were written were subject to decay, destruction, and loss.

The Hebrew people who were entrusted with the words of God placed great emphasis upon maintaining the holy writings. A group of men were assigned the task of safeguarding the divine words, of making new copies of the Scriptures when the existing ones began to show wear. These men were known as scribes.

The Bible itself does not set forth any instructions for scribes to follow, but the Jewish people developed elaborate instructions to guard against the encroachment of any aberration into the word of Yahweh. In the Talmud (writings of Jewish civil and religious law) we find some of the earliest recorded instructions to scribes.

A synagogue scroll must be written on the skins of clean animals, prepared for the particular use of the synagogue of the Jew. These must be fastened together with strings taken from clean animals. Every skin must contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the entire codex. The length of each column must not extend over less than forty-eight, or more than sixty lines; and the breadth must consist of thirty letters. The whole copy must first be lined; and if three words be written in it without a line, it is worthless. The ink should be

A group of men were assigned the task of safeguarding the divine words...

Yahweh's Book

*black, neither red, green, nor any other colour and be prepared according to a definite recipe. An **authentic** copy must be the exemplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least to deviate. No word or letter, not even a yod, must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codex before him...*

Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene; between every word the breadth of a narrow consonant; between every new parashah, or section, the breadth of nine consonants; between every book, three lines. The fifth book of Moses must terminate exactly with a line; but the rest need not do so. Besides this, the copyist must sit in full Jewish dress, wash his whole body, not begin to write the name of God with a pen newly dipped in ink, and should a king address him while writing that name he must take no notice of him...

[Source: *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, Frederic Kenyon]

These words were recorded in the early centuries following the time of Christ. It can be assumed that similar instructions had been passed along orally for many centuries prior. Around 500 A.D. a group of scribes called the Masoretes (meaning “tradition”) arose. They are renowned for their attention to accuracy as well as for innovations to preserve the pronunciation of Hebrew words. Before you read the following quotation from the writing of Neil R. Lightfoot, let me define the words “codex” and “codices” for those to whom they may be unfamiliar. The earliest Biblical writings were recorded on scrolls. This began to change around the first century A.D. at the same time that the Christian church came into being. The Romans began to place their writings in book form. Such a book was called a “codex.” The plural of this word is “codices.” At first, the pages of these books were made from wood, and later from papyrus, vellum, or paper. The Latin word “codex” literally means

“trunk of a tree.”



Chinese Bamboo Book, or Codex

In Europe, the bark of the Beech tree was used for the pages of a codex. It is from the word “Beech” (German bok - pronounced “boke”) that we get our English word “book.”

The following excerpt describes the meticulous attention to detail employed by the Masoretes to ensure that the Hebrew Bible was copied with flawless precision.

The Masoretes, who go back to about A.D. 500, succeeded the earlier scribes. The Masoretes of Tiberias were the most important of the Masoretes, and the Ben Asher family of Tiberias, with whom several of the model codices are associated, are especially renowned.

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The work of the Masoretes is truly significant. Their labors are spread out over a period of four or five centuries, and their contributions are many. They are perhaps best known for their system of vowels and accents which they devised for the Hebrew text. It will be remembered that all of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet are consonants. Thus the Old Testament was first written without vowels. Although this may seem strange to us, it was sufficient during the many centuries when Hebrew was a spoken language. When eventually Hebrew was no longer spoken, the danger was imminent that the proper pronunciation of the consonantal text might be lost. To meet the danger, the Masoretes, on the basis of their well-kept traditions, inserted vowel points above and below the lines of the text. It must be emphasized, however, that they did not bother the text itself; they only added a means by which to ensure the correct pronunciation of the text.

The Masoretes were not concerned with only such things as proper pronunciation. They also sought ways and methods by which to eliminate scribal slips of addition or omission. This they achieved through intricate procedures of counting. They numbered the verses, words, and letters of each book. They counted the number of times each letter was used in each book. They noted verses that contained all the letters of the alphabet, or a certain number of them. They calculated the middle letter, the middle word, and the middle verse of the Pentateuch; the middle verse of the Psalms, the middle verse of the entire Hebrew Bible, and so forth. In fact, they counted almost everything that could be counted. With these safeguards, and others, when a scribe finished making a copy of a book, he could then check the accuracy of his work before using it.

