

What is the Masorah?

The Masorah is the tradition or process that the Masoretes used to determine and maintain the precise text of the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible / Old Testament). The Masorah records details about the Tanakh designed to prevent the loss or misplacement of a single letter or word during the process of copying.

The following are examples of the precise nature of the Masorah:

It records the number of times that several letters occur in the various books of the Bible.

It records the number of words, number of verses and the middle word and the middle verse of the unit passage.

It records the number of expressions and combinations of words of each unit passage.

The Masorah is the reason why the Masoretic Text (MT) is the authoritative text of the Tanakh. The Masorah can be seen within the Masoretic Text as it defines its precise text and vocalization and accentuation of its lettering.

Masoretes, a Jewish scribal community during the 7th and 10th century A.D., were the authorized custodians of the Tanakh and responsible for the fidelity of the Masoretic Text. An example of one of the oldest copy of the Masoretic Text is the Aleppo Codex dated to the 10th century.

The Masorah can be seen in the oldest and best Masoretic texts. On every page, the Tanakh is arranged in two or more columns and distributed between the upper and lower margins are a varying number of lines of smaller writing.

Masorah Magna or Great Masorah is often the small writings in the side margins.

Masorah Parva or Small Masorah is the small writings between the columns.

The illustration given to the right is a reduced facsimile of a three column Masoretic Manuscript (16.25" x 12.375"), written in a German hand, about the year A.D. 1120.

The Masorah Magna is the small writing in the upper (four lines) and lower margins (seven lines) of the manuscript.

The Masorah Para is the small writing in the outer margins and between the three columns.

This information contains the necessary details to insure correct transcription of the manuscript and maintain its fidelity.

Reference:

1. Bullinger EW, The Companion Bible, Zondervan Bible Publishers (1974), Appendix 30.

