

# Bibles That Changed the World

The Washington Pentateuch



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## **The Washington Pentateuch**

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# Bibles That Changed the World

## The Washington Pentateuch

### INTRODUCTION

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Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart... Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6:6-9, NRSV).

Every book has a history. But of all the books in the world, the Bible is unique. Not only is its history rich and fascinating, but from its very first words, the Bible has changed the world. Almost nowhere do we see this rich history more clearly than in the first five writings, the books of Moses. Known in Judaism as the Torah and in Christianity as the Pentateuch, the impact of this part of the Bible cannot be overstated. Today, we will get a glimpse of an example of this extraordinary text in an amazing and ancient manuscript that we now call the *Washington Pentateuch*.

### EXAMINING THE ARTIFACT

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While examining the Washington Pentateuch, we'll consider four related topics, beginning with the artifact itself. Where did the Washington Pentateuch come from, what makes it unique, and how was it used?

The *Washington Pentateuch* was created around the year 1000 by the Masoretes, a group of Jewish scribe-scholars, probably in or near Tiberias on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was acquired by a Karaite Jewish community in Yevpatoria, Ukraine, and in 1835, it was gifted to Gabriel, Archbishop of Kherson, in southern Ukraine. By 1876, a Russian theological academy near Moscow had acquired the manuscript, and according to a German publication, manuscript “No. 121” — as it was called at the time — was still with the academy in 1882. Sometime before 1990, an Israeli rabbi acquired it, and in 1990, David Sofer of London, England, purchased the manuscript for his private collection. The Green Collection in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, acquired the manuscript in 2017. And in 2018, the Green family donated it to The Signatry under the curatorial care of Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., where it came to be known as the *Washington Pentateuch*.

As the name suggests, it is a Pentateuch, that is, it consists of the five books of Moses, also known as the Torah. The text of this manuscript is very much like that of the Leningrad Codex, a Masoretic codex on which most translations and editions of the Hebrew Bible are based. But while the Leningrad Codex is a complete Hebrew Bible — or what modern Christians call the Old Testament — the *Washington Pentateuch* contains only the Torah.

The *Washington Pentateuch* is one of the few surviving Masoretic codices in existence. A codex, unlike a traditional Hebrew scroll, is a manuscript in book form made up of folded sheets of parchment paper called folios. This manuscript is remarkably complete, although 28 folios were replaced after the initial work was finished. Twenty-one of these — two folios now in Genesis, nine in Numbers, and ten at the end of the book of Deuteronomy — were written by the

scribe Joseph ben Jacob in 1141 in Alexandria, Egypt. The remaining seven replaced folios are undated, but come from sometime later in the medieval period. We have no record of when any of these folios came to be part of the *Washington Pentateuch*. The first mention of them wasn't until 1876, when Professor Gorski-Platonov of the Moscow Theological Academy, commented on the manuscript in one of his publications. So, they may have been inserted anytime between 1141 and 1876. Still, the manuscript is considered one of the oldest, most complete, and most well-persevered biblical manuscripts in the United States today.

The *Washington Pentateuch* provides a wonderful example of all the standard features of a Masoretic codex. It's presented in three columns with vowels and cantillation marks placed below and above the consonants. Cantillation marks are notations for where to stress the words and how to chant them. In the margins between the columns, you can see some of the Masorah, a highly developed system of textual notes and references. Often, the note is brief, just a single letter, recording the number of times a given word appears. In the top and bottom margins, there are larger comments, often called the "large Masorah," in contrast to the "small Masorah" between the columns. At the end of the volume, is a "final Masorah" with even more notes.

The Masoretes, who created this manuscript, were not only concerned with accuracy and detail, but they also produced beauty. Not only is every page an example of elegant symmetry, but the Masoretes also developed the copying of texts into an artform in its own right, a practice called "micrography." For example, throughout this manuscript, we find scribal notes artfully arranged into creative shapes and decorations. And at the end of the volume, we find the so-called "carpet pages." In this manuscript, these final pages are from Joseph ben Jacob's later work in 1141. But, like other Masoretic codices, they contain the words of the Masorah arranged across an entire page in a way that resembles the weave of a carpet.

