

# THE END TIMES

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## THE HISTORIC JOURNEY OF GOD'S WRITTEN WORD

*The historic journey of the Word of God reads like a dramatic mystery novel, complete with political intrigue, brave heroes, hush money, treachery and murder.*

To the sincere Christian, the Bible is not just a compilation of wise proverbs and interesting stories, but it is a priceless treasure—the words and thoughts of the Divine Creator Himself. Both the Old and New Testaments have been provided by divine revelation, and written by holy men of old who were moved by the spirit of God. (2 Peter 1:21) Christians should not only reverence the words of this incredible book, but they should also appreciate the *journey* that it took to arrive at this end time destination.

### ANCIENT PATH OF OLD TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

The journey of the Bible begins with the ancient patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament. When the Hebrew captives returned to Palestine from Babylon, Jewish tradition holds that Ezra collected together all of the writings of Moses, the prophets and other faithful ancients. These had been miraculously preserved throughout the turmoil of the nation's exile.

None of the books that were written between Ezra's time and the time of Christ—known as the *Apocrypha*—were considered by the Jews to be inspired. The books of the *Apocrypha*, included in Catholic Bibles today, are not considered inspired even by Catholic scholars; and, unlike the inspired books of the Old Testament, they were not originally written in Hebrew. In addition, the Jews rejected the *Apocrypha* because of many magical claims found there, such as in the book of Tobit 6:5-8: "If the Devil, or an evil spirit troubles anyone, they can be driven away by making a smoke of the heart, liver, and gall of a fish...and the Devil will smell it, and flee away, and never come again anymore." This and many other passages throughout the *Apocrypha* contradict the inspired Word of God to the Hebrews.

The original manuscripts of the Old Testament, written between 1200 and 500 B.C., have all been lost for thousands of years. Manuscripts now available are merely copies many times removed from the originals. However, these Old Testament copies are considered faithful to the original words of the writers, due to the great reverence the Jewish scribes held for the Word of God and their consequent carefulness in transcribing. In fact, Jewish transcribers were so meticulous that if an error was found, that manuscript would be destroyed.

The *Masoretes* were Jewish scribes who worked diligently around the seventh through eleventh centuries A.D. Their carefulness in transcribing was aided by a process called *gematria* wherein each Hebrew letter was assigned a number, and each line of text totaled a numeric value. Confirmation of the accuracy of the Masoretic transcriptions was found after World War II when ancient manuscripts written circa B.C. 100, known as the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, were discovered in caves near the Dead Sea in Israel. Scrolls found there of the Book of Isaiah confirm that the Masoretic transcriptions retain remarkable fidelity to the most ancient of Hebrew manuscripts.

Between the third and first centuries B.C., seventy Hebrew scholars translated the Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament into the Greek language which was common to the world at that time. This translation has been known as the *Septuagint Version*. Copies of this version were rare and were later treasured by early Christian congregations. Also rare were the few Hebrew copies of the Old Testament manuscripts available only to larger Christian congregations.



### JOURNEY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BEGINS

While Jesus lived, his words were the voice of authority to his followers and were compiled in the four *Gospels*. After his death, the Apostles became the voice of authority, and their words were primarily conveyed to the faithful by letters (*epistles*). The only other books of the New Testament considered to be inspired are the recorded *Acts* of the Apostles and the *Revelation* of Jesus to John. (John 17:20) It was not until the year A.D. 120, about 20 years after the death of the Apostle John that these books and letters, all written in Greek, were compiled as the New Testament.

These were very scarce and considered most precious. It was not until the fourth century that these books and letters were regarded as

*canon*—God's finished Word to the church—although there were many other epistles written by faithful Christians after that time. Three primary factors were taken into consideration when qualifying a manuscript as *canon*: first, the text had to have been written or authorized by an apostle; second, its teaching had to be consistent with the teachings of Christ and the apostles; and third, it had to have been acknowledged and used by Christians since the earliest days of the church.

