

THE Lodz TORAH

“Our New Torah is Complete!”

Imagine a small town in Germany (or possibly Poland). Something is about to take place in this poor community that will ripple through centuries. It happened before Mozart ever wrote a note, before Martin Luther launched the Reformation, before Sir Isaac Newton discovered the primary laws of physics, and even before Columbus sailed for India and instead discovered America. Imagine with me what the scene must have been like as it occurred in this impoverished Jewish community in the mid-1400s.

It was nearing midnight when the Jewish scribe, Baruch, was startled by a sudden knock on his door. His heart began to pound like a hammer as he wondered who could possibly be calling at this late hour. Cautiously and hesitantly, he opened the door. He stepped back quickly as the figure in the darkness burst into his home.

“Moshe!” said Baruch when he had recovered his senses. “What is wrong? What brings you here so late? And why are you grinning as if you had suddenly inherited a fortune?”

“Baruch, it is certified!” Moshe exclaimed. “I simply could not wait to tell you.”

Moshe’s elation spread immediately to Baruch. He knew exactly what Moshe meant. His friend was bringing him the news he had been hoping to hear for many weeks. The rabbi had just certified the Torah that Baruch had been copying for just over a year. The 304,805 words he had copied from Genesis to Deuteronomy was a work of art as far as the rabbi was concerned.

During the following Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath), Baruch spoke to those gathered at the synagogue in their small village. “I can proudly announce to all of you,” he began, pointing to the Torah, “that our new Torah is complete! It has been certified by our rabbi.” The Jewish congregation was overwhelmed with emotion.

It was easy for me to visualize a scene such as the above, because over 550 years later I, too, was overwhelmed with emotion as I touched the edge of that very same Torah. I was now the owner—more precisely, I was the caretaker—of this rare ancient text. And I too was deeply moved as I held it tightly in my arms.

You may wonder, why would I treat the mere copying of a manuscript so dramatically? Why such emotion over a medieval copy of ancient Scripture? There is good reason you and I should be moved by this discovery, and I want to share it with you.

Discovery of a True Treasure

I had always wanted to touch an ancient manuscript of Scripture. I remember when I first saw the oldest known New Testament manuscript. It was a fragment of John's Gospel displayed in the John Rylands Library of Manchester, England, dating back to within fifty years of the time when the apostle John penned the original. I wanted to reach out and touch it. Though I knew that manuscript itself was of immense value, to me it represented an even greater treasure—the reality that a loving God wanted to communicate directly to me.

Now I am the caretaker not only of a medieval Hebrew manuscript, but also of a unique complete Torah (the Jewish term for the first five books of the Old Testament). I named it the Lodz Torah in honor and memory of the Jews who suffered and died at the hands of the Nazis during World War II. At that time, Lodz was the second largest city in Poland. During the war, it became known as the Lodz Ghetto, one of the largest Jewish detention camps in German occupied Europe. This ancient scroll had been preserved through the centuries and became the synagogue reading copy of the twentieth-century Jews in Poland. I thought it fitting to name it after a group of people who had such reverence for God's Word and preserved it through such persecution. But when I acquired this scroll, I had no idea as to what I actually had in my possession.

The Lodz Torah has been dated between 1450 and 1500. The scroll was written on thirty-six calfskin sheets or panels. When completely rolled out, it measures just over seventy-two feet. It is in amazingly good condition, but that is not what makes it so rare.

Because the original Jewish caretakers of this Torah were from a poor community, they couldn't afford to commission a new copy when this one suffered damage. So over the years they hired scribes to patch it up and re-ink areas in order to keep it in perfect condition.



Normally, deteriorating and fading Hebrew scrolls were stored away when a new one was completed. That didn't happen with the Lodz Torah, making it an unusually old complete Torah. Because of its dating, the region it was from, the use of earlier writing traditions, and other internal factors, it meant I had acquired a manuscript that would normally be placed right alongside those found in the largest private collections of Hebrew scrolls in the entire world!

Once I had researched the background of the manuscript and had it thoroughly analyzed, I realized what a unique and amazing treasure had come into my possession. I sensed a deep responsibility to share this treasure with you and the world. The very existence of the scroll has for us a significant message about how and why God preserved his Word. And, I feel compelled to tell it.