The *Washington Pentateuch* is a Masoretic codex. As one of only a few surviving Masoretic codices, and certainly one of the most well preserved, its importance is hard to overstate. Still, it's worth noting how the *Washington Pentateuch* differs from a traditional Torah intended for ritual use in synagogue worship. Ritual Torahs must be scrolls with pages linked in a roll form, rather than folded like a codex. Furthermore, ritual Torah scrolls cannot have anything other than the consonantal text. But this Masoretic codex is full of vowels, cantillation marks, and the Masorah or scribal notes. Because of these differences, scholars have speculated about the origin or use of these manuscripts.

Because this particular copy of the Torah is a codex instead of a scroll, scholars are not certain of why it was produced in this format. What we can be sure of, however, is that over the life of this manuscript, it was used for detailed study of the Torah. And while today we might think of deep study as an individualistic endeavor, that was certainly not the case with this manuscript. For much of its life, it would have been owned by a community, a synagogue, and it would have been used for corporate study, for memorization, and for debate. And its Masorah, or system of scribal notes, would have informed generations of the deep details of the Hebrew text.

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## TRANSMISSION AND STABILITY

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As we consider the *Washington Pentateuch*, we should look at the Torah itself. What was its purpose, how was it transmitted over the centuries, and why should we consider it reliable today?

Torahs, like the *Washington Pentateuch*, have been central to Judaism throughout Israel's history. From its roots on Mount Sinai, the Torah was received as a covenantal document between the Jewish people and the God who liberated them from slavery in Egypt.

Of course, the first book of the Torah, Genesis, makes it clear that the God of ancient Israel is no mere tribal deity. Rather, he is the creator of the whole universe. In Genesis 12:2, 3, God made a covenant with Abram — who was later called Abraham — in which he promised to give him enough land and children to make of him “a great nation ... so that ... all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” The benefits and requirements of this initial covenant relationship are elaborated in these five books. In fact, the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt, told in the second book, is rooted in this earlier covenant.

According to the fifth book, by remembering and following these covenantal instructions, or Torah, Israel would be shaped as a unique people, for a particular purpose. As Exodus 19:6 tells us, they were to serve as “a kingdom of priests” whose service to God and each other would not only benefit their own community, but would make them a light to all the nations.

The earliest history of the transmission of the Torah is largely lost to time. And while there are many scholarly opinions on it, we have very little evidence, outside of the text itself, until sometime in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. At that time, under the leadership of a prominent Jewish scribe and priest named Ezra, the scrolls containing the Torah were once again carefully copied, studied, read and taught to the people.

In this same period, Jewish groups began to distinguish themselves from one another with differing views on the Torah. But while a rich tradition of scribal debate began to develop, the careful copying and transmission of the “five scrolls” remained the priority. And this work has continued as a revered cultural practice throughout the centuries. Even today, late-modern Jewish scribes, known as *sopherim*, painstakingly copy the consonantal text of the Torah in a single scroll made to specific ritual standards. We don't know the names of all the people — or even the names of the groups — who copied every letter of the Torah by hand over the centuries. But we do have numerous documents that provide windows into their work.

For one, as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, Jewish scholars had created a Greek translation of the Torah. This translation is now part of what many scholars call the *Septuagint* — or the Greek Old Testament. After Alexander the Great had conquered the Mediterranean basin in the 330s BC, Greek had become the *lingua franca* — the common language used between people of diverse speech. Jewish communities around the Mediterranean copied and transmitted these Greek translations of their Scriptures. These manuscripts bear witness to the state of the text at that time, and scholars have been able to learn a great deal about the Hebrew texts from which they were translated.

Two and a half centuries later, a sectarian group, who lived on the shores of the Dead Sea at Qumran, kept and copied the Torah, along with the other parts of the Hebrew Bible and documents specific to their group. In 1947, a cache of clay pots was discovered in the caves at Qumran, containing part of what we now call the “Dead Sea Scrolls.” Since that time, scholars have worked to compile, photograph, publish, and compare these texts to other copies of the Hebrew Bible.

