

The Sacredness of the Torah

Your personal Bible may have a black, brown, blue, or red leather or imitation leather cover. The words may be a fine-print, red-letter edition distinguishing Christ's words. Your translation may be the popular 1611 King James Version, New King James Version, Amplified, or New American Standard. It may have a red ribbon inserted to mark selective passages. Your Bible might be a translation from a language other than English. In the Jewish synagogue, the Torah is in the form of a scroll and not a leather-bound book.

The Jewish Scriptures read by the rabbi in a Jewish synagogue are penned by scribes on a large scroll. The scroll is rolled together on two wooden spindles, and the script is handwritten with special ink on a kosher, animal-skin parchment. The primary scroll in every synagogue is the Torah-Genesis through Deuteronomy. The other books in the synagogue consist of the Prophets (called the Haftorah), the writings, and the wisdom literature.

Copying the Sacred Text

Often critics will claim that the words (English translation) of our Bible cannot be trusted. They allege that throughout the centuries, copyists have made critical errors when scribing the individual letters and have added some words and omitted others. Those who make such statements are perhaps ignorant of the laws that were established by ancient scribes who were given the duty of copying the Scriptures.

The Parchment: The parchment is made from the skin of a "clean" (kosher) animal. A Torah scroll consists of eighty skins. There are 248 columns on each scroll, and each section holds 3 to 4 columns. There must be three inches across the top and two inches between the columns.

The ink: The ink consists of a special mixture made of

gallnuts, copper sulfate crystals, gum Arabic, and water. The ink is prepared in small amounts to prevent it from drying up while the scribe is meticulously penning the letters on the scroll. The ink must be very dark for the letters to be seen, and they must remain equal in color throughout the scroll.

The pen: A quill pen is used to write the letters. It must come from a clean animal. A goose feather is the choice of many scribes. The most important aspect is that the end of the quill must be cut precisely to ensure the letters are formed properly. Many pens are used when writing a scroll.

Some have asked, how could a scribe ensure that there are no mistakes made when copying the individual letters? The scribes followed strict guidelines when preparing a new Torah scroll.

These include:

The new scroll had to be copied directly from another scroll. Nothing was copied from memory.

The scribe must repeat every word out loud before writing the word down.

If a Torah was written incorrectly, it could not be kept more than thirty days without being corrected or hidden.

Every word and letter must be individually counted when it was completed.

The script was written without vowels-just as they were in ancient times.

Every Hebrew letter and each line is individually examined to ensure that the form of each letter and line is correct. If a mistake is made, that section of the scroll is not permitted to be sewn together with the other parchments.

If there is a letter mistake, a scribe is permitted to scrape off that letter and remake it. It is, however, forbidden to erase the sacred name of God once that name has been penned on

the parchment. If a mistake is made related to God's name, that section of the parchment must be buried in a special place for scrolls, and the process must begin again. There are three other trained persons who each examine the individual sections of the parchments before they are approved.

Once the parchments are completed, the scribe will take threads from the sinews of kosher animals (a cow, ox, or a sheep) and sew the back of the scroll in a special manner so the threads are not visible from the front. The large scroll is then placed on the two rollers, called in Hebrew Etz Chayim, or the "tree of life."

Writing God's name was so sacred that if a scribe was copying God's name on the parchment and a king walked in, the scribe was not permitted to look up until the name of God was completely written. It is reported that before and after writing God's name, the scribe's pen was wiped clean, and in ancient times scribes would leave the table and wash in honor of writing God's holy name on His holy Word. Each scroll was copied from a previous scroll, using the above guidelines and regulations when copying the Torah.

 *Perry Stone is the author of numerous books, including Breaking the Jewish Code (Charisma House), from which this article is excerpted. To purchase a copy, click on the book.*