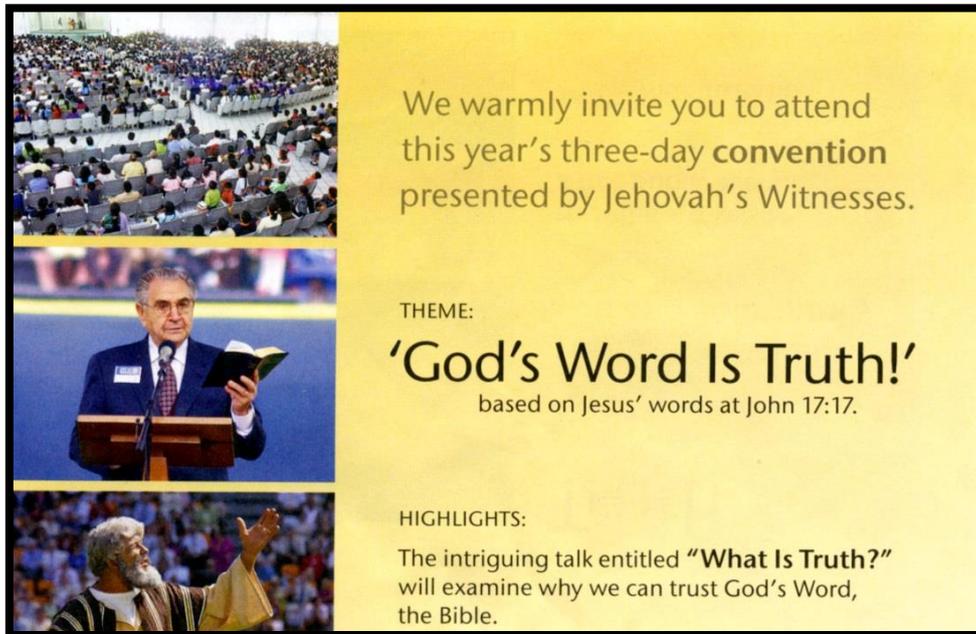


“HOW DO WE KNOW THAT OUR COPIES OF THE SCRIPTURES ARE AUTHENTIC?”

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The theme of the 2013 Jehovah’s Witness Convention was: “*God’s Word Is Truth! based on Jesus’ words at John 17:17*”. The advertising states that the “Highlights” include “*the intriguing talk entitled ‘What Is Truth?’*”



We warmly invite you to attend this year’s three-day convention presented by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

THEME:
‘God’s Word Is Truth!’
based on Jesus’ words at John 17:17.

HIGHLIGHTS:
The intriguing talk entitled “**What Is Truth?**” will examine why we can trust God’s Word, the Bible.

32-page booklet released

The Convention saw the release of the 32-page booklet, “*How Can You Have a Happy Life?*”¹ The booklet includes the question, “*How do we know that our copies of the Scriptures are authentic?*”

“Ezra, a skilled copyist”

The booklet cites Ezra as being “*a skilled copyist* in the law of Moses’ [who] exercised extreme care in order to preserve the text of the Scriptures. (Ezra 7:6)”.²

However, not one of the renderings of Ezra 7:6 at <http://biblehub.com/ezra/7-6.htm> describes Ezra as a “*skilled copyist*”. Ezra is commonly described as: “Well versed in the Law of Moses” or as “A scribe skilled in the Law of Moses”. The rendering “skilled copyist” comes from the booklet’s own *New World Translation*.

*[Ezra] was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given; the meaning is, not that he had a quick hand in writing out copies of it, but was well versed in the knowledge of it; had studied it thoroughly, well instructed in it, and was abundantly qualified to teach it to others; he was an eminent doctor of the law; so scribes, in the New Testament, who are the same with the lawyers, were such as were teachers of the law; the word here used in the Arabic language signifies to be expert.*³

This Ezra ... was a ready scribe in the law of Moses—The term “scribe” does not mean merely a penman, nor even an attorney well versed in forms of law and skilled in the

¹ All people featured in the booklet are Jews.

² Italics supplied.

³ [Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible](http://biblehub.com/ezra/7-6.htm) at <http://biblehub.com/ezra/7-6.htm> (accessed 19 August 2013) (underlining supplied)

method of preparing public or private deeds. He was a rabbi, or doctor, learned in the Mosaic law, and in all that related to the civil and ecclesiastical polity and customs of the Hebrew people. Scribes of this description possessed great authority and influence.⁴

In any case, many generations of copyists and redactors after Ezra amended the documents. And he had no hand in the writings produced after his time.

“The Dead Sea Scrolls ... differ very little from one another”

The paragraph in the Watchtower’s booklet continues:

The Dead Sea Scrolls ... differ very little from one another and from the traditional Hebrew text in use today.

The paragraph specifically cites noted Dead Sea Scrolls scholar Geza Vermes. In the immediate context of the sentence quoted by the booklet, Vermes wrote:

The Qumran scriptural scrolls, and especially the fragments, are characterized by extreme fluidity: they often differ not just from the customary wording but also, when the same book is attested by several manuscripts, among themselves. In fact, some of the fragments echo what later became the Masoretic text; others resemble the Hebrew underlying the Greek Septuagint; yet others recall the Samaritan Torah or Pentateuch, the only part of the Bible which the Jews of Samaria accepted as Scripture. Some Qumran fragments represent a mixture of these, or something altogether different.⁵

Geza Vermes thus contradicts the booklet’s assertion that the Dead Sea Scrolls ... differ very little from one another”. The 2013 Convention is about “truth”. The truth is that the Dead Sea Scrolls DO differ substantially from one another.

“The Dead Sea Scrolls ... differ very little ... from the traditional Hebrew text”

The “Hebrew text” is commonly known as the Masoretic Text, in recognition of the Torah scholars of the 7th to 11th centuries CE.

The oldest copies of the Masoretic Text only date back to the 10th century, nearly 1000 years *after* the time of Christ. And these texts differ from the originals in many specific ways. The Masoretic text is named after the Masoretes, who were scribes and Torah scholars who worked in the middle-east between the 7th and 11th centuries. The texts they received, and the edits they provided, ensured that the modern Jewish texts would manifest a notable departure from the original Hebrew Scriptures.

Historical research reveals five significant ways in which the Masoretic Text is different from the original Old Testament:

1. The Masoretes admitted that they **received corrupted texts** to begin with.
2. The Masoretic Text is written with a **radically different alphabet** than the original.
3. The Masoretes **added vowel points** which did not exist in the original.
4. The Masoretic Text **excluded several books** from the Old Testament scriptures.
5. The Masoretic Text includes **changes to prophecy and doctrine**.⁶

As highlighted by the book of Jeremiah, the differences between the between the Greek text⁷ and the Masoretic Text are significant.

⁴ [Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary](http://biblehub.com/ezra/7-6.htm) at <http://biblehub.com/ezra/7-6.htm> (accessed 19 August 2013)

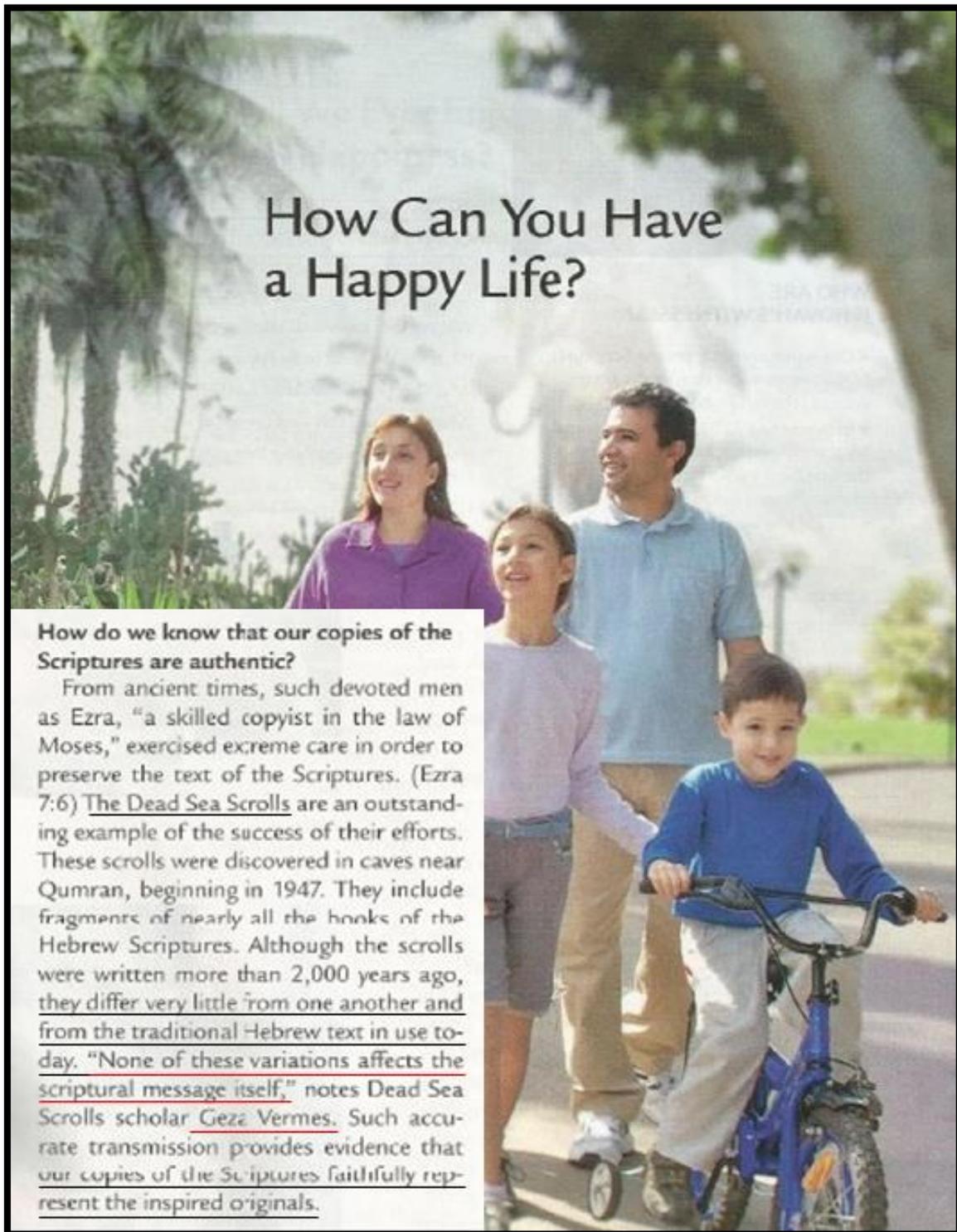
⁵ *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, page 38, by Geza Vermes, Penguin Books 2004

⁶ <http://theorthodoxlife.wordpress.com/2012/03/12/masoretic-text-vs-original-hebrew/> (accessed 19 August 2013). Refer also to <http://www.biblebelievers.org.au/masorete.htm>

⁷ Commonly referred to as the Septuagint [LXX]. The term covers a number of variant readings.

The message provided by the variant readings might have been similar, but that is not justification for asserting that this shows the current texts “faithfully represent the ... originals”, or that they “differ very little from one another”. The fact is that there are significant variations.

It is ironic that the Watchtower Society should say that the current texts faithfully represent the “inspired originals” when it amends the New Testament by adding its mystic word “Jehovah” throughout.



How Can You Have a Happy Life?

How do we know that our copies of the Scriptures are authentic?

From ancient times, such devoted men as Ezra, “a skilled copyist in the law of Moses,” exercised extreme care in order to preserve the text of the Scriptures. (Ezra 7:6) The Dead Sea Scrolls are an outstanding example of the success of their efforts. These scrolls were discovered in caves near Qumran, beginning in 1947. They include fragments of nearly all the books of the Hebrew Scriptures. Although the scrolls were written more than 2,000 years ago, they differ very little from one another and from the traditional Hebrew text in use today. “None of these variations affects the scriptural message itself,” notes Dead Sea Scrolls scholar Geza Vermes. Such accurate transmission provides evidence that our copies of the Scriptures faithfully represent the inspired originals.

Direct quotation from Geza Vermes⁸

The Qumran finds have also substantially altered our views concerning the text and canon of the Bible. The many *medieval* Hebrew scriptural manuscripts, representing the traditional or Masoretic text, are remarkable for their almost general uniformity. Compared to the often meaningful divergences between the traditional Hebrew text and its ancient Greek, Latin or Syriac translations, the few variant readings of the Masoretic Bible manuscripts, ignoring obvious scribal errors, mainly concern spelling.

By contrast, the Qumran scriptural scrolls, and especially the fragments, are characterized by extreme fluidity: they often differ not just from the customary wording but also, when the same book is attested by several manuscripts, among themselves. In fact, some of the fragments echo what later became the Masoretic text; others resemble the Hebrew underlying the Greek Septuagint; yet others recall the Samaritan Torah or Pentateuch, the only part of the Bible which the Jews of Samaria accepted as Scripture. Some Qumran fragments represent a mixture of these, or something altogether different. It should be noted, however, that none of these variations affects the scriptural message itself. In short, while largely echoing the contents of biblical books, Qumran has opened an entirely new era in the textual history of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Community's attitude to the biblical canon, i.e. the list of books considered as Holy Writ, is less easy to define, as no such list of titles has survived. Canonical status may be presumed indirectly either from authoritative quotations or from theological commentary. As regards the latter, the caves have yielded various interpretative works on the Pentateuch (the Temple Scroll, reworked Pentateuch manuscripts, the Genesis Apocryphon and other commentaries on Genesis) and the Prophets (e.g. Isaiah, Habakkuk, Nahum, etc.), but only on the Psalms among the Writings, the third traditional division of the Jewish Bible. From the texts available in 1988, I collected over fifty examples of Bible citations which were used as proof in doctrinal expositions, thus indicating that they were thought to possess special religious or doctrinal importance.

On the other hand, the Psalms Scroll from Cave 11 contains seven apocryphal poems, including chapter L1 of the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira, not annexed to, but interspersed among, the canonical hymns. This may be explained as a liturgical phenomenon, a collection of songs chanted during worship; but it may, and in my view probably does, mean that at Qumran the concept 'Bible' was still hazy, and the 'canon' open-ended, which would account for the remarkable freedom in the treatment of the text of Scripture by a community whose life was nevertheless wholly centred on the Bible.

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⁸ *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, pages 38 - 40, by Geza Vermes, Penguin Books 2004 (underlining and *italics* have been added)