

Why We Must Protect, Respect God's Word

✖ Torah-observant Jews are extremely respectful of the Torah scroll. In each synagogue, the Torah scroll is placed in a special case called an ark. The scroll is rolled up, and a beautiful, embroidered cover is placed over the scroll to keep dust from collecting on it. When the time comes to remove the scroll for reading, a man is appointed to carefully remove the scroll from the ark and uncover it, placing it on the platform for the speaker.

The speaker actually never places his finger on the scroll itself but will use a metal or wooden instrument about eight inches long, called a yad, which resembles a small hand with a single index finger pointing upward. Called the finger of God, this object is used by the reader and speaker to follow the lines of the text. This serves a dual purpose: it preserves the sanctity of the scroll, and it prevents oily, human fingers from eventually erasing the black-inked letters on the parchment.

It should be pointed out that the Torah is dressed to imitate the high priest's garments. In Exodus 28, the outfit of the priests included a tunic, a belt, a crown, and a breastplate. These four items are a part of the Torah's decoration in the synagogue.

The tunic is the beautiful embroidered covering for the scroll, similar to the blue garment of the high priest. Just as the high priest had a crown placed on his head, each Torah scroll has a beautiful crown of silver that sits atop the handle of the roller. The priest's garment had a special belt fitting around the waist. Likewise, a sash ties the scroll together before placing the adorning cover over it.

The high priest also was given a unique breastplate of gold with twelve embedded gemstones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes. A silver plate, similar to the priest's breastplate, is hung over the top of the wooden rollers.

The Torah is so holy that it is considered on the same level as a human being. Heroic stories are told of Jewish men who risked their lives through the smoke and the flames to rescue a Torah scroll from its ark when synagogues were burned in Europe in years past. This should come as no surprise, since the apostle Paul wrote: "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword" (Heb. 4:12, KJV). The Greek word quick means "alive"!

I have in my personal possession a 300-year-old nonkosher (meaning the ink has faded) Torah scroll given as a gift from a Jewish family from a Russian synagogue. It is encased in a wooden case. I still can sense a special awe when I see it.

After a scroll is used for many years, the ink on the parchment can begin to fade. Once the Hebrew text becomes unreadable, the scroll is not destroyed but is removed from its place and is buried in a Jewish cemetery just like a person. This is because the Torah gives life to the believer and must be respected in burial in the same manner of a righteous person.

How Do You Treat Your Bible?

Compare the detailed and careful treatment of the Torah to the manner in which some Christians treat their Bibles. Most Christians have many Bibles and translations available that are often strewn randomly throughout the house, buried under piles of magazines, or accumulating dust on a shelf, undisturbed for days on end. Other Bibles are permanent fixtures in the pew racks of local churches and are opened briefly each Sunday morning when the pastor reads his sermon text.

When you consider the high price paid to translate and print the Bible, you will experience fresh gratitude for God's Word. In the 1380s, Oxford scholar Wycliffe, opposing the organized religions of his day, handwrote a manuscript of the Bible. His followers, called the Loddards, translated and copied by hand hundreds of Bibles.

Forty-four years later, the pope dug up the bones of Wycliffe and had them scattered. John Hus, a follower of Wycliffe, continued the work of copying God's Word. He was burned alive, with pages from a Wycliffe Bible used for kindling the fire, according to research. For some, the price of translating the Scripture was martyrdom.

Today in some Islamic countries, a believer could be beheaded or arrested for reading or preaching from a Bible. In Communist nations such as China, believers have been incarcerated and tortured if found reading or studying a Bible. In 1990, I met a minister from Bulgaria who, while under Communism, possessed only one page from a Bible, which was John 11. For years he preached to his small, secret group of twelve believers, reading the same message each week-the resurrection of Lazarus. To him this one page was priceless.

Christians must take a lesson from our Jewish friends and treat our Bibles with dignity and respect as we would a living person. After all, Paul proclaimed that the "Word of God is living and powerful" (Heb. 4:12).

 *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.*