Roughly around the same time, another group emerged. These were a class of religious officials and scholars who copied the Torah known only as “the scribes.” Before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, they were, at times, aligned with the priests in the Temple and with the leaders of the Jewish ruling council, known as the Sanhedrin. They were also mentioned on many occasions alongside a popular group of Israel's religious leaders, known as the Pharisees.

For roughly 1000 years, we have no examples of their work. However, we can see evidence of their skill and precision through the Torah manuscripts of the Masoretes.

The Masoretes were a medieval group of experts and scholars who were able to develop this system that solved a complicated problem for the Hebrew language and the Hebrew Bible. The problem that they solved was different people in different parts of the ancient world were reading and pronouncing Hebrew words a little bit differently. So, spelling would vary in certain parts and pronunciation and emphasis on words would be different in different parts of the world. People would pause in different parts of the Hebrew Bible whenever they were cantillizing the Pentateuch in the synagogue, and so this could develop into a problem. Especially as Aramaic and Arabic started to have an influence on the Hebrew language, someone needed to step in to stabilize and codify the Hebrew Bible. And this is what the Masoretes did around 700 to 800. At 900 it started to really develop, and by the year 1000 the Masoretes had developed and finalized this system that completely covered the entire Hebrew Bible. And it worked so well that by 1100 and 1200 pretty much every Jewish community across the Middle East and Europe was using it for their pronunciation and for marking how to properly pronounce... The Masoretes helped with the transmission of the Torah through several factors. One factor is the form that the Masoretes were working in, in the form of the writing, the book form. So, instead of writing in a scroll, because they weren't allowed to — according to Jewish law, they couldn't write their Masoretic system into a scroll form — they were writing in a book form or codex. And so, because they were doing that, the codex, the book form is far more portable than a Torah scroll. So, this is the first major factor that enabled wider transmission of the Torah. Second major factor here is the Masoretes were developing and marketing their system in a way by churning out as many manuscripts as they could. So, they're writing and rewriting and writing another one of the Pentateuch using their Masoretic system with their pronunciation and their spelling to help stabilize all the different traditions. And because they were churning out that many, they essentially flooded the market with just sheer volume of copies of their work that that helped the transmission of the Torah.

— Mr. Herschel A. Hepler

Most modern translations and editions of the Hebrew Bible are based primarily on the Masoretic Text. But if these texts were created hundreds of years after those of the first-century scribes, why should we trust them as reliable and true? Well, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls provides a good test case for how stable the text of the Hebrew Bible was for a period of roughly 1000 years of being copied by hand. If we compare the Masoretic Text to the Dead Sea Scrolls, we find clear reasons to keep copying, studying, printing and believing these texts.

The resemblance of the Masoretic Text to the Dead Sea Scrolls is sometimes exaggerated, but we can't deny that there is a striking similarity between them. In a survey of 125 biblical manuscripts found at Qumran, leading researcher, Emanuel Tov, judged 56 texts to

be like the Masoretic Text; five texts he categorized with the Samaritan tradition; and seven he found similar to the Greek manuscripts of the Septuagint. The other 57, Tov deemed “unaligned.” Later research, however, suggests that many of these unaligned texts ultimately resemble the Masoretic Text. Many of the minor variations found in them are due to scribal activity, like grammatical normalization.

So, by looking at the Dead Sea Scrolls, we’ve been able to see that the text of the Torah has been remarkably stable. And because of this stability, we can view our modern translations of the Hebrew Bible as fully reliable.

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## THE TORAH IN JUDAISM

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The text of the Torah has been remarkably stable for thousands of years, but the Torah is far more than just a book. What is its content, what is its relationship to Judaism, and what do we know about the oral Torah?

The Torah is the beating heart of Jewish identity, faith, and culture. The word “Torah” is often translated as “law” in English. This habit dates back at least to the Greek translation of Torah as *nomos*, which more or less means “law.” But *Torah*’s meaning is far broader. Both “teaching” and “instruction” capture the breadth of the term well. So, we shouldn’t think of the Torah as merely a law code or set of ethical principles. Rather, a correct understanding of these five scrolls or books must include the narrative descriptions of God’s actions in history.