From the time of Christ to the fourth century, Satan used pagan Rome in an attempt to blot out the Word of God. But, God's Word and children survived Satan's demonic plot. Then, in the fourth century, Christianity became popular when Emperor Constantine made it the religion of state. Because Rome was the dominating world government, Latin became the unifying language throughout the Roman Empire. In the mid-fourth century, Jerome, a religious scholar was commissioned by the bishop of Rome to compile all of the various attempts at Latin translations into one more consistent Latin translation of the Bible—termed the *Latin Vulgate* (the *vulgar* or common language of the people). Jerome translated, not from the Hebrew, but primarily from the Greek Septuagint of the Old Testament and the Greek New Testament, finishing his work in A.D. 405. Although Latin was the language of the common people at the time, most were illiterate, and so this Latin translation was only useful to the church hierarchy and a few from the privileged classes.

Within 500 years after the death of Jerome, Latin became a *dead language*. As a consequence of this, the Scriptures were kept from the congregations, cloaked in a language only understood by the clergy. This became the time of darkness prophesied in Revelation 11:3 "And I will give power unto my two witnesses [the Old and New Testaments], and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days [1260 prophetic years], clothed in sackcloth [clothing worn by those who mourn—the *dead language* of Latin]." It became expedient for the Church of Rome to keep the Scriptures from the people to maintain papal domination and church tradition. This *cover-up* was thought to be so vital that many of the precious ancient Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament were commanded to be destroyed during the Crusades and other anti-Jewish persecutions.

### THE TREACHEROUS JOURNEY THROUGH THE CENTURIES

Because of this systematic effort to ban the Word of God, the Scriptures have traveled a path paved with intrigue and the blood, toil and tears of many faithful martyrs. Early in the second millennium A.D., those attempting to translate into common languages had to work in secret. The Church of Rome—in union with the kings of

Europe—hunted down and persecuted these heroes of faith who were thought to be seditious traitors. It is a disturbing fact of history that these persecutions came at the hand of those who claimed to be God's honored representatives on earth. The attitude of those in religious authority was that "*ignorance is holiness.*" This was quite a contrast to the words of the Apostle Paul who admonished the faithful: "*Study to shew [present] thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" (2 Timothy 2:15) Without the Word of God, the apostasy of the clergy went unchecked, while the common people were fed superstition and fear.

In spite of the persistent opposition by the Church of Rome, God overruled that the translating work into the common language of the people continued. One of the first complete English versions of the Bible was translated in A.D. 1384 by John Wycliffe—the *morning star of the Reformation*. Wycliffe produced dozens of *handwritten* English copies of the Scriptures. The only source text available to Wycliffe from which to translate was Jerome's *Latin Vulgate*. It was, therefore, a translation from a translation.

At this time in history, the Roman church ruled all of England and Europe with an iron fist. This power, however, was threatened because Wycliffe was making the Word of God available to the people—exposing the numerous erroneous creeds and practices which held the congregations in bondage. Disdain for Wycliffe was so severe that, forty years after he died, his bones were exhumed from the grave and burned for heresy. Even though hated by the corrupt church in power, Wycliffe was beloved by the faithful *little flock* for his steadfast preaching that "*believers should ascertain for themselves what are the true matters of their faith, by having the Scriptures in a language which all may understand.*" Many of Wycliffe's followers, such as Jan Hus, actively promoted Wycliffe's mission and spoke out against the tyranny of the corrupt Roman Church which was threatening execution of anyone possessing even a small portion of a Bible. Hus was burned alive at the stake in 1415 with Wycliffe's manuscripts used as kindling for the fire. Thousands of other heroes of faith joined Wycliffe and Hus in putting the following words of Jesus above their own lives: "*Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.*" John 8:32

God continued to direct the path of His Divinely inspired Word when, in 1455, the first book ever to be printed by a printing press was the Bible. Printed in Latin, it was published by Johannes Gutenberg, the inventor of moveable type for the printing press. By His providence, God was preparing for the spread of His Word into the hands of those who longed to know His truth.

In 1534, the great English translator, William Tyndale completed his work of translating the Bible into the English language from certain Greek and Hebrew manuscripts—texts which Wycliffe was not privileged to secure. At this time in England's history, King Henry VIII was still a strong defender of the Roman Catholic Church, and, therefore, saw Tyndale's work as a threat. In order for Tyndale to complete his task of translating he was forced to leave England, becoming an exile in Germany. While in Germany he befriended Martin Luther who had translated the Bible into German. Both were strongly united by the motto "*sola scriptura*"—the Scriptures alone.

