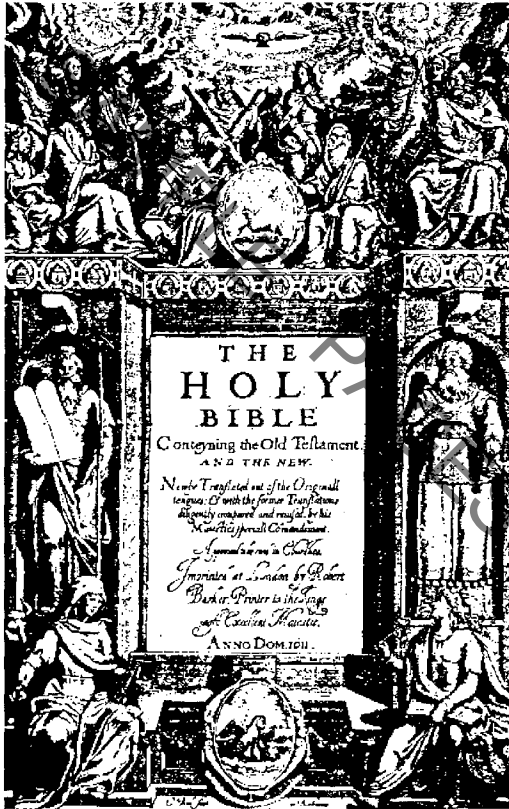


# *Forever Settled*

**A Survey of the Documents and History of the Bible**

*“Forever O, LORD thy word is settled in heaven.”*  
(Psalm 119:89)



*Compiled by*  
**Dr. Jack Moorman**

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*The New Bible Dictionary*, IntersVarsity Press  
*Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, Eyre and Spottiswoode  
*Believing Bible Study*, The Christian Research Press

**PART ONE:**  
**A SURVEY OF**  
**THE OLD**  
**TESTAMENT**  
**DOCUMENTS**

SAMPLE PAGES

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## I. The Hebrew Scriptures

### 1. Christ and the Old Testament

During His earthly life, the Lord Jesus Christ appealed unreservedly to the very words of the Old Testament text (Matt. 22:42-45; John 10:34-36), thus indicating His confidence that this text had been accurately transmitted. Not only so but He also expressed this conviction in the strongest possible manner:

*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.*

Here our Lord assures us that the Old Testament text in common use among the Jews during His earthly ministry was an absolutely trustworthy reproduction of the original text written by Moses and the other inspired authors. Nothing had been lost from the text. It would have been easier for heaven and earth to pass than for such a loss to have taken place.

Moreover, our Savior's statements are also promises that the providential preservation of the Old Testament text shall never cease or fail. That same Old Testament text which was preserved in its purity during the Old Testament dispensation shall continue to be faithfully preserved during the New Testament dispensation until this present age is brought to an end and all the events foretold by Daniel (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15) and the other ancient Prophets come to pass. So our Lord has promised, and today the Holy Spirit gives to all true believers the assurance that their Savior has kept and will keep his promise.

Christ's promises of the preservation of the text are in addition to those already given by inspiration in the O.T.

*Psa. 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 forever.*

*Psa. 119:89--For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.*

*Isa. 40:8--The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand forever.*

The O.T. text has been preserved. Christ has kept His promise. The following will help us to better understand some of the details of this preservation.

## 2. The Hebrew Scriptures Written by Moses and the Prophets

The O.T. books as they appear in the Hebrew Bible are divided into three main groups, namely, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The principle on which they were so classified was mainly that of authorship rather than of date or subject matter.

The first five books constitute the Law. They were grouped together because they were all written by one man, Moses. The Law or Torah is an undivided unit. Briefly we know that it was written by Moses for three reasons:

- (1) The testimony of Christ, "Did not Moses give you the Law?" (Jn. 7:19)
- (2) Mosaic authorship is the traditional belief of the Jews from time immemorial.
- (3) The evidence of archaeology in Palestine strongly supports this traditional view.

Next in the Hebrew Bible comes the Prophets. This second division is subdivided into the Former Prophets and Latter Prophets. The books of the Former Prophets are Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. The books of the Latter Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. There is good evidence also that originally Ruth and Lamentations were included among the books of the Prophets. All the books of the Former and Latter Prophets were written by men who held the prophetic office, men who were definitely called by God to serve Him in this way. Christ and the other N.T. writers quote from this portion as inspired scripture.

The third division is called the Writings. The books placed in this category are Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles. With the exception of Ruth and Lamentations, these books were written by men who were inspired of God but were not prophets in the official sense. They were not specifically called by God to labor as prophets among His people. David and Solomon, for example, were inspired, but they were kings, not prophets. Job, though inspired, was not a prophet. Neither was Daniel a prophet in the official sense, for he did not labor among the people. Ezra was a priest, and, according to ancient opinion, Chronicles also was written by him. Again Christ and the N.T. writers quote frequently from this third division.

### 3. The Hebrew Scriptures Preserved by the Priests

The duty of preserving this written revelation was assigned not to the prophets, but to the priests. The priests were the 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 . . . 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.*

Thus the law was placed in the charge of the priests to be kept by them alongside of the most Sacred Vessel of the sanctuary, and in its innermost and holiest apartment. Also the priests were commanded to read the law every seven years.

Deut. 31:12--*Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and the 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.*

The priests were also given the task of making correct copies of the law for the use of kings and rulers, or at least of supervising the scribes to whom the king would delegate this work.

Deut. 17:18--*And it shall be, when he [the king] 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 and Levites.*

Apparently a goodly number of such copies were made. The numerous allusions to the law in all the subsequent books of the O.T. indicate familiarity with it. Psa. 1:2 describes the pious by saying:

*His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law doth he meditate day and night.*

The admiration and affection for the law expressed in such passages as Psa. 19:7-11, Isa. 40:7, 8, and the exhortations and rebukes of the prophets based upon the requirements of the law imply an acquaintance with it such as could only be produced by its diffusion among the people.

Not only the Law of Moses, but also the Psalms were preserved in the Temple by the priests, and it was probably the priests who divided the Hebrew Psalter into five books corresponding to the five books of Moses. It was David who taught the priests to sing Psalms as part of their public worship service. We are told when David brought the ark to Jerusalem:



I Chron. 15:16, 17--*He spake to the chief of the Levites, to appoint their brethren to be singers with instruments of music . . . So the Levites appointed Heman . . . Asaph . . . Ethan.*

Like David, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan were not only singers but also inspired authors, and some of the Psalms were written by them.

It is likely that the books of Solomon were collected together and carefully kept at Jerusalem. Some of Solomon's proverbs, we are told were copied out by "*the men of Hezekiah King of Judah*" (Prov. 25:1). During the period of the kings also private and partial collections of the books of the Prophets had already been formed and were in possession of individuals. This is apparent from the frequent references made by the prophets, such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel to the language of their predecessors or to the former history of the nation, from the explicit mention of a prediction of Micah, delivered a century before, by the elders in addressing the people (Jer. 26:17-19), and from "*the books*" of which Daniel (9:2) speaks at the close of the captivity, and in which the prophecies of Jeremiah must have been included.

Except for periodic revivals under Godly rulers, such as Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah, the days of the kings were times of spiritual darkness in which the priests neglected their God-given task of guarding and teaching God's holy Law. Note for example the years which preceded the reign of good king Asa.

II Chron. 15:3--*Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law.*

During the reign of Manasseh, the original copy of the Law had been mislaid and was not found again until Josiah's time (II Kings 22:8). Because the priests were thus unfaithful in their office, Jerusalem was finally destroyed and the Jews were carried away captive to Babylon (Mic. 3:11, 12). But in spite of everything, God was still watching over His holy Word and preserving it by His special providence. Thus when Daniel and Ezekiel and other true believers were led away to Babylon, they took with them copies of all the Old Testament Scriptures which had been written up to that time.

