



Moses' death. These 5 books were known as the "book of the law" or the "law of Moses" and are referenced throughout the Old Testament, attesting to its preservation (1 Chron 16:40; 2 Kings 14:1-6; 2 Kings 22:11-13; Ezra 3:2). Many other books of the Bible indicate who actually authored them.

Ancient Old Testament MSS have been discovered in genizot, depositories for sacred Hebrew writings that are no longer usable. These genizot may be in basements, walls, synagogues, or underground.

Masoretes were Jewish scholars and scribes responsible for maintaining the Jewish tradition by preserving the Scriptures. The c. 930 AD Masoretic text known as Aleppo Codex is considered the most accurate in existence, but the Pentateuch and more is missing. Leningrad Codex, c. 1008 AD, is the oldest complete Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). (A codex is bound papyri.)

The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), discovered 1948-1956, date from 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC to 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Fragments from every Old Testament book except Esther were found. These early texts closely resemble the later Masoretic Text.

Fragments of Scripture found at Masada are similar to DSS, attesting to the stability and preservation of the text.

Jews translated the Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek in 2<sup>nd</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC. This text is known as the Septuagint. Some fragments from BC exist; the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD Codex Vaticanus has a nearly complete OT in Septuagint version.

The Vulgate, translated by Jerome, 390-405 AD, is usually considered the first translation from Hebrew to Latin of the Old Testament.

## New Testament (NT)

The NT documents were written 50-100 AD in Koine Greek. There are nearly 6000 MSS (fragments and lengthier) of NT, earliest fragments dated c. 125 AD, complete NT dated c. 325 AD (within 275 years of original writing). Other ancient MSS have far fewer extant MSS written much later than the originals and are considered authentic. A few examples: Platos' *Dialogues*, 1245 years from original to oldest complete text, 250 MSS extant; Aristotle's *Ode to Poetics*, earliest copy 1400 years after original writing; 49 copies extant; Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 800+ years after original, 9 MSS. There is overwhelming evidence for the authenticity of the NT from the multitude of MSS discovered to date.

Extant early MSS:

- 5900 Greek texts (many are fragments)
- 8000 Latin texts
- 1000 in other languages
- Nearly all NT books have a MSS earlier than 4<sup>th</sup> century.
- Oldest NT MSS is a small two-sided fragment (3.5 by 2.5 inches) of John 18:31-33, 37-38, dated 125-130 AD.

Few MSS survived the persecution of Christians from 303-313. Around 400, parchment (animal skin) which is more durable than papyrus began to be used. Greek Biblical text is found in 4 great uncial (all capital letters) codices: Vaticanus (oldest MSS of Hebrew Bible outside DSS), Sinaiticus (has entire NT text, half of Hebrew Bible missing), Alexandrinus (missing some NT), Ephraemi Rescriptus (no complete NT book). Uncials have few divisions between words, words may be divided at end of lines, and no standard punctuation.

Chapter divisions were developed by Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1207-1228. Verse numbering (NT) developed by Robert Estienne, 1551. Masoretic text had verse divisions in 1300s.

## The Bible Canon

"Canon" refers to the list of writings considered inspired and authoritative for church's doctrine and guidance in life of faith.

Old Testament canon came to the church via the Jewish Hebrew canon. This included the 39 books of the current OT. There was dispute over apocryphal writings (written during 400 silent years between the testaments) that were included in the Jewish Septuagint. Since the apocrypha describes doctrines and practices inconsistent with the rest of Scripture the Protestant church rejects them as not inspired.

New Testament writings were determined to be canon based on:

- Apostolic origin (identity of author)
- Apostolic content (writing consistent with apostle's oral teaching)
- Recognition by church

Authority of NT writings indicated: John 20:31; Acts 6:2, 4; 16:4; 2 Cor 13:10; 1 Thess 2:4, 13; 4:2; Gal 1:6-16a; 1 Peter 1:10-12.

## How Reliable is our New Testament?

The NT MSS are copies and so some variations exist. **Textual criticism** refers to the work of scholars who compare MSS with each other to determine the most accurate original text, which is known as the "critical edition." Indirect textual evidence is gathered by examining Scriptures in translated form. Lectionaries contain portions of New Testament text, as do early Christian writings that quote NT, that can be compared with other MSS.

Variations in texts (unintentional or intentional) occur when a scribe:

- Eyes skipped over a word or line when copying MSS
- Saw something twice
- Skipped intervening words when two words had same ending
- Misheard dictation
- Misjudged abbreviations
- Incorporated editor's notations

- Removed supposed contradictions
- Clarified meaning
- Expanded what was considered important
- Changed text to match personal viewpoint

127 NT papyri published in the last 116 years either confirm scholars' idea of original wording or confirmed alternate readings already found in MSS. No new authentic readings were introduced.

Textual criticism tells us:

- God's word has been preserved through time and despite attempts to destroy it during persecution
- God's teaching is spread throughout 66 books of the Bible for safekeeping and accuracy
- No major Christian teaching is affected by variants. Only 1% of the NT has unresolved questions due to variants and no questionable passage contradicts or affects Biblical teaching
- Translations rely on the careful work of textual scholars
- Variations in readings are available for general public to view/read so we can make up our own minds

## Sources for our translations:

Old Testament: *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (4<sup>th</sup> edition of Masoretic Text of Leningrad Codex)

New Testament:

- Textus Receptus (Greek NT published 1516 by Erasmus), basis for KJV
- Majority Text (based on most numerous readings found in MSS)
- *Novum Testamentum Graece* (ed. Nestle-Aland) 28<sup>th</sup> edition Greek Critical Text (same as United Bible Society 5<sup>th</sup> ed)

Critical Edition: reproduces what is believed to be the original text; determined by committee after comparing many MSS; contains critical apparatus (footnotes with information about variants).

IN SUMMARY:

The Masoretic Jews were meticulous in preserving the Hebrew Bible text since it related to preserving the Jewish tradition that distinguished their people. The similarities between the Masoretic text, the DSS, and the Septuagint Greek translation provide assurance of the accuracy of today's Old Testament. New Testament accuracy is attested by a multitude of MSS and the careful textual criticism of scholars for a critical edition that is close to the original Greek writings. As believers, we also trust that LORD God is able to preserve His word for His people as we need for life and salvation.