

# Saving the Scriptures

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

## Introduction:

- A. The Old Testament contains 39 books out of the 66 books of the Bible
  - 1. What is their history?
  - 2. How have they come down to us?
  - 3. How do we know that we have an accurate text?

## I. RECEIVING THE OLD TESTAMENT

- A. John 1:45 - But how was it received? Not the same as the New Testament
  - 1. In the New Testament, inspired teachers preached and revealed the word until the New Testament was complete - 2Thes. 2:13-15
  - 2. In the Old Testament, it was seldom written down for distribution until the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.
  - 3. It was mostly communicated by means of:
    - a. Going to hear the reading of the few books that were written,
    - b. By prophets who preached and taught by inspiration,
    - c. Or by memorization by the scribes who would recite it
  - 4. Jer. 26:1-5; 1Sam. 3:1; Amos 8:11; Psalm 74:9
- B. Just as there were many preachers guided by the Holy Spirit, but only a few New Testament writers, so there were many more prophets who just preached by inspiration than those who wrote inspired OT books.
  - 1. Those named in the OT constitute a small fraction of the total number
- C. Who were the Old Testament Prophets?
  - 1. Hebrew: "nabi," from a root meaning "to bubble forth, as from a fountain," hence "to utter" - Psalm 45:1
  - 2. Nabi is the first and the most generally used for a prophet.
  - 3. In the time of Samuel another word, ro'eh, "seer," was used - 1Sam. 9:9
  - 4. Another word, hozeh, "seer," is used - 2Sam. 24:11
  - 5. In 1Chron. 29:29, all these three words are used: "Samuel the seer (ro'eh), Nathan the prophet (nabi'), Gad the seer" (hozeh).
  - 6. In Joshua 13:22 Balaam is called (Hebrew) a kosem "diviner," a word used primarily for a false prophet.
- D. What did they do?
  - 1. A prophet was a spokesman for God; he spoke in God's name and by His authority - Ex. 7:1
  - 2. He is the mouth by which God speaks to men - Jer. 1:9; Isa. 51:16
  - 3. "The foretelling of future events was not a necessary but only an incidental part of the prophetic office. The great task assigned to the prophets whom God raised up among the people was to correct moral and religious abuses, to proclaim the great moral and religious truths delivered to them by God."

4. But while the prophetic gift was exercised from the beginning, the prophetic order began with Samuel. Schools of the prophets were instituted for the training of prophets
  - a. 1Sam. 19:18-24; 2 Kings 2:3, 15, 4:38
  - b. These schools continued until the close of the Old Testament.
  - c. These schools were established at Ramah, Bethel, Gilgal, Gibeah, and Jericho.
5. The “sons” or “disciples” of the prophets were young men (2Kings 5:22, 9:1, 4) who lived together at these different schools (4:38-41). These young men were brought up to exercise the office of prophet, to preach morality and honest worship of Jehovah, and work with the priesthood

## II. WRITING THE OLD TESTAMENT

- A. Luke 24:44 - What is implied in Jesus' words?
  1. That the Pentateuch, Psalms, and Prophets are inspired of God
  2. That in order for all things to be fulfilled, the list of all things that must be fulfilled must be comprehensive and complete.
  3. That by the time Jesus said this, the copies of the OT in His day were a comprehensive and complete representation of God's inspired will during the dispensations of the patriarchs and Law of Moses.
  4. This is true regardless of:
    - a. The means they used in copying and transmitting the scriptures down through the centuries
    - b. Whether or not we know how it was done
    - c. Whether or not we have confidence in the process.
- B. Means of copying and transmitting the OT through the centuries
  1. The OT was not written down in its entirety until beginning in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, and the canon of the OT was not established until the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC
    - a. Like the revelation of the NT that went through three stages: Oral only, oral and written, and written only, and the canon was not set until the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD...
    - b. So the OT went through a similar process, only more prolonged
  2. From Adam's day until near the end of Moses' life, it was oral only
    - a. From Moses until the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, it was oral and written, mostly oral
    - b. From the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, it was written and oral, mostly written
    - c. Then in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, it was compiled into a single collection of scrolls constituting the canon of the OT
  3. In the earliest days it was carved into stone, metal sheets, clay tablets, or wax boxes
    - a. But it was primarily memorized and recited or re-revealed in each generation by the prophets

