**The Dead Sea Scrolls**

(Attesting to Bible Accuracy)

**Assertion:** The Bible text as it exists today is an accurate copy of the inspired texts, as they were first written. Sufficient care has been taken to reproduce the texts that our modern copies are fundamentally the same as the original autographs.

**Oldest Old Testament (Hebrew) texts are not as old as the New Testament texts**

* Cairo Codex – Major & Minor prophets (895 A.D.), Leningrad Codex of the prophets (916 A.D.), British Museum Codex (10th or 11th century). Earliest complete manuscript – Complete Leningrad Codex (1008 A.D.)
* Any old or worn copy of the Old Testament (as a sign of respect) was buried by Jewish scribes, and has been lost.

**However, the accuracy of the text was reserved by a group of early Jewish scribes, known as Massoretes. They carried on the tradition of sacred respect for the text, and their efforts were influencial from about 500 A.D to 1000 A.D.**

* Counted the verses, words and letters of each book
* Counted the number of times each letter was used in each book
* They noted which verses contained all the letters of the alphabet, calculated the middle verse, the middle word, and the middle letter of each book. (Note: The middle verse of the Pentateuch is Leviticus 8:7. The middle verse of the Hebrew Bible is Jeremiah 6:7).
* When a copy was made, all of these were checked to ensure the accuracy of the copy. The codices mentioned above are examples of Massoretic effort.

**Talmud requirements for preparation of copies of Pentateuch:**

(Taken from How We Got the Bible, page 75).

“A synagogue roll must be written on the skins of clean animals, prepared for the particular use of the synagogue by a 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 be first lined; and if three words be written in it without a line, it is worthless. The ink should be 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…. The rolls in which these regulations are not observed are condemned to be buried in the ground or burned; or they are banished to the schools, to be used as reading-books.”

**The Dead Sea Scrolls serve as a witness to the accuracy of the Massoretic text which serves as the basis of our translations of the Old Testament.**

**The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1948.**

* Found by chance by an Arab shepherd boy, looking for his goat. Stumbled on a cave with clay jars containing leather rolls. With further exploration, a total of more than 350 rolls (most fragmentary) have been found.
* Product of the Essenes (an ascetic Jewish cult) who had a commune in the area about 100 B.C.
* Some contain doctrines peculiar to the sect. Others records of daily life in the community. However, many others contain fragments of every book of the Old Testament except Esther.
* The most important rolls are two of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah A (the oldest) contains almost the entire manuscript, missing only a few words. Isaiah B is not complete, but contains Isaiah 41-59.
* **Note:** In 1989 more documents were released that serve to corroborate the authenticity of Daniel. Both of the text itself, as well as the date of writing (606-536 B.C.), (not 160 B.C. – modernist claim).

**The Isaiah rolls confirm that the Massoretic text is almost identical to the Hebrew text of 1000 years previous.**

**F.F. Bruce:** “The new evidence confirms what we had already good reason to believe – that the Jewish scribes of the early Christian centuries copied and recopied the text of the Hebrew Bible with the utmost fidelity” (*Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 61-62).

* **Consider:** The RSV (1952) was completed without input from the Dead Sea scrolls. With the rolls in hand, the translation committee determined to revise the translation for accuracy. Adopted only 13 variant readings. In RSV, if you come across the footnote: “One ancient MS”, that refers to Isaiah A of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

**An example: Isaiah 21:8**

(KJV) “And he cried, **A lion**: My lord, I stand continually upon the watchtower in the daytime, and I am set in my ward whole nights”

(RSV) “Then **he who saw** cried: “Upon a watchtower I stand, O Lord, continually by day, and at my post I am stationed whole nights.

*The Hebrew words translated “a lion” and “he who saw” obviously mean two very different things, but are similar in appearance. It is probable an inscription mistake was made. (Most examples like this are caught by a simple consideration of context). Here it seems probable that the RSV (based on Isaiah A) is more accurate.*

**Summary** (from *How We Got the Bible*, Neil Lightfoot, page 79)

“Our oldest Hebrew manuscripts date no farther back than the ninth century. This might prove to be a difficult barrier for the Old Testament text were it not for the safeguards devised and followed by the Massoretes and the strict rules observed by earlier Jewish scribes. Early versions of the Old Testament and other sources are of great value since they attest to the reliability of our present text. The Biblical documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls are nothing short of sensational. The most important are the two Isaiah scrolls which, although they exhibit many minor differences, confirm beyond doubt the accuracy of our present Hebrew text.

**Important Note:** Jesus and the apostles trusted in, and quoted from the Septuagint translation, which was a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Obviously, our Lord was comfortable with the text of the Hebrew Scriptures that existed at that time, and we have supplied evidence that from that point until now the text has remained accurate. We can have confidence in the accuracy of the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures.