

by J.W. McGarvey

The following chapter was written in 1897 by J.W. McGarvey, a Christian and president of College of the Bible in Kentucky University. It deals with the same question regarding the trustworthiness of the Bible that we hear about today. This chapter covers the Old Testament, and contains the same truths today as it did then. Additionally, since that time we have discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls which serve also to verify the Old Testament Scriptures. There can be no doubt that we have in our hands the same biblical text that God intended for the Jewish people. -- Wayne Goff

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The books of the Old Testament were all written, with unimportant exceptions to be mentioned hereafter, in the Hebrew tongue, which was the native tongue of the Hebrew nation. As the earliest of them were written more than three thousand years ago, it is proper to inquire, what assurance we have that our present books are the same as those in the original collection, and that they contain the same words. To give a full answer to these questions would require a whole volume as large as this, but we can give the principal facts in the case in a few lines.

During the period from the first writing of the books till the invention of printing, all copies were made with the pen, and it has been found impractical to copy books in this way without making some mistakes. These occur chiefly in the spelling of words, and in the omission or insertion of words not essential to the meaning of a sentence; but a few occurred which affect the sense, and which sometimes introduce contradictions of a book with itself, or with another book. Especially is this last the case with names and numbers, in which the copyist had no train of thought to guide him. This accounts for the discrepancies in numbers which every thoughtful reader has noticed between certain passages in Chronicles and the corresponding passages in the books of Samuel and Kings.

After this process had continued until the errors of copyists attracted the serious attention of Jewish scholars, a company of them drew up some very stringent rules to prevent such errors in the future. They counted the number of words in every book by sections, and marked the middle word of every section. Then they required every copyist, when he had copied to the middle word, to count back and see if he had the right number of words. If he had, there was good assurance that he had omitted none and added none. If he had not, the part written was to be thrown away and a new copy made. These rules were adopted in the second century after Christ, and from that time forward no errors worth considering crept into the Hebrew Scriptures. When printing was invented, which was in the year 1448, and the Hebrew Old Testament was published in this form, which was in 1477, no more copies were written by hand, and the making of mistakes by copying came to an end; for when the types for a book are once set up correctly, all copies printed from them are precisely alike.

The question whether any of the original books have been lost, or others added, is settled by the fact that a Greek translation of the Old Testament was made, beginning in the year 280 before Christ, which has come down to our day, and it contains the same books. There can be no reasonable doubt, therefore, that we now have the Old Testament substantially the same as when its several books were originally written.

A Guide To Bible Study
Chapter III: The Original Text & Its Preservation
pp. 22-24