### III. PRESERVING THE OLD TESTAMENT

- A. The oldest texts from some portion of the Bible is 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, but vast majority of texts from 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and later
- B. Sources and Editing/Glosses
  - 1. We also have to account for the fact that Biblical texts have an original source and perhaps were exposed to later inspired editing or glossing
  - 2. Editing: organization of material
  - 3. Glossing: addition of material for understanding
  - 4. Examples of editing: prophetic books - collections of oracles compiled by some editor, the prophet himself or someone later; historical books
  - 5. Example of glossing: Deuteronomy 2: additional comments about various groups mentioned, written from a post-conquest perspective
  - 6. The prophets who did this work after the exile were inspired to record the will of God from the distant past, much as Moses did when he wrote of the creation, flood and patriarchs in Genesis
- C. Texts: 1500-530 BC
  - 1. Most original OT texts written then
  - 2. Earlier (1500-900): Pentateuch
  - 3. United Kingdom (1000-900): Joshua-Judges, many Psalms, Proverbs, Solomon, Ecc.
  - 4. Early Divided Kingdom (900-700): 1-2Samuel
  - 5. Late Divided Kingdom/Exile (700-530): 1Kings-2Chron, prophetic books
- D. First Copy of Biblical Text: Ketef Hinnom "Silver Scroll" - 600 BC
  - 1. Contains the "Priestly Blessing" - Num. 6:24-26
- E. Texts: 530-450 BC - Last texts written
  - 1. Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- F. Texts: 450-200 BC
  - 1. Shift from writing texts to interpreting texts
  - 2. Neh. 8:5-8 - Ezra's interpretation

### IV. TEXTUAL TRANSMISSION

- A. Textual Transmission: 1500-586 BC
  - 1. Little known about textual transmission
  - 2. Evidence of texts being written down, many possibly maintained in some form of royal library; All/parts of Pentateuch in Temple
- B. Textual Transmission: 586-300 BC
  - 1. After destruction of Jerusalem, great efforts made preserve Scriptures
  - 2. Many other texts possibly destroyed or non-canonical
    - a. The Book of Jasher (Joshua 10:13; 2Sam. 1:18)
    - b. The Book of the Wars of the Lord - Num. 21:14
    - c. The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel and Chronicles of the Kings of Judah - 1Kings 14:19, 14:29
    - d. The Book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the Seer - 2Chron. 9:29, 12:15, 13:22
    - e. The Manners of the King - 1Sam. 10:25
    - f. The Acts of Solomon - 1Kings 11:41

- g. The Annals of King David - 1Chron. 27:24
- h. The History of Nathan the Prophet and the Book of Gad the Seer - 1Chron. 29:29; 2Chron. 9:29
- i. The Acts of Uzziah - 2Chron. 26:22
- j. The Prayers of Manasseh and the Sayings of Hozai - 2Chron. 33:18-19
- k. The Chronicles of King Ahasuerus and the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia - Esther 2:23, 6:1, 10:2; Neh. 12:23
- 3. Possible inspired editing of texts
- C. Textual Transmission: 300-150 BC
  - 1. Ca. 280: beginning of translation of Septuagint (LXX; Greek translation of the Bible)
  - 2. Septuagint exhibits some differences from the modern text; no difference impacts doctrine significantly
- D. Textual Transmission 150 BC - 70 AD
  - 1. Beginning of textual standardization
  - 2. No formal "canon," but beginning consolidation and contrast of inspired and uninspired books
- E. Biblical Manuscripts: Dead Sea Scrolls
  - 1. Ca. 250 BC - 68 AD
  - 2. Found in 1947 in Judean desert
  - 3. Remnants of texts from Qumran community
  - 4. Many Biblical texts preserved
  - 5. Vast majority of texts agree with our MT
  - 6. Some variants conform to LXX readings
- F. Textual Transmission: 70-1450 AD
  - 1. Destruction of Jerusalem leads to discussions between rabbis at Jamneh (Jamnia); essential canon agreed upon
  - 2. Transmission of Hebrew texts placed in hands of special group of scribes in the Middle Ages, Masoretes - Masoretic Text ca. 500-700 AD
  - 5. Text extremely stable-- Masoretes took great care of text, numbering letters and lines, adding textual notes (called the Masorah), leading to a text that changed little for over a millennium
  - 6. With printing press in 1450 AD, text transmission no longer necessary
- G. Extant Manuscripts: 10th, 11th century codices
  - 1. Aleppo Codex-- 925 AD
    - a. Three-quarters of Biblical text recognized as model codex
  - 2. Leningrad Codex-- 1009 AD
    - a. Most complete text in its tradition; basis of most critical editions of the Hebrew text

