

# MANUSCRIPT COPIES, THEIR CARE AND PREPARATION

## I. THE OLD TESTAMENT:

A. To prepare a manuscript, the utmost care and strictest rules were observed. Some of the rules, as described in the Talmud, are as follows. The Talmud period was about 100-500 A.D.

1. The parchment must be made from the skin of clean animals.
2. It must be prepared by a Jew only.
3. The skins must be fastened together by strings taken from clean animals.
4. Each column must have no less than 48 or more than 60 lines.
5. The entire copy must be first-lined, and if three words were written in it without the line, the copy was worthless.
6. The ink could only be black and prepared according to a special recipe.
7. No word nor letter could be written from memory, the scribe must have an authentic copy before him.
8. Each word must be read and pronounced aloud before writing it.
9. He must reverently wipe his pen each time before writing the word for "God," and he must wash his whole body before writing the word "Jehovah."
10. One mistake on a sheet condemned the sheet.
11. If three mistakes were found on any page, the entire manuscript was condemned.
12. The revision of a roll must be made within 30 days after the work was finished; otherwise, it was worthless.
13. Every word and letter was counted, and if a letter were omitted, an extra letter inserted, or if one letter touched another, the manuscript was condemned and destroyed at once.

These are only a few, as the list goes on ...

B. Some of these rules may appear extreme and absurd, yet they show how sacred the Holy Word of the Old Testament was to its custodians, the Jews. They give us strong encouragement to believe we have the Old Testament exactly as God gave it to them.

## II. THE NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS:

- A. The papyrus sheets, upon which the New Testament was originally written, were tender; therefore, MANY original manuscripts doubtless soon perished.
- B. During the first three centuries, copies were carefully prepared.
- C. The Roman Emperor, Diocletian, (302 A.D.) induced severe persecution of Christians and ordered all the Christian Scriptures to be destroyed and many copies were burned.

1. To escape death, a few Christians gave up their copies, but many manuscripts were concealed and preserved, and the work of multiplying them continued.
- E. New churches were rapidly being formed in various parts of the Empire and the demands for the Scriptures were increasing.
- F. Papyrus was giving way to vellum.
- G. After Constantine made Christianity the state religion (312 A.D.), he ordered 50 vellum copies to be made for the churches of Constantinople.
- H. Under government protection, copies could be safely and carefully made, and many were. The number of manuscripts increased steadily until the invention of printing (1450), as thousands of them were in circulation.
- I. About this time Greek was soon to cease as being the ONLY language in which the New Testament was USED were made in other languages. Hundreds of copies were made in other languages.
- J. In the time of Christ it was held that Moses received the Law from Jehovah; that he handed it down to Joshua, Joshua to the elders, the elders to the prophets, the prophets to those of the Synagogue, and on to the family of Scribes. All of this would give sanctity, reverence, and care to the Word of God.
- K. The warning of the Old Rabbi to the young scribe shows how jealously the transmission of the sacred text was guarded:

"Take heed how thou dost do thy work, for thy work is the work of Heaven; lest thou drop or add a letter of a manuscript, and so become a destroyer of the world."

### III. THE PRESERVATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT:

- A. From the 4th Century onward there was an increasing number of manuscripts as UNCIALS gave way to the minuscule. Those copies could be multiplied faster.
- B. They were preserved with great care.
- C. From the 6th or 7th Century on, the monks collected, preserved, and copied the manuscripts. The monasteries became places of safety during trou-b-lous time.
- D. During the Dark Ages, preceding the Reformation, many manuscripts were destroyed yet many valuable manuscripts escaped destruction and have been found in various monasteries and other places. However, additional ones are being found each year.



1. Illustration of a Monk Copyist - Dark Ages

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