

Mount Olive Baptist Church
Bible Study Series: *How We Got the Bible*
Session 6 – “The Text of the Old Testament”

Session Aim

To understand how the Old Testament text was transmitted through Hebrew manuscripts, scribal tradition, and the work of the Massoretes; to examine the importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls in confirming the reliability of Scripture; and to reflect spiritually during the Lenten season on our responsibility to cherish, trust, and live the Word God has faithfully preserved.

Opening Reflection: Jerome and Spiritual Realignment

Last session we studied Jerome and his personal crisis that forced him to choose between cultural admiration and spiritual devotion.

Jerome discovered:

- He loved learning more than he loved obedience.
- He respected Scripture but had not fully submitted to it.

That conviction changed his life and led him to devote himself to translating Scripture so others could know God’s Word.

God often uses discomfort to redirect us toward deeper faithfulness.

I. Ash Wednesday and the Beginning of Lent

Lent is the forty-day journey to Resurrection modeled after Christ’s forty days in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1–11). It is one of the oldest practices of the Christian Church — a season intentionally designed for spiritual renewal before we celebrate the resurrection.

Lent Is a Time of:

- Repentance — honestly examining our hearts before God
- Reflection — slowing down to hear God more clearly
- Discipline — praying, fasting, studying, and reordering priorities
- Renewal — allowing God to reshape our desires and direction
- Preparation — walking with Christ toward the cross before celebrating the empty tomb

Lent reminds us that resurrection joy comes after repentance, surrender, and reflection.

It is not about “giving something up” casually. It is about making room for God intentionally.

Ash Wednesday reminds us:

- We are dependent on God.
- Life is fragile and sacred.
- We return to God with humility.

Jerome’s story reflects this same movement — God stripped away distractions so he could return fully to Scripture.

Lent invites us to do the same.

II. Turning to the Old Testament Text (p. 128)

Just as the New Testament depends on reliable Greek manuscripts, our Old Testament depends on reliable Hebrew texts.

The question scholars asked was:

Has the Old Testament been transmitted accurately across centuries?

Chapter 12 answers that question with overwhelming evidence of careful preservation.

III. The Hebrew Manuscripts (pp. 129–130)

Several key manuscripts preserved the Hebrew Bible:

1. The Aleppo Codex

- A beautifully written manuscript of the Hebrew Bible.
- Completed in the 10th century.
- Partially destroyed in 1947 riots.
- Remains one of the most valuable witnesses to the text.

2. The Leningrad Codex

- Written around A.D. 1010.
- The oldest complete manuscript we possess today.
- Forms the foundation of most modern Hebrew Bibles.

3. Other Codices (Cairo Codex, British Library Codex)

- Preserve important portions of the Prophets and Pentateuch.

Why So Few Early Manuscripts?

Jewish scribes did not discard worn copies.

They buried them ceremonially out of reverence for God's name.

IV. Early Scribal Activity (p. 131)

The scarcity of manuscripts does **not** mean careless transmission.

Jewish scribes were:

- Highly trained specialists
- Guardians of the sacred text
- Committed to exact copying

They believed the text was unchangeable.

V. The Work of the Massoretes (pp. 131–132)

The Massoretes (A.D. 500–1000) became the great preservers of the Hebrew Bible.

Their contributions:

- Added vowel markings.
- Created systems to safeguard pronunciation.
- Counted letters, words, and verses to detect errors.

They did not revise Scripture. They protected it.

VI. Strict Copying Regulations (p. 133)

Copying Scripture followed detailed rules:

- Written on skins of clean animals.
- Columns measured precisely.
- No word written from memory.
- Every letter checked carefully.

If a manuscript failed standards, it was buried or destroyed.

VII. The Dead Sea Scrolls Discovery (pp. 134–136)

In 1948, a shepherd discovered scrolls hidden in caves near the Dead Sea.

These manuscripts dated from **200 B.C. to A.D. 100**.

They were over 1,000 years older than any manuscripts previously known.

What Was Found?

More than 800 scrolls and fragments, including:

- A complete scroll of Isaiah

- Portions of nearly every Old Testament book

What Did They Prove?

When compared with later manuscripts like the Massoretic Text:

The message remained essentially identical.

Differences involved:

- Spelling variations
- Minor wording differences
- No doctrinal change

Life Application — A Lenten Response

Lent is when we move from information to transformation.

If scribes guarded Scripture with such devotion, we should approach it with equal reverence.

During these forty days:

- Slow down and listen to Scripture.
- Remove distractions that compete with spiritual attention.
- Walk intentionally toward the cross so Resurrection is experienced, not just observed.

God preserved the Word for us. Lent is our opportunity to return to it.