After the Jews returned from the Babylonian exile, there was a great revival among the priesthood through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Zech. 4:6--*Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.*

The Law was again taught in Jerusalem by Ezra the priest, who:

Ezra 7:10--*Prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do*

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*it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgements.*

By Ezra and his successors, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all the Old Testament books were gathered together into one Old Testament canon and preserved until the days of our Lord's earthly ministry. By that time, the Old Testament text was so firmly established that even the Jews' rejection of Christ could not disturb it. Unbelieving Jewish scribes transmitted this traditional Hebrew O.T. text, blindly but faithfully, until the dawn of the Protestant Reformation, at which time it again passed into the possession of the Christian Church.

#### **4. The Difference Between the Preservation of the Old and New Testament Texts**

Old Testament Israel was under the care of the divinely appointed, Aaronic priesthood, and for this reason the Holy Spirit preserved the O.T. through this priesthood and the scholars that grouped themselves around it. The Holy Spirit guided these priests and scholars to gather the separate parts of the O.T. into one canon and to maintain the purity of the text. In the New Testament Church, on the other hand, this Aaronic priesthood has been abolished through the sacrifice of Christ. Every believer is a priest before God, and for this reason, the Holy Spirit has preserved the N.T. text not through any special priesthood but through the universal priesthood of believers, that is, through the usage of God's people, the rank and file of all those that truly trust in Christ.

Jesus Christ, when He was on earth, acknowledged the authority which the priests, the sons of Aaron, had received from God to guard and to teach the O.T. Scriptures. Due to their frightful sin and worldliness, the priests had largely abandoned these functions, leaving them mainly in the hands of scribes and Pharisees who were not of the priestly race. Probably only a minority of the scribes were priests in the days of Christ's earthly ministry. But, even so, the order of scribes had developed out of the priesthood and was fulfilling the teaching office which God, through Moses, had assigned to the priests. Hence these scribes and Pharisees, in spite of their hypocritical lives, possessed a certain divine authority. It was this fact that Jesus called to the attention of His disciples.

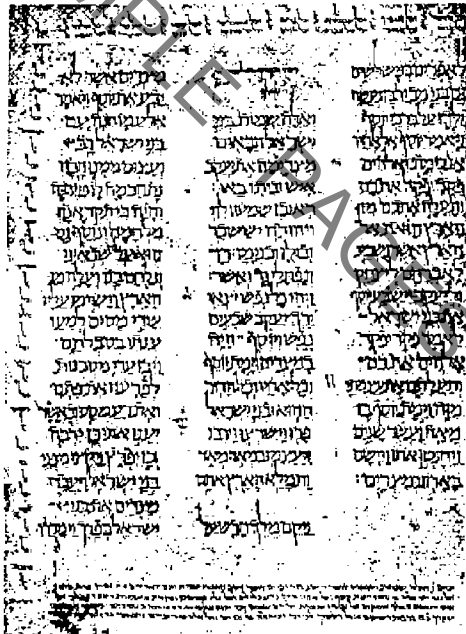
*Matt. 23:2-3--The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do ye not after their works, for they say and do not.*

## 5. The Traditional (Masoretic) Hebrew Text of the Old Testament

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

Rom. 3:2--*Unto them were committed the Oracles of God.*

During this period, Christ was faithful to his own promise that the O.T. Scriptures would not perish or suffer loss. By His special providence He raised up among the Jews generations of scribes, who faithfully transmitted those treasures from which, in their unbelief, they refused to benefit. As Augustine said, those Jewish scribes were the librarians of the Christian Church.



Hebrew MS. - tenth century

*British Museum Or. 4445*  
(Actual size 16½ in. × 13 in.)

Hebrew MS--tenth century. British Museum Or. 4445