In the Torah, we learn that God created human beings in his image, but that image was corrupted when humankind broke faith with him. Mercifully, God offered a way for them to be restored, and later, made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants through which God would bless the whole world. We learn of how God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt and how he established Israel as a nation-state, constituted by his law that was given at Mount Sinai.

The stories, promises, rules, descriptions, and regulations of the Torah shaped the identity and vocation of God’s covenant people. And by his creative and redemptive choice, God’s “instruction” was designed to make them a unique people to shine as a light to the nations. Of course, the Torah teaches that what makes Israel unique is not Israel itself, but the presence of God in Israel’s midst. So, when ancient Israel compared itself to the nations around them, to the Canaanites, to the Babylonians, and later to the Greeks and Romans, they knew what distinguished them. What made them unique was their God and his Torah. It was God who made it possible for the people to live in his holy and merciful presence. So, by hearing and heeding his instructions, Israel could approach and relate to the Holy One in faithfulness.

In the Hebrew Bible, the Torah serves as a kind of canon within the canon. The books of the Prophets — the second division of the Hebrew Bible — use the Torah to evaluate and critique the leaders and people in their own generation. The Writings — the third division — reflect often on the Torah and its role in Jewish life. For example, in the first Psalm, the psalmist speaks of the blessing of the one whose delight is in the Torah, and who meditates on the Torah day and night.

The Torah was always vital to Jewish life, but it became more central over time. When Solomon built the first Temple in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC, it was seen as the place where God dwelt among his people. It was the site of the annual festivals and the regular sacrifices. It was where



the people offered worship to God to maintain and renew their covenant relationship. But when it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 or 586 BC, the people were sent into exile. In the exile, a system of synagogues developed where the people continued to study and practice Torah and maintain their Jewish identity.

When the exile ended in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, returning Israelites rebuilt the Temple, and it resumed its prominent role in Jewish worship and practice. However, in AD 70, the second Temple was destroyed by the Romans. At this time, the reading, study and practice of Torah was already central to the synagogues in Jerusalem and in the Jewish communities outside of Palestine, known as the Diaspora. But without a Temple, the Torah came to represent God's very presence in the community. And since that time, Torah study and practice have been vital for the survival and spread of every form of Judaism.

**The Torah continued to be the word of God for God's people both before 70 AD and after 70 AD. But things get a little more complicated when it comes to the laws of sacrifice, because in 70 AD that second temple was destroyed, and that meant they didn't have a place, at least a central place, to offer sacrifices. So, when that temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, the mainstream of Judaism in that day, the faithful ones among them, turned back to their practices during the exile, during the Babylonian exile, before they had returned to build the second temple. And in those days, we know that they did not, for the most part, make sacrifices themselves apart from the place in Jerusalem. But rather, the Babylonian Talmud, for example, contains instructions that indicate that worship in the various synagogues all around the Mediterranean world were to be related to temple worship in as many ways as you could but without the actual animal sacrifices. And more than this, the rabbis, again in the Babylonian Talmud, taught that the spirit of sacrificial ceremonies should be followed as the faithful deny themselves. They go through self-denial, and they embrace suffering as God's faithful people and extend generosity to other people. And this is the way they taught that the sacrificial system should be applied prior to the rebuilding. Well, when the destruction of the temple occurred in 70 AD, the mainstream of the Jewish community went back to those kinds of practices or ways of fulfilling what the Torah said about sacrifice.**

— Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

In most forms of Judaism since the destruction of the temple, reference to the Torah has meant not only the written text of the five books of Moses, but also the *oral* Torah. The oral Torah is the tradition and application and interpretation passed down by the rabbis generation after generation. The traditional view of the oral Torah, which is written out in the *Pirkei Avot* — a collection of rabbinic teaching compiled around the year 200 AD — is that the oral Torah was also given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Moses then passed it down to Joshua, who passed it down to the elders, who passed it down to the prophets, who passed it down to the Men of the Great Synagogue, to this body of leaders and rabbis at the time of Ezra.