[Source: *How We Got the Bible*, Neil R. Lightfoot]

You may wonder why I would write about Scribes that created copies of the Hebrew Scriptures as recently as the tenth century A.D.. The reason is that these copies that the Masoretes made are the oldest

existing copies of the Hebrew Scriptures known today. (The Dead Sea Scrolls are much older, but they contain primarily fragments of the Hebrew Bible.) There are actually much older copies of the Old Testament in languages other than Hebrew, such as the Greek Septuagint, but these are not valued as highly because they are a translation, and not the original language of the Old Testament.

There are no existing manuscripts for the first 2,500 years of the Hebrew Scriptures..

You may well ask, “What happened to the older Hebrew manuscripts, for they first began to be recorded as far back as 1,500 B.C.?” This means that there are no existing manuscripts for the first 2,500 years of the Hebrew Scriptures. Neil R. Lightfoot provides the answer for us.

The Jewish scribes looked upon their copies of the Scriptures with an almost superstitious respect. This led them to give ceremonial burial to any of the texts that were damaged or defective. Their motive was to prevent the improper use of the material on which the sacred name of God had been inscribed. Before burial, however, faulty manuscripts were hidden away in a “ginizah” (from Aramaic genaz, to hide), a kind of storeroom for manuscripts that were unusable. But however noble the intentions, the replacement of older copies with newer ones, and the burial of those discarded, have deprived us of early Hebrew manuscripts.

[Source: *Ibid*]

The modern Hebrew Bible (Old Testament only) is based upon the Masoretic text of the Scriptures. Following is a list of five of the most important Hebrew manuscripts.

Yahweh's Book

1. *The Aleppo Codex.* First in rank among the Hebrew manuscripts, the Aleppo Codex derives its name from the city in Syria where it had long been located. A beautifully written codex of the entire Hebrew Bible, it was finished sometime in the tenth century. Unfortunately, it is no longer complete; large sections of it were destroyed in Arab riots against the Jews...

Arab mobs, looting and burning and killing, destroyed all the synagogues in Aleppo, including the 1,500 year old Mustaribah Synagogue. Found in the ashes of this synagogue was the prized Aleppo Codex. A quarter of the manuscript had been destroyed - almost all of the Pentateuch and all of a number of other books as well. Smuggled out of Syria to Jerusalem, it is now being used as the base of a new critical edition of the Hebrew Bible to be published by Hebrew University.

2. *The Leningrad Codex.* Of equal rank with the Aleppo Codex is the Leningrad Codex. Now the oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible, it was written in Cairo about the year 1010. It, too, is a beautiful manuscript, with pages ornately wrought.

The manuscript today is in the National Library of St. Petersburg, Russia. Although the city's name is once again St. Petersburg, the manuscript is still known as the Leningrad Codex... It is the Leningrad Codex that mainly underlies most editions of the modern Hebrew Bible...

3. *The Cairo Codex.* This manuscript of the Former and Latter Prophets was written by Moses ben Asher in 895. Subsequently, it came into the posses-

sion of a Jewish sect in Jerusalem known as Karaites. After being carried off by the Crusaders and later returned, it made its way to the Karaite community in Cairo, where it remains today.

4. *The Leningrad Codex of the Prophets.* Written in 916, this manuscript includes Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets.

5. *British Library Codex of the Pentateuch.* Containing most of the Pentateuch, this codex is an important witness to the text. An undated manuscript, which formerly was thought to be from the ninth century, is now dated a century later.