The seeming misfortune of exile in Germany was actually by providence of God to put Tyndale in contact with a printer brave enough to print his manuscripts. Large quantities of *Tyndale's English Version* of the Bible were then secretly smuggled into England, contrary to the decree of King Henry and the corrupt church. To complicate matters, King Henry became angry with the Pope for not granting him a divorce. He then broke from the Church of Rome and formed the Anglican Church of England—a sect which was neither Catholic nor Protestant. All of this political wrangling culminated in Tyndale being hated and hunted by both the Roman and Anglican churches. The Anglican Bishop hit upon what he thought was an excellent plan to put a stop to what he called a *plague of Bibles* coming into England. He contacted a man by the name of Augustine Pakington, a merchant trading between England and Antwerp, and suggested that Pakington buy up all of Tyndale's copies of the Bible and bring them to England where the Bishop could burn them. Provisionally, Pakington was a friend of Tyndale's and sympathetic with his mission, so he only pretended to enter into the Bishop's plot, purposefully purchasing every book at four times the usual price. With the money he received, Tyndale published a better, much larger edition, and for every Bible burned, Henry paid for three more to be published. Hence, the Bishop's plan failed, and *Tyndale's Bible* continued to pour into England. Finally, in October 1536, King Henry and his Anglican Bishop forcibly brought Tyndale back to England, and had him strangled and then burned to ashes at the stake. His last prayer was heard, "*LORD, open the King of England's eyes.*"

Two years after his death, Tyndale's prayer was answered, for the first major act as head of his new church, King Henry sanctioned the printing of the first *legal* English Bible. Known as *The Great Bible*, Henry commanded that it be placed in the pulpit of every church

in England. Henry's motivation was not exactly noble, but fueled by vanity and a desire to defy the Pope for not allowing his divorce from Queen Catherine to marry Anne Boleyn.

The intriguing turn of events that led to the royal embrace of the Bible again took a deadly path when, in 1553 Queen Mary I (*Bloody Mary*) took the throne six years after the death of her Father, King Henry VIII. Queen Mary was raised as Catholic by her mother, Henry's first wife Catherine, and she felt a strong contempt for her father after he abandoned her mother for Anne Boleyn. Mary was determined to put down the Anglican Church of her despised father and restore England to its Roman Catholic roots. The Bible was again considered a threat to this Roman Catholic revival, and so began another persecution of the Puritans and other Protestants in England.

Escaping this persecution, many Protestants fled to Geneva, Switzerland and there began the work of yet another important English translation known as the *Geneva Bible*—the first Bible completely translated from Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Completed in 1560, it stands as the translation with the greatest impact upon the Protestant Reformation in England. The *Geneva Bible*, known as the first study Bible, provided excellent study tools such as modern chapter and verse divisions, maps, a dictionary of proper names, an alphabetical concordance of principle subjects, a chronology chart from Adam to Christ, and Scripture cross references—in total about forty pages of study tools. Its use of italics for the interpolated (uninspired inserted) words is a testimony to the integrity of the translators. The most controversial study tools of the *Geneva Bible* were the marginal notes. These notes presented the distinctive doctrinal stance held by the Reformers in opposition to the Church of Rome united to the kings of Europe. They pointed out the hope of salvation without the need of the priest-craft and the erroneous system of the sacraments. They boldly identified the papacy as the anti-Christ and the Church of Rome as the scarlet woman riding the beast in Revelation 17:4. While the *Geneva Bible* served to edify the Reformation Movement, it infuriated the religious hierarchy in power.

When Rome's great supporter, Queen Mary, died in 1558, another twist of religious history occurred. Mary was succeeded by her half-sister Elizabeth I, who, much like her mother Anne Boleyn, but unlike Queen Mary, strongly embraced the Protestant Reformation. Now feeling safe, many of the exiles in Geneva returned to England, bringing with them their beloved *Geneva Bible*.

Not long after this advancing popularity of the *Geneva Bible*, the Roman Catholic Church, in 1582, saw that it could no longer continue to hide the Word of God in Latin, and concluded that, if the Bible was to be available in English, it would provide its own *official* translation complete with its own marginal notes. Using the *Latin Vulgate* as the only source text, the Pope sanctioned what became known as the *Douay Old Testament* and *Rheims New Testament*. Still the translation of choice for Catholics today, it has been rejected by Protestants, for the *Douay Old Testament* includes the uninspired books of the *Apocrypha*.

