

## Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scrolls

During my video, “Bible Versions: What’s the Difference?” I make a quick unplanned comment, around the 22-minute mark, that the Isaiah Scroll of the Dead Sea Scrolls matches the Masoretic text letter for letter. This comment was impromptu, and a question was asked before I had a chance to explain the statement. I did not intend to convey the idea that no discrepancies whatsoever can be found.

The Old Testament was preserved by a letter and word counting system. The words and letters were counted as a way of validating that copies matched.

Some differences happened with the English KJV text. The editions that rolled off the printing press between 1611 and 1769 are different. There were variation, modifications, and updates to spelling, and typeface and font. 1769 was the first year that two things occurred: all the printed words matched the translation work, all the spelling and other updates were applied. So a KJV from 1611 might say, “thov fhalt be faued,” where the 1769 edition would say, “thou shalt be saved.” The 1611 would say “sope” instead of “soap” or “wee” instead of “we.” It is obvious that there were no updates to the translation work itself, but rather updates to the rendering of the language, with no changes to the words.

Prior to 1948, liberal theologians who preferred corrupted versions of the Old Testament made false claims that were widely believed about the preservation and authenticity Masoretic text used for the KJV. They claimed that Masoretic text had been changed and was not reliable. The oldest Masoretic text available was from around 900 AD or so.

When the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, however, the match between the evidence and the Masoretic text was remarkable. While there were very minor updates that occurred over the thousand years, they were akin to the updates to the editions of the KJV as I discussed above. There were no substantive changes. Also, it was very clear that the same letter-for-letter or word-for-word counting system produced both the Masoretic text and the Isaiah Scroll from the Dead Sea, and that the Masoretic text is a faithful representation of the most ancient texts available.

I’ve copied and pasted other sources below that relate to this topic:

From the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia:

### 2. Preservation of Text:

The scribes during these centuries, besides fixing the reading, took means to preserve the text by counting the words and letters, and finding the middle verse (Judges 10:8; Isaiah 33:21), and so forth. The middle verse of the Law is Leviticus 8:7, and the middle of the words falls in Leviticus 10:16. The middle verse of the Hebrew Bible is Jeremiah 6:7. Note was made of words written abnormally (Hosea 10:14; Micah 1:15; Isaiah 3:8) and lists were made up. All such lists were retained in the mind; nothing was written.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.

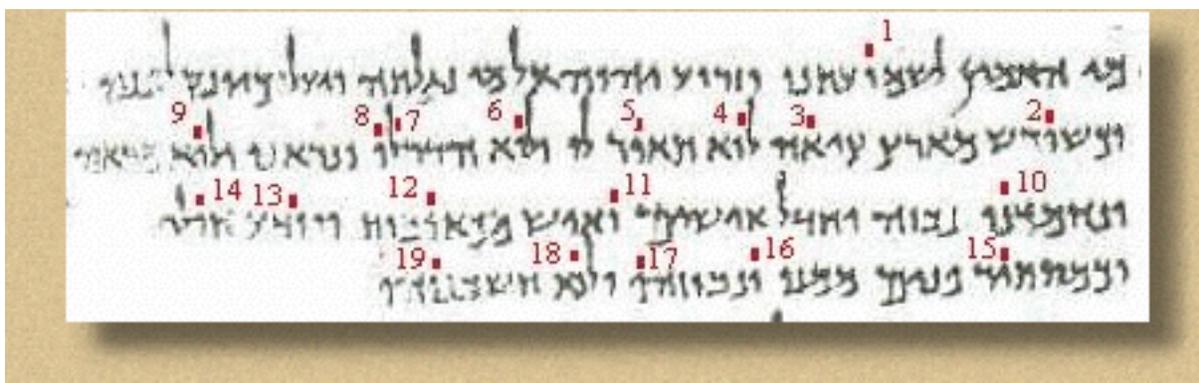


Image from: [http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/31\\_masorite.html](http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/31_masorite.html)

From: <https://www.probe.org/the-dead-sea-scrolls/>

After years of careful study, it has been concluded that the Dead Sea Scrolls give substantial confirmation that our Old Testament has been accurately preserved. The scrolls were found to be almost identical with the Masoretic text. Hebrew Scholar Millar Burrows writes, “It is a matter of wonder that through something like one thousand years the text underwent so little alteration. As I said in my first article on the scroll, ‘Herein lies its chief importance, supporting the fidelity of the Masoretic tradition.’”{6}

A significant comparison study was conducted with the Isaiah Scroll written around 100 B.C. that was found among the Dead Sea documents and the book of Isaiah found in the Masoretic text. After much research, scholars found that the two texts were practically identical. Most variants were minor spelling differences, and none affected the meaning of the text.

One of the most respected Old Testament scholars, the late Gleason Archer, examined the two Isaiah scrolls found in Cave 1 and wrote, “Even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known (A.D. 980), they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The five percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling.”{7}

Despite the thousand year gap, scholars found the Masoretic Text and Dead Sea Scrolls to be nearly identical. The Dead Sea Scrolls provide valuable evidence that the Old Testament had been accurately and carefully preserved.