[Ibid]

Since we have no ancient manuscripts of the Bible in the Hebrew language, how do we know whether it has been copied accurately during the preceding two and a half millennia? There are actually a number of ways. Although the Dead Sea Scrolls do not contain the entirety of the Hebrew Bible, they do include large portions, including the entire book of Isaiah on a single scroll. The Dead Sea Scrolls were made by a sect of Jews called the Essenes who dwelt in the wilderness of Judea from the first century B.C. until the second century A.D.. This means their writings are nearly a thousand years older than the existing Hebrew Scriptures copied by the Masorete scribes. Among the Dead Sea scrolls is a copy of the book of Isaiah. When comparing the Isaiah scroll to the Masoretic text copied nearly a thousand years later, they have been found to be nearly identical. In a thousand years there was no significant change to the text. Comparison of the Masoretic text to other scrolls and fragments discovered with the Isaiah scroll reveal that there has been no substantial change to the text. This takes us much closer to the original writings, but we can go further back still if we look at the Old Testament in other languages.

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In the second century B.C. the Greek ruler of Egypt, Ptolemy II, wanted to build a great library. There were many Jews dwelling in Alexandria, Egypt at the time. These Jews spoke Koine Greek, and were not fluent in Hebrew. Ptolemy sponsored a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, and 72 Jewish scholars were appointed to make the translation. The word “Septuagint” means “the seventy.” The Septuagint became a very important translation for the Jews, for many Jews no longer spoke Hebrew fluently.

There are diverse views among scholars regarding the differences/similarity between the Greek Septuagint and the Hebrew Masoretic Text. Some scholars focus on the similarities, for the same thoughts are conveyed in both Hebrew and Greek in the great majority of instances. This has led some scholars to suggest that the translators of the Septuagint must have worked from a Hebrew manuscript very similar to that of the Masoretes. Other scholars focus on the differences between the Greek and Hebrew Old Testaments, for the fact that there are differences cannot be denied. There are verses found in the Hebrew that are absent in the Greek Septuagint, and vice versa. The Septuagint also contained numerous apocryphal books, and some sections from apocryphal writings were added directly into the text of books such as Daniel. However, in the great many places where we find agreement between the old Greek texts and the Masoretic texts of the Scriptures, we are once more assured that the basic message of the Bible has remained consistent throughout its thousands of years of existence.

Keep in mind that the Old Testament was written over a span of about one thousand years. The last book, Malachi, was likely written somewhere between the years 445 and 420 B.C.. The Torah portion of the Septuagint was written in the 3rd century B.C., and other books were completed in the next two centuries. Therefore, the gap between the time

the last book of the Old Testament was written, and the translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek was at most a few centuries. There are existing manuscripts containing some books of the Septuagint that date back as far as the 2nd century B.C..

The Latin Vulgate

Although the Latin Vulgate is a translation of the Bible into a secondary language, it is important due to its antiquity and the prominent role it has occupied in the church age. The word “vulgate” means “common.” This Latin translation was the standard Bible used in Europe for more than a thousand years.

In 382 A.D., Pope Damasus I commissioned Eusebius Hieronymus (also known as Jerome) to create a standardized Latin edition of the Bible. At the time many disparate Latin translations existed, and a need was perceived to bring some order and harmony to the Latin scriptures. Jerome began by producing a revised Latin version of the four gospels. This was completed in 384 A.D. shortly before the death of Pope Damasus I. Jerome then fell out of favor in Rome and departed to the Holy Land where he took up residence in Bethlehem. There, he obtained access to a copy of the Hexapla, a version of the Scriptures produced by Origen in about 150 A.D.. The Hexapla was an ancient form of what may be compared to a parallel Bible today. Origen’s Hexapla listed six translations of the Bible in parallel columns. This massive work spanned some 6,000 pages and was originally contained in 15 volumes. Included in the Hexapla was a Hebrew Bible (written in the Hebrew alphabet), as well as a Hebrew Bible transliterated in Greek letters, a copy of the Greek Septuagint, and three additional Greek

The Old Testament was written over a span of about one thousand years...

Yahweh's Book

versions of the Scriptures written respectively by Theodotion, Symmachus, and Aquila of Sinope. Using the Hexapla as his primary resource, Jerome was able to complete his Latin translation of the Old Testament.