The Importance of God's Written Word

Over 3,000 years ago the ground shook, smoke billowed from Mount Sinai, and the children of Israel heard the voice of God. "Search all of history," Moses wrote, "from the time God created people on the earth until now.... Has anything as great as this ever been seen or heard before?" (Deuteronomy 4:32). Not only had God spoken audibly, but he had also personally given Moses "two stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, written by the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18). In addition to writing directly, as God did on the stones, he also had Moses come up before him, where he would speak to him "face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Exodus 33:11). Moses would then write down what God had told him.

The first five books of the Bible contain the record of God communicating directly to the children of Israel about who he is. These Israelites, like all humans, were lost and separated from God, which "broke his heart" (Genesis 6:6, NLT). The words of God written down by Moses were a revelation of the "God who is passionate about his relationship with you" (Exodus 34:14, NLT). As he did then, God wants you and me to know him and his ways so that we might regain a relationship with him.

God's written Word chronicles the history of his creation and what happened when humans chose not to trust in him. Then it tells us of his masterful and merciful plan to restore the relationship that he once enjoyed with the first human couple. Without this written history—God's Word—we would have no way of knowing how to get right with God. The children of Israel—the Jewish people—understood this. It was the Jewish scribes who reverently and meticulously copied and preserved God's Word, passing it down from one generation to another so we could know God and his ways. They were not about to allow a single word from God to be changed, distorted, added to, or left out. And neither was the scribe of the Lodz Torah.

The Case of the Meticulous Lodz Scribe

The Lodz Torah, as it survives today, was prepared predominantly by a dedicated Ashkenazi scribe some 550 years ago. Major sections were replaced over time by four other scribes. It is likely these scribes came from the same family or certainly knew each other's family. From one generation to another, they carefully preserved God's Word.

Baruch, as I am calling him, was a scribe who probably followed the typical requirement of preparing the skins, ink and traditions of precisely copying the Scripture. He certainly was a rigorously trained, highly skilled, passionate professional who was very respected in his community as a religious scholar. His work was eye straining and back breaking. He worked hours on end hunched over a table tediously copying Scripture tediously in a room dimly lit by candles or an oil lamp.

Baruch had talent, discipline, and extreme reverence for God's Word. He replicated each letter from an existing medieval Hebrew manuscript in order to create this

particular Torah. To be certified as a scribe, Baruch had to memorize 4,000 different laws and principles dictating how to copy Scripture. Without knowing each of these laws of manuscript transcription, he would not be qualified to copy the sacred text. Let's follow Baruch on his all-important task.

To begin, Baruch obtained ceremonially clean animal skins from a Jewish butcher. He then created the panels for the scroll. His next step in preparing the scroll was to purchase barley leaves from the market. Then he headed out to a wooded area to gather gallnuts. With his knife he cut off a number of gallnuts from the limbs of trees. These "nuts" or nodules are formed by insects, such as wasps. The trees react chemically to the insect larvae, creating these protuberances called gallnuts.



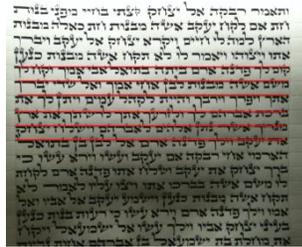
Next Baruch carefully soaked the animal skins in water mixed with his barley leaves. For this particular scroll, he soaked five skins. The soaking softened the skins, making it easier for him to scrape off the hair and fibers. Then, he soaked the gallnuts in scalding hot water for six hours, causing them to release an acidic chemical compound called tannin. He treated the skins in this solution. This tanning process is designed to produce smooth skins. He also acquired strips of muscles from the legs of a kosher calf. Once treated, these muscle strands became the string he would later use to sew the manuscripts into a seventy-two-foot long scroll.

Baruch continued to scrape each skin to remove the hairs. He would scrape and sand each skin until it was perfectly smooth. It took him days to prepare these skin panels. Each became a beautiful cream color. Once each and every letter of the Torah was copied onto these skins, he then sewed them together. That was the last thing he did to form the Torah into a scroll.

But before he had a finished scroll, he had to make sure every letter was copied clearly and straight. Once our scribe carefully trimmed the skins into uniformed rectangles, he made tiny pinpricks along the top and bottom of the panels. He carefully placed small dowel pins about the size of toothpicks in each of the holes. He was preparing to mark the skins with a grid of symmetric columns.

Next he strung tight threads horizontally from one dowel pin to the other. Then, using the threads as guides, he took a dull knife that would not cut through the skin and carefully scored the surface horizontally. This indented the skin slightly to form a distinguishable line. After lining the entire skin horizontally, he repeated the same process vertically, creating a perfect cross-pattern grid on which to copy each and every letter of God's written Word.

