

In a Cairo synagogue attic storeroom, an amazing discovery was made of some 300,000 manuscripts and fragments and some 10,000 of them were Hebrew Biblical texts. Of the 300,000 Cairo manuscripts, 100,000 of them are housed today in Cambridge, and the largest collection of Hebrew O.T. manuscripts are housed in Leningrad. There are 1,582 texts of the Hebrew Old Testament written on parchment paper; 725 written on paper; plus 1,200 other O.T. Hebrew fragments.

But undoubtedly the most remarkable O.T. Hebrew manuscripts are the “Dead Sea Scrolls.” The Dead Sea Scrolls are “the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times.” Those manuscripts are dated by scholars as having been copied from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain one complete O.T. book of Isaiah and thousands of manuscript fragments, which collectively represent every O.T. book of the Bible, with the exception of Esther. There are copies of Biblical books in Hebrew and Aramaic, there are hymns, prayers, and different Jewish Rabbinical writings.

The story of how these manuscripts were found clearly shows the providential sovereignty of God. In the spring of 1947, a Bedouin Arab goat herder and shepherd boy (Muhammad Adh-Dhib) was searching the cliffs in the Dead Sea area for a lost goat. He was about 7 ½ miles south of Jericho and about 1 mile west of the Dead Sea. When he came to some caves, he decided to go into the cave to look for the goat. Some accounts say he threw a stone deeper into the cave to see if anything was in there and the stone hit something that sounded like pottery. So he went into the cave and found some jars that contained several leather scrolls.

It turned out that this was a hide-out of a religious Jewish sect, who lived at the time of Jesus Christ. They were called the Essenes. The Essenes took copies of the Old Testament and broke away from Temple worship in Jerusalem and established their own commune in the Judean desert near Qumran. They used the Qumran caves as their place to live. In all, there were eleven caves containing the scrolls, which were excavated between February, 1949-February, 1956. Since 1947, the Qumran caves have produced over 600 O.T. manuscripts. Those manuscripts date back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.

Moshe Goshen-Gottstein estimates that the total number of O.T. Hebrew manuscript fragments throughout the world runs into the tens of thousands. Here in the United States there are 500 Hebrew manuscripts of Biblical texts. Clearly, this is an amazing preservation of God’s Old Testament as no other book that has ever been written in history. The average book from antiquity at best has 7-10 manuscript copies. Clearly, we see that the preservation of these Hebrew manuscripts is incredible. As Isaiah 40:8 says, “the word of God stands and endures forever.”

**Category #2 - The Survival of the New Testament.**

When it comes to the New Testament, it is again clear that, more than any other writing, the Bible has uniquely and dramatically survived throughout time. The study of the transmission and the preservation of N.T. manuscripts is interesting, informative and extremely important. No other book in history has been copied and preserved as the Bible—both the O.T. and the N.T.

Now to appreciate what God has preserved, we need to have a basic understanding of some key manuscript related words. There are nine terms to know:

- 1) The term papyrus is a term that refers to a type of paper that came from a plant, which grew abundantly in the marsh lands of Egypt. Many N.T. manuscripts were written on this.
- 2) The term parchment refers to another type of material upon which the N.T. was written, that came from either goat or sheep skin.
- 3) The term vellum refers to a material made from calf or antelope skin, upon which Scriptures were written.
- 4) The term manuscript refers to a handwritten, hand-copied composition. Scriptures were hand-written or hand-copied manuscripts.
- 5) The term minuscule manuscript refers to a manuscript that was hand-written in small case letters and not capital letters. These are typically written in cursive style.
- 6) The term uncial or majuscule manuscript refers to hand-written manuscripts in all capital letters. These are typically written in a formal style as opposed to cursive.
- 7) The term lectionaries refer to early church service books that were used for worship. These contain several N.T. passages.
- 8) The term codex refers to manuscripts that have been put together in book form, rather than in a scroll or roll.
- 9) The term autograph or autographa refers to the first original manuscript written by the author.

As we said, the average book from antiquity has 7-10 manuscript copies. When we compare this to the New Testament, there is no doubt that the N.T. is the Word of God:

1. There are 88 papyri manuscripts.
2. There are 274 uncial manuscripts in codex form.
3. There are 245 lectionaries in uncial form.
4. There are 2,795 manuscripts in minuscule form.
5. There are 1,964 lectionaries in minuscule form.

The total of Greek manuscripts today that have been cataloged now numbers nearly 5,700. This number does not include early Scriptural quotations from the late first century that number 19,368 from the church fathers. Having nearly 5,700 manuscripts of the Greek New Testament in existence today clearly proves the New Testament is a very unique writing.

To put this in perspective, there are 7 manuscripts of Plato, who wrote about 400 B.C. There are 20 copies of Livy's History of Rome, who wrote about 59 B.C. to A.D. 17. There are seven manuscripts of Pliny's Natural History who wrote about A.D. 61-113. There are 643 copies of Homer's Iliad. Now compare that to the N.T. a total of nearly 5,700 manuscripts.