Elizabeth reigned forty-five years, providing relative peace for the Protestants. After Elizabeth died in 1603, King James I took the throne, and the *Geneva Bible*, which did so much to encourage Protestants, and especially Puritans, soon became a thorn in his side. James had declared himself head of the Church of England by *divine right of kings*, and ruled with a heavy hand over the Puritans who refused to honor him as head of the church. Many were either banished or escaped from religious tyranny to America. They took with them the *Geneva Bible* which had been exclusively known as the Protestant Bible. King James not only saw the Puritans as a threat to his sovereignty, but also saw the marginal notes of the *Geneva Bible* as "*seditious*", and "*savouring too much of dangerous and traitorous conceits.*" One of the notes in the *Geneva Bible* on Exodus 1:17, for example, states that Hebrew midwives were right to *disobey* the Pharaoh's command to kill all of the male babies. In King James' mind, this marginal note encouraged civil disobedience to a king's command.

King James, with the encouragement of a conference of Anglican clergymen, then began the quest to establish a new Bible for his kingdom and to replace every *Geneva Bible*. A committee of scholars was enlisted to translate this new version, removing any marginal notes which would disrespect the church/state crown. The translators took into consideration the *Tyndale New Testament*, the *Great Bible* of Henry VIII, the *Geneva Bible*, and even the *Catholic Rheims New Testament*. In 1611 the *Authorized King James Version* of the Bible was completed and dedicated to the King.

#### LIGHT SHINING MORE AND MORE UPON THE BIBLE PATH

From 1611 to 1881 the *King James Version* of the Bible has been a wonderful source of spiritual strength to God's children. However, notwithstanding the Lord's overruling which brought His Word to this point in history, the journey did not stop there. Many important discoveries have revealed serious flaws in the *King James Version* which



modern translations have sought to address. Still, some Protestant denominations claim that the *King James Version* of the Bible is the only *authorized* version by God. These claim that “*The Authorized Version was translated under a God-ordained English King.*” This assertion promotes the idea of the *divine right of kings*, a creed which contradicts a very important foundation doctrine of Protestants—that Christ alone is head of the true church. Because of the push by Puritans to reform the church and state, an infuriated James declared, “*I shall make them conform themselves, or I will harry them out of the land.*” This disappointment to the Puritans was God’s appointment, for as was stated, many Puritans were either banished or escaped England to settle in America.

Strict advocates of the 1611 *King James Version* should also consider another important fact of Bible history. Until 1666—forty-one years after the death of King James—the *Apocrypha* was included in the *Authorized King James Version*. This is the version which James commanded replace every other Protestant Bible in his kingdom. Most Protestants agree that the books of the *Apocrypha* are to be rejected as uninspired and promoting magic. God would not have *authorized* such a translation. It should be noted that the term *authorized* does not refer to the authority of God, but to the authority of the King of England who only *authorized* the translation work to begin. To discredit other versions translated since the *King James Version* is to ignore the Word of prophecy which states: “*The path of the just is as the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*” (Proverbs 4:18) As careful as King James’ committee of scholars were, it is more important to put the Word of God before the work of translators.

It is also important to note that when *King James Version* was translated, only eight Bible manuscripts were available for reference—the oldest one dating back to the tenth century. After the *King James Version* was translated, hundreds of much older manuscripts have come to light, some of them dating back as early as the fourth century, and a few even date back to the second century. It is only logical to presume that the earlier the manuscript, the more nearly correct it is likely to be.