In the Western world we write above the lines. Baruch instead, like all Jewish scribes, hung the letters from the lines. In other words, he wrote below the lines and he always wrote from right to left.



When looking at the scroll it appears to be upside down. This is because we would have placed the letters on the line of the grid.

The grid was very important to the scribe. It kept him from weaving his letters up and down the scroll as he wrote. This process enabled him to be more accurate in copying each letter. Baruch believed, like all the Jewish scribes before him, that he had a solemn responsibility to reproduce every letter perfectly and clearly. Hanging his letters on the grid aided him in accomplishing this goal. He knew that miscopying what God said could mean misreading, mispronouncing, and worse, misinterpreting and misunderstanding what God wants his people to know about him and his ways.

With the skins now complete and perfectly marked with grid columns, Baruch's next task was to prepare his ink and quills for writing. Remember, he had 304,805 letters to write, and not one of them was to touch another. The meticulous care and deliberation required meant it would take him over a year to complete this beautiful Torah.

Baruch obtained a number of goose feathers as his quills. They are firmer than other feathers and remain sharp longer. The sharper the quill, the less chance of the ink blotting and letters potentially touching each other. If this happened, it would be considered an error and require correction.

The ink Baruch mixed was critical to his task. It would entail crushing and soaking gallnuts and a carefully prepared mix of items to be sure he had ink that wouldn't fade. This took time. He would prepare just a small amount at a time so he would always be writing with fresh ink. A sharp feather quill and freshly prepared ink were critical to Baruch's task, for he did not want the words of God to be lost or fade away over time. Knowing the truth about the one true God and his ways depended upon it. He was intent on doing whatever it took to produce a beautiful and perfect masterpiece.

“My Words Will Never Disappear”

(Matthew 24:35)

Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear” (Matthew 24:35). That truth is a reality mainly because of the incredible reverence and devotion to Scripture held by the children of Israel and their scribes. And because over time, skins deteriorate and ink fades and chips away, scribes had to keep copying new manuscripts that matched the previous ones exactly.

Typically, a Torah scroll that began to deteriorate and fade would be “retired” to a special wooden cupboard called a genizah. The newly copied Torah would then become the authoritative text for the synagogue. The rabbis did not want to take a chance of a faded word being mispronounced, misread, or misinterpreted.

Yet the Lodz Torah copied by this Ashkenazi scribe is the exception to this rule. It was saved centuries past its prime because the Jewish community that had it was too poor to pay another scribe to produce a new one. Notice how the ink has turned orange in places. Normally this Torah would have been retired to the genizah, but because this Jewish community couldn’t afford a new one, they hired scribes simply to re-ink the fading letters.

One thing that is apparent about this Torah is that it was copied from an older Torah that was produced in medieval times. There is clear evidence that he kept many of the late-medieval scribal aspects. You can see curled letters and numerous spiral and wrapped letters used only during the medieval time period. This Torah retains an early tradition for text layout. It did not follow later models for each column, which varied in width and number of lines.

You can see that later generations of scribes, sometime after 1450, made notations and “corrections” to this scroll. Later generations of Jewish scholars brought uniformity to how the text was to be laid out and to proper orthography related to precise writing of each letter using specific shapes and forms, even in which way a letter was struck with the inked quill. You can see where attempts were made to correct some of these early medieval writing traditions used by our scribe.

As the rabbis of future generations read this Torah, they undoubtedly understood they were encountering an earlier iteration of the Sacred Word. As the congregation saw it being taken out of the ark it doubtlessly looked old to the people. There were probably stories associated to how this Torah was handed down from one generation to another. This would have reminded them of their rich historical tradition of Scripture. It also reminds us today of Jesus’ promise to protect his words: They would never “disappear.”

Not Even the Tiniest of Letters Will Disappear

Every word and letter in the Hebrew text (the Old Testament) is important, as is the New Testament. The apostle Paul made it clear that “the law was our guardian until Christ came” (Galatians 3:19). Jesus himself made it clear that he was the context of interpreting the Old Testament and he had not come to do away with it. He said, “Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the Law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose” (Matthew 5:17). The Torah recounts how humans sinned against God and what that did to the human race. It also chronicles the covenant God made to Abraham to redeem his people by a sacrifice to satisfy God’s justice in dealing with our sin. Jesus became that perfect sacrificial Lamb (see Hebrews 3-10).

Jesus wanted to assure us beyond a shadow of doubt that he was the completion of God's law and his Word would last forever down to the last detail. So he said, "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18, NKJ). Just how literally detailed should we expect that declaration to be?