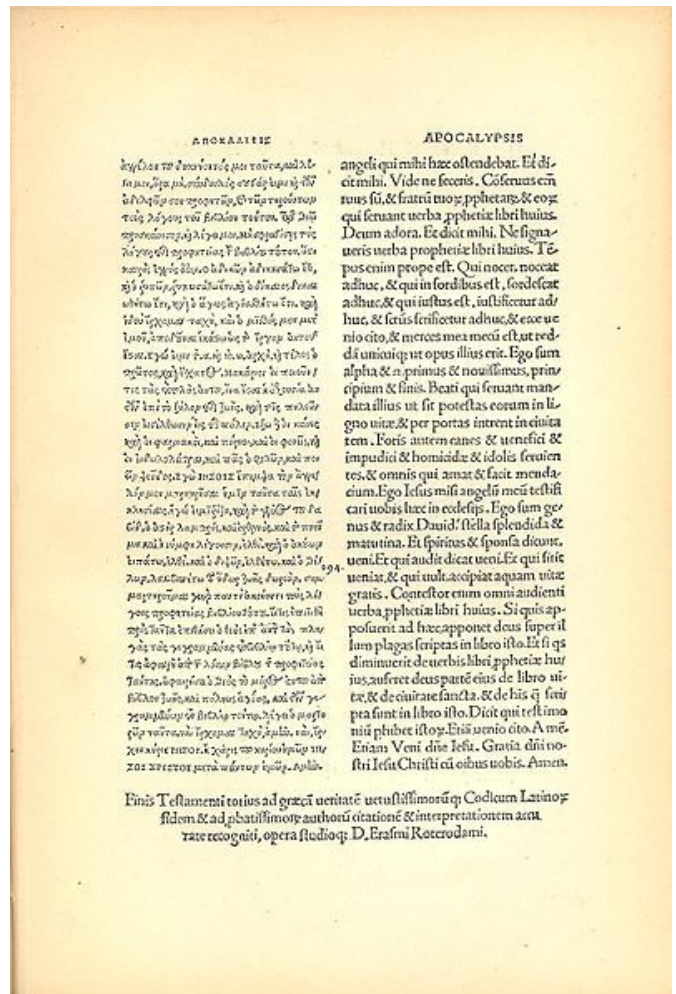
By the 6th or 7th century, Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible had become the standard throughout Europe, replacing the Old Latin (Vetus Latina) scriptures. In 1546 at the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church officially assigned Jerome's Latin scriptures the title "Vulgate," making this the official Bible of Romanism. One rather serious shortcoming of this official sanction of the Roman Church is that when Catholic translations of the Bible were later made into English, they were translated from the Latin Vulgate, rather than from the original Hebrew and Greek. Thus, Catholic Bibles in English have actually been translations of a translation.

When Gutenberg invented the printing press, one of the first books to be printed was the Latin Vulgate, which was done in the year 1456.

The Textus Receptus

In 1516, Desiderius Erasmus sought to revise Jerome's Latin Bible, improving upon it. Perhaps in order to demonstrate the superiority of his translation, Erasmus placed the Greek text of the Scriptures in parallel with the Latin. The inclusion of a Greek text of the Bible proved to be quite valuable, causing Erasmus' Bible to be highly sought after. For many, the Greek portion of Erasmus' Bible became far more valuable than the Latin. Erasmus' Greek New Testament would eventually become known as the "Textus Receptus," meaning "Received Text," though Erasmus himself never referred to it as such. More will be mentioned about this in the next chapter.

Undoubtedly, the great prominence attained by Erasmus' Greek and Latin text was due to the fact that it was the first Greek New Testament to be **published** in Europe. Note the emphasis on the word "published." There were many extant Greek New Testaments at the time, but none had ever been published using the relatively new invention of the printing press. The printing press made books much more financially accessible to the general population. To have a book copied by a scribe was prohibitively expensive. A great many Bible scholars and students rejoiced to find a printed copy of the Greek New Testament that they could afford.



