

ISSUE

19.49

BULLETIN OF  
THE OLSEN  
PARK CHURCH  
OF CHRIST

# Faithful Sayings

December 3,  
2017

## Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

## Elders:

Pat Ledbetter

Jeff Nunn

## Deacons:

Steve Dixon

Ryan Ferguson

Arend Gressley

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Brady McAlister

Walker McAnear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Rusty Scott

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

## Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



## Manuscripts of the Hebrew Old Testament

### How the Bible Came to Us (13)

By Kyle Pope

Over the last year we have considered the steps God used to reveal and preserve His word in the Bibles we can now read and follow so easily. As we end this study we conclude with one final lesson looking at the manuscripts used to translate the Old Testament.

### The Hebrew Masoretic Text

We observed in earlier studies that the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, with a few passages in Aramaic (a Semitic language very similar to Hebrew). We also observed that well before the New Testament, the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into the Greek version known as the Septuagint (LXX). In the early years, while some Christian converts from Judaism probably still read Hebrew, as time went on more and more Christians read Greek—making the Septuagint the primary Old Testament used among Christians. As Latin became more common in the Roman Empire, eventually the Latin Vulgate translation became the primary Old Testament in the West, while the LXX remained dominant in the East. During these years the scribes who continued to copy and preserve the Hebrew text were Jews. Even though most Jews did not believe Jesus was the Messiah, the Hebrew Old Testament continued as the Scriptures

preserved and read in Jewish synagogues as it is to this very day.

There is no doubt that Jewish scribes respected the Scriptures as God's word. From the years AD 500-1000 in Tiberias, Babylon, and Jerusalem Jewish scribes known as the Masoretes followed a strict *massorah* (or "tradition") of copying and preserving the Hebrew Old Testament. Part of this involved carefully counting every letter of a manuscript to preserve its accuracy. Out of fear that a damaged text might allow part of Scripture to be lost or misinterpreted, the Masoretes actually destroyed damaged manuscripts to avoid corruption.

While this practice preserved the accuracy of the text, it also limited the number of surviving ancient manuscripts. Even so, these scribal practices preserved the text of the Hebrew Old Testament with amazing consistency. We call texts produced from this scribal process the Masoretic Text (MT). One of the most respected families of Masoretic scribes was that of Aaron ben Asher.

After the Middle Ages, when an interest in looking back to the original texts of Scripture began to grow, scholars sought out the oldest surviving Old Testament manuscripts. Before the 1940s there were two main manuscripts that represented the MT:

**1. The Aleppo Codex.** Named after the Syrian city where it stayed for centuries, this parchment codex was copied around AD 920 by Shlomo ben Buya'a and was verified by Aaron ben Asher. It was used by Maimonides, the famous Jewish physician, philosopher, and theologian. The Aleppo text was complete until 1947 when portions of it were lost in fires and riots. It is now in the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem and can be viewed online at: [www.alep-pocodex.org](http://www.alep-pocodex.org).

**2. The Leningrad Codex.** Named after the former Soviet name of St. Petersburg, Russia where it has been for centuries, this parchment was copied in 1008 from manuscripts done by Aaron ben Asher. It is the oldest complete MT and has served as the basis for most editions of the Hebrew Old Testament. It is housed in the Imperial Library in St. Petersburg and may be read online at: [https://archive.org/details/Leningrad\\_Codex](https://archive.org/details/Leningrad_Codex).

### Twentieth Century Discoveries

From the time the last book of the Old Testament was written until the Aleppo Codex was copied was about 1300 years. When compared to most other ancient manuscripts, such time gaps are not unusual. It was long believed that there would never be any



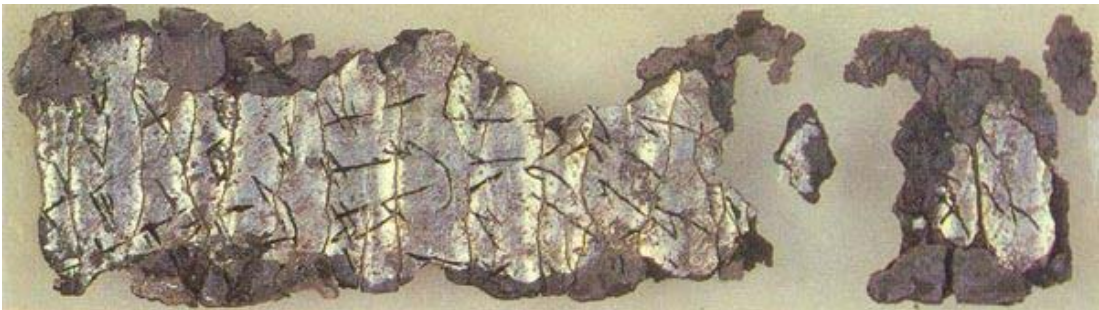
manuscript evidence of the Old Testament found closer to the time it was originally penned. The twentieth century changed that assumption. Three important discoveries were made:

**1. The Nash Papyrus.** At the beginning of the century four papyrus fragments of the Hebrew Old Testament were acquired by W. L. Nash and published in 1903. These dated to the second century BC, and contained portions of the Ten Commandments.

**2. The Dead Sea Scrolls.** In 1946, a Bedouin named Muhammad ed-Dib threw a stone into a cave near the Dead Sea while looking for a goat that had wandered off. When he did, he heard the sound of breaking pottery. Inside the cave were found jars filled with manuscripts of religious and secular books stored away before the advance of the Roman armies upon Jerusalem in AD 70. Over the next decades, other caves were discovered with other manuscripts dating from 100 BC – AD 70. These scrolls were found contain biblical manuscripts of almost the entire the Hebrew Bible. Most of these manuscripts are now in the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem, and many can be viewed online at: <http://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/>.

When studied closely it was found that the biblical texts matched the MT almost exactly. Where there were differences, the readings often matched wording reflected in the LXX and Vulgate, indicating the existence of a pre-Masoretic text-type that lay behind these ancient translations. What a remarkable affirmation this is that God's word has been preserved through the ages! How true are David's words, "The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever" (Ps. 119:160).

With the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nash Papyrus the 1300-year time gap was reduced to only a few hundred years from the time the last Old Testament



Silver Scroll Pendant



book was written. One final discovery reduced this gap even further...

### **3. The Silver Scroll Pendant.**

In 1979, in a tomb near the Old City in Jerusalem, a tomb was excavated and a small silver scroll necklace ornament was found with eighteen lines of Hebrew text dating to around 600 BC. The scroll contains a passage from Numbers 6:24-26: "The LORD bless you and keep you, the LORD make His face to shine upon you and give you peace." This represents the oldest

biblical passage ever found. With this small discovery the time gap was no longer a few hundred years—the scroll pendant was made before the Old Testament was completed!

### **Why Does this Matter?**

So why should any of this matter to us? How does this relate to life in modern times? It matters because in the pages of Scripture that have come down to us through the ages by the providence of God, the God of all creation has revealed Himself to us. Paul declared that the gospel is "the power of God to salvation" (Rom. 1:16). The Bible reveals this gospel. Peter declared that we may be "born again"—"through the word of God which lives and abides forever" (1 Pet. 1:23).

Life is short, and our time on earth is brief, but when we look to the words of the Bible we are looking at something enduring. Peter wrote, "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, But the word of the LORD endures forever" (1 Pet. 1:24-25a). Let us all look to this word, trust in it, and obey it with all of our heart and soul. It is enduring, and it offers to us the only way of salvation.



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# *Welcome Visitors*

**We are so glad that you joined us today.  
Please come again.**

● **Let us know if you have any questions.**