## V. EVIDENCE FOR THE TEXT

- A. The OT texts we have went through many centuries of transmission before they came to us
- B. What evidence do we have for the text?
- C. History

1. Archaeology has uncovered many texts from the ancient Near East that verify Biblical events
  2. Moabite Stone and 2Kings 3
  3. Tel Dan inscription and the "House of David"
  4. The "Sennacherib Prism" and the 701 BC invasion of Judah by Assyria
  5. Various texts relating to Babylonian invasions
- D. Other ancient versions also provide evidence for the text
- E. Greek: Septuagint (LXX) or Old Greek (OG)
1. Translated in third century BC, by Alexandrian Jews
  2. Somewhat problematic, since four later recensions made (Lucian, Symmachus, Theodotion, Hexaplaric)
    - a. Extant manuscripts come from 4th century CE-- Sinaiticus and Vaticanus; some papyri fragments, but not much earlier
  3. As said previously, variants demonstrate the LXX to have come from a Hebrew text in a different tradition than that of the MT
  4. Many readings in LXX, when retroverted into Hebrew, superior to MT readings
- F. Samaritan Pentateuch
1. Samaritans preserved a tradition of the Pentateuch originally from Jews
  2. Adapted whenever possible to serve Samaritan interests
  3. Earliest manuscript: 12th century AD; tradition goes back to ca. 5th century BC
  4. Some variants agreeing with LXX over MT, some unique, although text is suspicious since it was tampered with for ideological reasons
- G. Latin Vulgate and Syriac Peshitta
1. Vulgate-- origins in 3rd century CE, written in late 4th century CE
  2. Peshitta-- probably between 2nd-4th centuries CE
  3. Secondary witnesses, since they follow as translations of the MT with help from the LXX
  4. Texts for both, however, occasionally show unique and superior variants, since their text basis varies somewhat from MT
- H. Aramaic Targum
1. With Aramaic as more common language of Jews, Scriptures freely translated into Aramaic
  2. Part of the Targum-- ca. 100-1000 AD
  3. Translations tend to be free, but sometimes present superior variants
- I. Other Texts/Versions
1. Coptic-- from Egypt, post-4th century AD
  2. Ethiopic-- from Ethiopia, post 3rd century AD
  3. Cairo Geniza-- 11th century, depository of old texts
- J. Other Witnesses
1. New Testament-- 1st century AD-- maintains many LXX readings, some translations from Hebrew
  2. Patristics-- 2nd-9th centuries AD
  3. Rabbinics-- 1st-7th centuries AD
- K. Value of Versions

1. Unlike the NT text, which was standardized early and has thousands of texts, the OT text is shrouded in obscurity
2. A manuscript that is very late may have variants that, in NT textual criticism, may be easily dismissed...
3. Yet in OT analysis, the possibility exists that such a variant may have been faithfully transmitted over a long period of time
4. Since all extant manuscripts are rather late (Greek, 4th century AD; Hebrew, 11th century AD), more legitimacy given to other versions and later manuscripts

Conclusion:

- A. What, then, shall we say in regards to these things?
- B. While the OT is not as well-attested as the NT...
- C. ...thanks to versions and extra-Biblical accounts, we can be sure that the Old Testament we have is fairly accurate to the original texts
- D. We can have confidence in the Scriptures that Paul says are there that we might have hope - Rom. 15:3-4
- E. Most telling of all is Jesus' testimony of its completeness and authenticity  
Luke 24:44