Erasmus' Textus Receptus (Latin and Greek Text Side by Side)

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Erasmus' Greek New Testament has been criticized due to the fact that he had access to only six Greek manuscripts, none of them of great antiquity, and there was a portion of the New Testament missing from the manuscripts (specifically the last six verses of the book of Revelation). It is suggested by numerous scholars that Erasmus was under some pressure to quickly produce his Latin/Greek translation, which led to hasty, and somewhat sloppy work. Rather than seeking out a Greek manuscript with the missing verses from Revelation, Erasmus re-created the missing verses by translating backwards from Latin into the original Greek, a process whereby he was forced to guess what Greek words were originally used by the New Testament writers. There were also numerous spelling errors in his translation, and many other corrections that needed to be made. Erasmus would eventually publish five versions of his Greek New Testament, making corrections and improvements with each edition.

Erasmus' Greek New Testament proved to be highly sought after by European Christians who wanted to produce a Bible translation in their native languages. Martin Luther used Erasmus' Greek New Testament when creating his German translation of the Scriptures (Luther's New Testament was completed in 1522 and the Old Testament in 1534). William Tyndale used Erasmus' New Testament when creating his English Bible, as did the translators of the Geneva Bible and the King James Bible. In fact, from the 16th through the 19th centuries, most English Bibles used the Textus Receptus as the foundation for their translations. In the 19th century, older, and more reliable, Greek manuscripts began coming to light, leading to better Greek New Testaments. Westcott and Hort published their Greek New Testament in 1881 based largely upon the highly regarded *Codex Vaticanus*. The *Textus Receptus* has declined in favor among Bible scholars and translators as more ancient Greek manuscripts have come to light.

The Great Manuscripts

I will bring this chapter to a close by making mention of three of the oldest and most valuable (to scholars) Bible manuscripts extant today. All three of these manuscripts were discovered AFTER Erasmus published his Greek New Testament, and AFTER the King James Bible was published. These manuscripts, listed in the order of their importance, are as follows.



Page from the Codex Vaticanus

Codex Vaticanus

The Codex Vaticanus contains both the Old and New Testaments and is written in Greek. It derives its name based upon the place where it resides. Since the 15th century this manuscript has been located in the Vatican library. The codex became known to Western scholars due to a correspondence between Erasmus and the Vatican, but access to the manuscript was restricted until 1889-1890 when a complete photographic facsimile was produced.

Yahweh's Book

The Codex Vaticanus is regarded as the oldest and purest quality New Testament manuscript, and it is among the oldest Old Testament manuscripts in any language, though it is not in the original language of Hebrew.

The Codex Vaticanus is missing the following portions of Scripture:

Genesis 1:1-46:28

Psalms 106-138

Hebrews 9:14 to end of book.

I and II Timothy

Titus

Philemon

Revelation

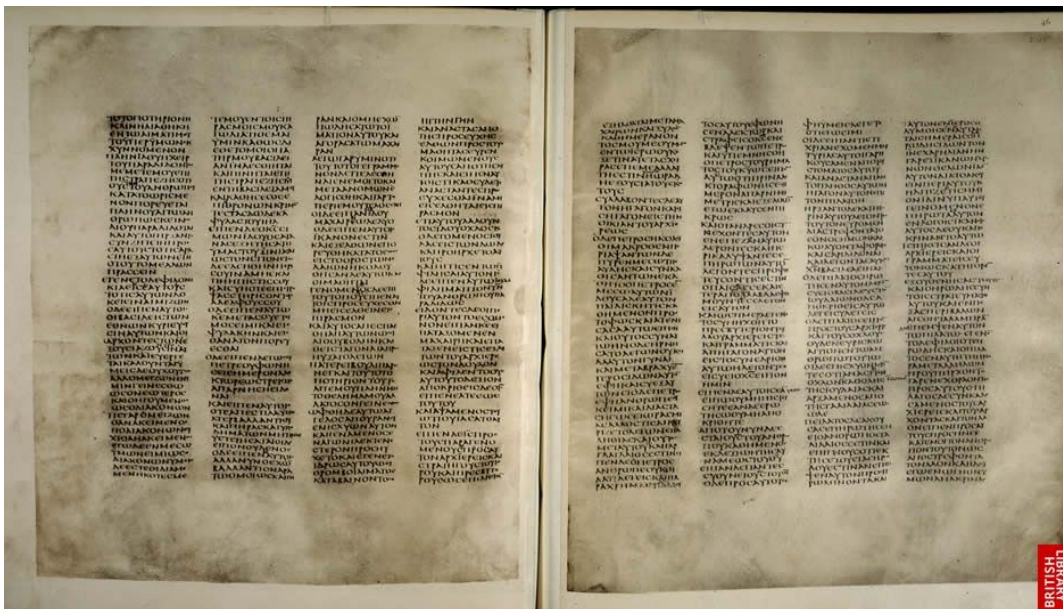
The Codex Vaticanus has been dated to the first half of the 4th century A.D. (Prior to 350 A.D.). It differs significantly from both the *Latin Vulgate* and the *Textus Receptus*.