This oral Torah is recorded in the Mishnah — a kind of rabbinic commentary on the written Torah — and in the Talmud — an expansion of and commentary on the Mishnah. These

collections contain the judgments, opinions, and debates of rabbis, in addition to stories and expansions on the biblical narrative. Of course, not every Jewish group, nor every Jewish person, holds this traditional view of the oral Torah and its development. In the time of Jesus, the party of the Sadducees rejected the oral Torah. Unlike the Pharisees, who considered the oral Torah to be equal in authority to God's written Word, the Sadducees held that only the five scrolls of Moses were Holy Scripture. And Jesus himself raised questions in his own teachings and practice of Torah about "the tradition of the elders" in places like Matthew 15:2 and Mark 7:3, 5.

Even today, a Jewish community known as the Karaites, whose origins may date back to the earliest disputes about the oral tradition during the Hasmonean period, only recognize the written text itself of the Torah as authoritative for their life together in community. Still, whether or not people view the oral Torah as authoritative or only the written, its impact has been, and continues to be, central to Jewish identity, faith, and culture.

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## CHRISTIANITY AND THE TORAH

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As important as the Torah is in Judaism, it's also vital to Christianity. What did Jesus have to say about the Torah, how did early Christians view its instructions, and what does it mean for us today?

Christianity has had a different relationship to the Torah than Judaism has had. But from the beginning, the books of Moses have been a part of the Christian Scriptures and an integral part of Christian theology and ethics. Throughout the writings that make up the New Testament, we find many references to the role of the Torah — referred to as the Law — in the Christian life. Nowhere do we find a more compelling presentation of the Law than we do in the teachings of Jesus.

Throughout the history of Christianity, many people came to believe that Jesus disregarded the Law in favor of his own instruction. However, at no time did Jesus contradict the Torah, or any of the Old Testament. Instead, he taught in ways that corrected common misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the Law. This is why all of the gospel writers describe Jesus of Nazareth as a teacher of Torah who challenged "the tradition of the elders." Many scribes and Pharisees in his day presented the Law based on their traditions rather than on the content of the Law itself. And they tended to focus on outward obedience, rather than on the condition of the heart. By contrast, Jesus affirmed the Torah's requirement from Deuteronomy 10:16 to "circumcise ... your heart" when he taught against the lust, coveting, deceit, pride, and envy that corrupts us from within.

Perhaps, most famously, in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pressed his point that outward conformity to the commandments falls short of the Torah's true teaching. First, in Matthew 5:17, he affirmed the authority of Torah when he said:

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17).*

Then, using conventional forms of rabbinic debate, he recaptured the heart of Torah with a series of statements that focused on true obedience to God's commands. For instance, in Matthew 5:21-22 Jesus said:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not murder...” But, I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment (Matthew 5:21-22).

Jesus applied the Law from the inside out, from inner affections to outer practices.

According to Jesus, Torah-keeping is rooted in loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving your neighbor as you love yourself. And he extended this love of neighbor beyond the boundaries of ethnic Israel to offer dignifying love and restorative righteousness to Samaritans, Syrophenicians, and even to the Roman soldiers who occupied Israel.

But Jesus came not only as Israel’s teacher. He also came as the Messiah. He came to fulfill the requirements of Torah by his life, death and resurrection. He was the “second Adam,” the one who would carry out God’s law perfectly and reverse the curse of sin and death. And he came to fulfill the vision of the prophets as the Son of David, to extend God’s righteousness to the nations.

With a vision of this fulfillment, he called Saul of Tarsus as his apostle to the Gentiles — those who were not Jews by birth. Saul, who is better known by his Greek name Paul, was a Pharisee of Pharisees, a zealous and strict adherent of the Law. But he experienced a radical reorientation to the Law through a visionary encounter with Jesus.

According to the book of Acts, a pharisee named Saul was educated by the great sage, Gamaliel in Jerusalem. Saul was so zealous for the Law that he helped the Jewish ruling council pursue and punish those whom they deemed violators of the Torah — especially those who were following Jesus. Indeed, Saul was on his way to Damascus with several arrest warrants when he experienced a vision of the risen Jesus. Seeing now for himself that the confession of Jesus’ followers was true and not blasphemous, as he had assumed, Saul had to rethink his understanding of the Torah: What does Torah mean in relation to Christ?