The three oldest known, nearly-complete manuscripts of the New Testament available for use today are those designated the *Sinaitic Codex* (A.D. 350), the *Vatican Codex* (A.D. 325), and the *Alexandrian Codex* (Fifth Century AD). The *Vatican Codex* has a number of omissions, including the entire Book of Revelation. The *Alexandrian* manuscript has a good text from Acts to Revelation, but is also incomplete. Discovery of the *Sinaitic Codex* has been the most valuable to translators, since it is a complete manuscript of the Bible. It was discovered in a convent at the foot of Mt. Sinai in 1859 by the great German scholar, Dr. Tischendorf. Dr. Tischendorf made a careful comparison of the *Sinaitic* manuscript with the *King James Version* and compiled a long list of additions and alterations appearing in the *King James Version* translation which do not appear in the older manuscripts. These are known as *interpolations* or *spurious passages*. Careful students of the Bible should note these uninspired additions and should be suspect of any teachings based on these. The following passage is an example of added *interpolations* or *spurious passages* and how these can influence interpretation: “*They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them.*” (Mark 16:18) Even though this passage is *spurious*, there is a small sect of Christians who insist that it is true because they refuse to believe that there is any other proper translation than that of the *King James Version*. In view of the fact that God has provided for the discovery of the older manuscripts, is it not reasonable that God provided for corrections to be made to the *King James Version*?

With Tischendorf’s discovery of the *Sinaitic* manuscript, a flood of Bible translations has benefited the student of the Bible. The *Revised Version*, published in 1881, was an attempt to correct errors found in the *King James Version*. It was followed by numerous other translations such as *Weymouth*, *Moffatt*, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*, *The New American Standard*, *the Good News Bible*, *Scofield’s*, and the *Thompson Chain Reference Bible*. Benefiting from the discovery of the older Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, these, and many other newer translations have corrected many errors and state the thought more clearly than does the *King James Version*. It must be noted, however, that the newer translations are not entirely accurate either for they may also reflect the theological viewpoints of their translators.

#### HOW THE MEANING OF WORDS CHANGED OVER CENTURIES

The Word of God changes not from generation to generation, but language is a dynamic and ever-changing form of communication, and, as has been pointed out, the Bible was not originally written in the English language. The ancient Hebrew language, in which the Old Testament was written, is now the official language of Israel, and thus, it is easier to verify word meaning. However, the language used in Greece today

compares only to a degree with that which was used by the original writers of the New Testament. Thus, ancient Greek is less understood, and requires scholarly investigation to determine the meaning of New Testament words. By God’s providence, Greek scholars have supplied many helpful reference guides to determine what specific words mean such as Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance.

Since the translation of the *King James Version*, many of the 17<sup>th</sup> century English words used in it have taken on different meanings from those commonly understood at that time. Consider, for example, how the *King James Version* (KJV) translates Psalm 119:147: “*I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy Word.*” The 1885 *Revised Version* (RV) of this text reads: “*I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in thy words.*” In 17<sup>th</sup> century English the word *prevent* meant to *precede*, so it was a correct translation when first used, but it has taken on a different meaning in the English of our day. Obviously, the RV is more correct, for David could not very well *prevent* the *dawning of the morning*. 2 Corinthians 8:1 KJV reads, “*We do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed...*” The 1971 *New American Standard* (NAS) reads, “*We wish to make known to you the grace of God...*” Joshua 9:5 KJV reads, “*clouted upon their feet.*” NAS reads, “*and worn-out and patched sandals on their feet ...*” Exodus 19:18 KJV reads, “*Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke.*” NAS reads, “*Mount Sinai was all in smoke...*” Thus, more modern translations take the confusion out of many outdated words, without detracting from the intent of God’s message.

Another very important English word which has greatly changed in meaning is *hell*. Originally, in 17<sup>th</sup> century England, it meant to *cover*, or *conceal*. In Scotland burying potatoes in the ground for the winter was referred to as *helling the potatoes*. Putting a thatched roof on a cottage was termed *helling the cottage*. Through misapplication, however, the word *hell* has been redefined as a place of fire and torment. In several newer translations, the English word *hell* is not used to translate either the Hebrew word *sheol* of the Old Testament or the Greek word *hades* of the New Testament. Instead, these words are usually left untranslated. This is a step in the right direction; however, had the words *sheol* and *hades* in every instance been properly translated as *the grave*, the original intent of these words would not have been obscured by a misinterpretation. (See End Times Issue #25)

