

Finding God's Word In The New Age

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GOD PRESERVED HIS WRITTEN WORD

God not only wrote His words but He also preserved them:

Ps. 12:6-7 The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.

God Himself, the prophets, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Apostles all believed they had God's written word. God believed He had His words written down in Joshua 1:8. David believed he had God's written words (1 Ki 2:1-3). Daniel believed he had God's written word (Dan 9:11) Jesus clearly says that he had God's written words (Luke 4:4) and Paul tells Timothy he had a copy of the scriptures as well (2 Tim 3:15-16).

HOW THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES WERE PRESERVED UNTIL THE TIME OF CHRIST

Jesus said:

Matt. 5:18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

Luke 16:17 And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.

From these scriptures we see that the Lord Jesus Christ believed the Old Testament text in common use among the Jews during His earthly ministry was an absolutely perfect reproduction of the original text written by Moses and the other inspired authors. Nothing was missing and nothing was added. According to Jesus Christ, the Hebrew Old Testament text had been faithfully preserved from the time of its first writing down to his first advent.

The Hebrew Scriptures were written by the prophets and other inspired men. But the duty of preserving this written revelation was assigned not to the prophets but to the priests. The priests were divinely appointed guardians and teachers of the law:

Deut. 31:24-26 And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, That Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee.

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In addition, the priests were commanded to read the law to the people every seven years:

Deut. 31:12 Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law:

Finally, the priests were given the task of preserving correct copies of the law to be used by the kings. The kings were instructed to make a copy of it:

Deut. 17:18 And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites:

HOW THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES WERE PRESERVED UNTIL THE REFORMATION

From the end of the first century until the Protestant Reformation, the Hebrew Old Testament was preserved not by Christians but by non-Christian Jewish scribes.

The earliest of the scribes were called **Tannaim** (Teachers). These scribes not only copied the text of the Old Testament with great accuracy but also committed to writing their oral tradition, called Mishna. These were followed by another group of scribes called **Amoraim** (Expositors). These were the scholars who in addition to their work as copyists of the Old Testament also produced the Talmud which is a commentary on the Mishna.

The Amoraim were followed in the 6th century by the **Masoretes** (Traditionalists). the Masoretes produced the **Masoretic** Old Testament text which is standard Hebrew text used by Orthodox Jews today. It is also the text that the Protestant Old Testament translations are derived. The Masoretes took extraordinary pains to transmit without error the Old Testament text they had received from their predecessors. Many complicated safeguards against scribal errors were devised, such as counting the number of times each letter of alphabet appears in each book

HOW THE NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES WERE PRESERVED

Christ's Promise to Preserve the New Testament

When the Lord Jesus Christ was on the earth, He made clear that His message was eternal, and that the words He spoke had been given to Him by God the Father:

John 12:49-50 For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.

John 17:8 For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.

The Lord Jesus Christ promised that just as the Old Testament was preserved, His words would be preserved as well:

Matt. 24:35 Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

Mark 13:31 Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.

Luke 21:33 Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.

John 12:48 He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

The Preservation of the New Testament Scriptures

In the New Testament, the special priesthood was abolished through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every believer is a priest before God, and for this reason the Holy Spirit preserved the New Testament text, not through the Old Testament Levitical priesthood, but through the priesthood of believers:

1 Pet. 2:9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

Just as the Holy Spirit guided the early believers to gather the individual New Testament books into one New Testament canon, in the same manner the Holy Spirit guided the early believers to preserve the New Testament text by receiving the true readings and rejecting the false.

Although corrupted copies enjoyed popularity for a time, in the long run they were rejected. As a result, the vast majority of Greek copies/portions (over 90 percent) of the New Testament in existence today are in agreement. Many copies of the Greek New Testament were preserved by the Greek Church and these copies are therefore often referred to as the **Byzantine Text**. These copies are also sometimes referred to as the **Majority Text** as well.

A further step in God's preservation of the Greek New Testament was the printing of it in 1516 and its dissemination throughout the whole of Western Europe during the Protestant Reformation. The editor, **Erasmus**, performed his task in great haste in order to meet the deadline set by the printer, Froben of Basel. Therefore, his first edition contained a number of errors of a minor sort, most of which were corrected in later editions. But for the most part, the New Testament text first printed by Erasmus and later by Stephanus (1550) and Beza (1565) and Elzevir (1633) are in full agreement with the Traditional Text.

This printed text is commonly called the **Textus Receptus** (Received Text). The Greek Textus Receptus was the Greek text primarily used by the Protestant Reformers during the Reformation

and by all Protestants everywhere for three hundred years. It was from the Textus Receptus that the **King James Version** and the other classic Protestant translations were made.

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