Paul knew well that in the Old Testament, Moses required circumcision for all Jewish males, observance of the sacrifices and feasts, and adherence to eating kosher food. He knew that faithful observance of Torah marked Israel as God’s unique people, whose righteousness revealed God’s wisdom, and whose repentance and sacrifices displayed God’s mercy. But he also knew that Israel was called to fulfill God’s promises to Abraham, including the promise to bless all the families of the earth. So, now that the Messiah had come, did those promises to the nations mean that Gentiles must adhere to Jewish laws, like circumcision? Paul found answers in the Law itself, in the Prophets, and in the events of Jesus’ life and ministry.

**Paul knew that the Law couldn’t be set aside. It needed to be reinterpreted; it needed to continue to be practiced, but now in relation to what he’d experienced with the risen Jesus. As he studies, he understands, first of all, the prominence of the Abrahamic promise in relation to the Law. The Law must not only be understood in relation to Jesus but in relation to the promise that God made to Abraham. He realizes that before the Law was given, Abraham believed God. So, it wasn’t the giving of the Law that established Israel’s relationship with God, it was actually Abraham’s faith in God. He also begins to understand that the Law has limits. The Law has the power to reveal sin. It can expose the ways in which our living is not right,**

it's out of accord with God's will, but he understands because of Israel's exile, because of Israel's disobedience, that the curse of the Law had fallen upon Israel. That because of their disobedience Israel had experienced death just as God had promised in the Law itself. But the Law didn't have power to bring them back. It was in his experience with the risen Jesus that Paul understood who had the power to give life out of death. But there's something else. Just like Jeremiah had promised would happen, that God would give his Spirit and put it in their hearts, put the Law in their hearts, that's what had happened. Paul began to understand through his encounter with the risen Christ, and his rereading of the Law and the Prophets, his life was reoriented towards the Law, and he could walk in the ways of the Law now with a new power, a new ability.

— Dr. Gregory R. Perry

For the apostle Paul, a new chapter had opened in redemptive history. He believed that the Torah remained authoritative, but it must be studied and practiced in relation to the Messiah, the One who fulfilled its pattern of righteousness. By the sacrifice of Christ and his gift of the Holy Spirit, the new covenant had dawned — the one foreseen by the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 31:31. The sacrifices are no longer necessary, because Christ himself became our sin offering. Journeying to the holy place does not require a trip to Jerusalem because the Holy Spirit is already present in all those who confess that Christ is Lord. So, in 2 Timothy 3:14-17, Paul wrote this to his protégé, Timothy:

Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed ... [F]rom childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is ... profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

Paul's writings sum up how the Torah, the Law, as he understood its fulfillment in Jesus, shapes Christian communities. Where it is studied in relation to Christ and embraced from the heart, the Law or Torah, like all of Scripture, equips God's people "for every good work."

In the New Testament, we find positive claims about the law. The law is from God. In Romans 7:12, Paul called it "holy and righteous and good." The law shows God's perfection and perfect standard. Further, the New Testament provides the perspective that the law is ultimately about Jesus. It points to him. It is enacted and kept by him. And, finally, it is fulfilled in him. At the intersection of God's perfect law and sinful humanity, the New Testament presents Jesus as the solution, the sacrificial and priestly means of making God's covenant people "holy to the Lord."

We shouldn't think of close, detailed study of the Torah as something that's separate and distinct from devotion. Within both Judaism and Christianity, the study of the five books of Moses is a religious obligation, approached both as a delight and as a privilege.

## CONCLUSION

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In the *Washington Pentateuch*, the meticulous notes of the Masorah are not the product of dry scholarship, but of a fervent devotion that produced beautiful designs, even a new artform, to assist memory and to draw students closer to God. In a time before computers, even before readily accessible and affordable writing material, the Masoretes devised a system of studying the Torah so comprehensive that they counted every word, every grammatical form, and tabulated how often they appeared in the text.

When we look at a manuscript like the *Washington Pentateuch*, we are not only witnessing linguistic knowledge and artistry, we get a glimpse of the devotion of those who made and used it. They were devoted to the God of whom the text speaks, a God who makes and keeps promises, a God who shapes unique communities of purpose and blessing, who are called to serve everyone around them.