In addition to changes in the meanings of English words, it is important to remember that punctuation was not used in the original writings of the Bible, nor does it appear in the oldest of manuscripts. Punctuation was not generally used until the end of the fifteenth century. *Punctuation, therefore, is not a part of the inspired record*. In the majority of cases, punctuation does not change the meaning of a sentence, however, there are a few cases where interpretations have been misguided by one comma. For example, in Luke 23:43, when Jesus spoke to the thief on the cross, he said, “*Verily I say unto thee **today** shalt thou be with me in paradise.*” Depending on where the comma is placed in this sentence, it will completely change the time frame and meaning. If the comma is placed after *today*, then the understanding is that Jesus was comforting the thief that day. If the comma is placed before *today*, as it is in the *King James Version*, then it means that Jesus expected to be in Paradise that day. The *Rotherham Translation* gives the more accurate understanding of this passage: “*Verily I say unto thee **this day**, with me shalt thou be in Paradise.*” We know this is more accurate, because, according to Scripture testimony, Jesus did not go to paradise that day, but was in the grave for parts of three days after he died. (See Mark 8:31) Additional support for this is stated by the Apostle Paul, declaring that no one other than Jesus would be resurrected until his second advent, nearly 2000 years later. 1 Corinthians 15:22-23 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16

#### MEAT IN DUE SEASON

God promised *meat in due season* to the saints living at the end of the Gospel Age—what the Bible calls *the time of the end*. (Daniel 12:4; Matthew 24:45; Revelation 3:20) Today, with the aid of concordances and the discovery of older manuscripts, God’s children are able to determine as nearly as possible the intent of His inspired Word.

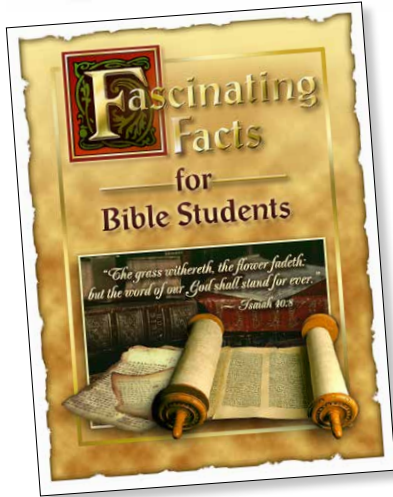
By God’s grace, the Bible has survived every attempt to destroy it and its sanctifying influence upon the true Church. It has been the accumulative effort of many faithful hands and hearts which has brought us the enlightenment of the Scriptures that we cherish today. We owe a great debt of gratitude to those whose lives were sacrificed in torture and death to bring us the Word of God that we now freely enjoy. That their lives should not have been taken in vain, we should handle the Scriptures with great care, reverence and appreciation. “*Sanctify them by Thy truth: Thy Word is truth.*” John 17:17



Conservator working on the Codex Sinaiticus at The British Library.



# VALUABLE BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES



## *Fascinating Facts for Bible Students*

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- Tischendorf's List of New Testament Spurious Passages
- A Chronology of Principle English Translations
- The Effect of Interpolations on Doctrinal Interpretation
- Accumulative English Translation Totals

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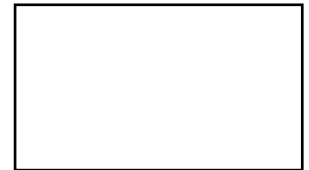
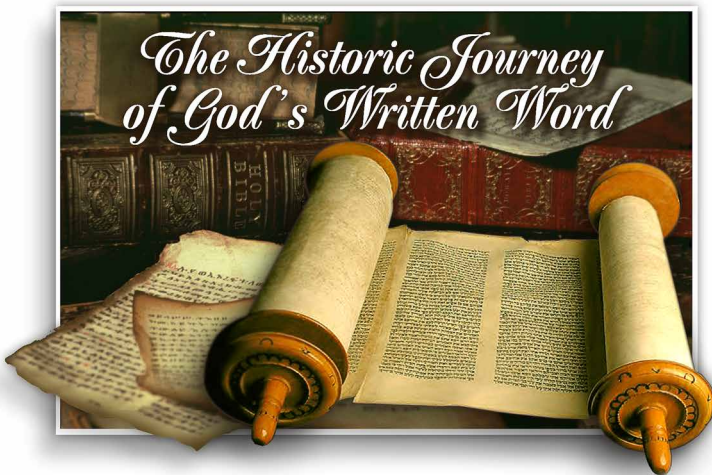
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