Codex Sinaiticus

A close rival to Codex Vaticanus is Codex Sinaiticus. It is dated accurately to between the years 325 A.D. and 360 A.D.. The nearer date would make it slightly more recent than the Vatican manuscript. The Sinaiticus manuscript was discovered by Constantin Tischendorf at St. Catherines Monastery near Mount Sinai. The discovery was made in the late 19th century. The manuscript is currently divided up between four locations, with the majority of it residing at the British Library. The story of the discovery of the manuscript, and Tischendorf's efforts to gain access to it, makes for exciting reading. Like Codex Vaticanus, it is written in Greek. The Codex Sinaiticus is especially valued because it contains the complete Greek New Testament.

Codex Alexandrinus

The Codex Alexandrinus is a 5th century Greek Bible. It contains the majority of the Septuagint and the New Testament. The manuscript resided for some time in Alexandria, Egypt, from whence its name is derived. It was later taken to Constantinople in the possession of the Eastern Orthodox



Codex Sinaiticus

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Church. It was subsequently gifted to King Charles I of England (the son of King James VI of Scotland - King James I of England) in the 17th century. The manuscript now resides in the British Library along with Codex Sinaiticus. The manuscript came to England too late to be of use to the translators of the King James Bible.

Aside from the Bible manuscripts in their original Hebrew and Greek, and translations into other languages such as the Greek Septuagint and Latin Vulgate, there exist ancient manuscripts in Syriac, Coptic, Georgian and other languages. These are valuable to use to compare with the original language manuscripts. There additionally exists a large assortment of writings by the early church fathers in which nearly every Bible passage is discussed. These writings include quotations of the various passages of Scripture, and are valuable to Bible scholars who are seeking to arrive at the original words of the Bible.

Although a great many variations exist between the best manuscripts of the Bible, the vast majority of the differences are nothing more than the spelling of specific words, alterations of word order, or other non-critical differences. There are no differences that would alter the basic doctrines of the faith relating to salvation in Christ. The Bible is by a wide margin supported by a greater number of ancient manuscripts than any other book in the world today.

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PARABLES PRECEPT— Famous Hymns: How Great Thou Art

O Lord my God, When I in awe-
some wonder,

Consider all the worlds Thy
Hands have made;

I see the stars, I hear the rolling
thunder,

Thy power throughout the uni-
verse displayed.

Refrain:

Then sings my soul, My Saviour
God, to Thee,

How great Thou art, How great
Thou art.

Then sings my soul, My Saviour
God, to Thee,

How great Thou art, How great

Thou art!

When through the woods, and
forest glades I wander,

And hear the birds sing sweetly
in the trees.

When I look down, from lofty
mountain grandeur

And see the brook, and feel the
gentle breeze.

Refrain

And when I think, that God, His
Son not sparing;

Sent Him to die, I scarce can
take it in;

That on the Cross, my burden

gladly bearing,

He bled and died to take away
my sin.

Refrain

When Christ shall come, with
shout of acclamation,

And take me home, what joy
shall fill my heart.

Then I shall bow, in humble
adoration,

And then proclaim: "My God,
how great Thou art!"

Written by Carl Boberg, 1885