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## CONTRIBUTORS

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## GLOSSARY

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**A.D. 70** – Year that Jerusalem and the second temple were destroyed by the Romans

**Canaanites** – People descended from Canaan, the son of Ham, who lived in the land of Canaan before Joshua's conquest

**cantillation** – The practice of ritual chanting of passages from the Hebrew Bible

**cantillation marks** – Notations on religious texts which instruct how the ritual chant is to be sung

**codex** – A manuscript in book form made up of folded sheets called folios

**covenant** – A binding legal agreement made between two people or groups of people, or between God and a person or group of people

**Dead Sea Scrolls** – Collection of ancient scrolls, first discovered in caves at Qumran in 1947, that includes Old Testament texts and extra-biblical writings documenting the distinct teachings of an ancient Jewish community

**Diaspora** – The population of Jews who were dispersed from the land of Israel and settled in other regions

**Hasmonean dynasty** – (ca. 141-37 BC) period of rule by a Jewish family originally positioned as high priests and later as kings, which expanded Judah primarily through conquest

**Karaite** – A sect of Jews that dismissed the oral tradition of the Torah and argued that the text of the Hebrew Bible was the sole source of all truth and religious practice

**Masorah** – A highly developed system of textual notes and references for the Hebrew Bible, created by the Masoretes between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries

**Masoretes** – Jewish scribe-scholars in the 6<sup>th</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup> centuries who developed a system of textual markings and notes that helped to stabilize, codify and preserve the text of the Hebrew Bible

**Masoretic Text** – Traditional text of the Hebrew Bible produced by the Masoretes between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries; considered authoritative by most Jews and Protestants

**micrography** – Term derived from the Greek word for “small writing”; practice of writing minute script in the form of decorative pictures and patterns or as notations in the margins of ancient texts

**Mishnah** – The first authoritative written collection of Jewish oral tradition and rabbinic commentary on the written Torah, known as the “oral Torah”

**nomos** – Greek term (transliteration) meaning “law” or “custom”

**oral Torah** – A collection of rabbinic teachings compiled around the year 200 AD; the tradition, application, and interpretation of the written Torah passed down by the rabbis generation after generation

**Pentateuch** – First five books of the Old Testament

**Pharisees** – Jewish religious sect from the first century known for their strict observance of the Law; believed in the future resurrection, but also believed that God would not intervene until Israel became obedient to the Law

**Pirkei Avot** – Usually translated “Ethics of the Fathers”; a collection of rabbinic teaching found in the Mishnah, compiled around the year 200 A.D., which transmits advice and insights on ethics and relationships

**Qumran** – Archaeological site near the Dead Sea where the *Dead Sea Scrolls* were found in caves during the last half of the 20th century

**Sadducees** – Jewish sect at the time of Christ that only adhered to the five books written by Moses (Genesis–Deuteronomy) and did not believe in angels, spirits, or the resurrection of the dead

**Samaritans** – People of Samaria whose pagan ancestors had intermarried with Israelites living in the northern kingdom; practiced a syncretistic form of the Jewish religion; considered by the Jews to be unclean and despicable

**Sanhedrin** – The highest court and council of ancient Israel that had both religious and civil jurisdiction

**scribe** – An ancient Jewish scholar and teacher of religious law who served as a copyist, editor and interpreter of the Hebrew Bible

**Septuagint** – Greek translation of the Old Testament

**Solomon** – Son of King David and third king of Israel who was known for his wisdom and wealth; expanded Israel’s borders and built the first temple in Jerusalem

**sopherim** – Literally, “one who counts”; Jewish scribe-scholars who precisely transcribed the text of the Hebrew Bible

**Talmud** – Collection of rabbinic teachings on Jewish civil and ceremonial law spanning approximately 600 years, beginning in the first century A.D.

**temple** – Building in Jerusalem where the Israelites worshiped God and where God promised to be present with his people in a special way; destroyed in 586 B.C., later rebuilt, and destroyed again in A.D. 70

**Torah** – The books of Moses or the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, often referred to as “the Law”; known in Christianity as “the Pentateuch”