Jot & Tittle

A "jot" is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. It looks like a heavy apostrophe as shown here. A "tittle" is a small decorative spur and looks like a little hair coming up out of a letter, like this one. Five tittles together were called a "crown" and often used to decorate certain letters.

The writer of the book of Hebrews said, "The word of God is full of living power" (Hebrews 4:12, NLT). Scripture is moving within history to accomplish God's purpose. To emphasize that truth, Jesus said that not one of these jots or tittles will disappear. His truth is eternal and all of his promises to us will be fulfilled.

Look at the smallest letters and the tiniest decorations of these words. See how words have been re-inked to preserve them. Throughout this scroll you can see how God has protected even the smallest of letters in a most astounding way. They are powerful reminders of Jesus' reassuring truth that his Word is eternal and can be counted on.

Fear God and Worship Him

Moses wrote telling the children of Israel "to fear the Lord your God and worship him" (Deuteronomy 10:20). To fear meant to be in awe of God, to reverence him and worship him as the Almighty God who shows mercy and grace to his people. That awesome reverence is clearly evident as the scribes performed their solemn duty to pass down the Scripture from one generation to another with such accuracy and exactness.

Imagine our scribe Baruch sitting down to begin his great task of copying the Lodz Torah. If he follows typical Jewish tradition he dips his new quill in the freshly prepared ink and speaks each word out loud before he writes. As his training has taught him to do, he pronounces each word correctly and copies each letter exactly. "In the beginning..." he says aloud as he forms the letters with painstaking precision. But Baruch stops before completing the last letter of the word just before the word "God." Then according to tradition, we watch him set down his quill and ceremoniously wash his hands. He is now purifying himself and sanctifying (or making separate) the ink that will pen the name of God.

One of the older traditions of scribes was that they were not to write the name for God directly after dipping their pen; for fear that the tip of the quill would carry too much ink. The name of God must not be blotted or smudged by excessive ink.

If Baruch followed this tradition, imagine him now picking up a fresh quill, dipping it in the ink, and then forming the last letter before the name of God. He then carefully pens the next word, “Elohim,” or God. He copies each letter in separate smooth strokes without allowing one letter to touch another. He must be sure he completes the glorious name before lifting his head.



Elohim

What reverence, what awe, what fear this scribe had in copying God’s sacred words! Although writing out God’s name may have required special ceremonial reverence, every letter he penned was to be exact and never, ever was one to touch another letter. The text of God’s Word was truly sacred to these Jewish scribes.



Jot

There are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The scribes were given specific instructions on how to form each letter perfectly. For example, the jot or Yud is the smallest letter in the alphabet. The Yud must have a little leg on the right side and a small tag on its upper left side. The scribe must bend its head down a little on the left like a small prickle pointing downwards. But the prickle must be shorter than the leg on its right, lest it resemble two other Hebrew letters (the Resh and Vav).

If the letter was not formed precisely in this way, it was invalidated and must be erased and penned over. Our Baruch would want each letter to be so clear and perfect that not even a child would misread the smallest of letters, mistake it for another similar Hebrew letter, mispronounce it or perhaps misinterpret the meaning of this sacred text.

The Torah was sacred, and the ink was not to be touched by human hands for fear that even one letter might be smudged. The reader must use a pointer to follow each and every word along the perfectly laid out columns.

You will notice that our scribe occasionally elongated a letter at the end of a word. Notice the horizontal line at the end of this word. These lines had an important function. Not only did the scribe want to copy the Scripture exactly, but he also wanted us to interpret it accurately. So these long lines at the end of a word were meant to slow you down to think about the meaning of the sacred text. A similar technique is used in our English Bible to in effect slow us down. It is used seventy-four times, mostly in the Psalms. The word is *selah*, and it is first used in Psalm 3:4. The Amplified Bible translates it “pause, and calmly think of that.” In other words, slow down and meditate on this because it is very important.

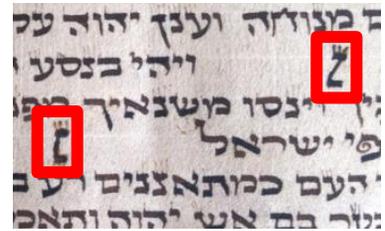


The scribe of this Lodz Torah also used another technique to get the reader to pause. At times he would enlarge letters like he did here with PE to signify that this passage is

very important. This is one characteristic that helps to date the scroll, for it was a writing style used only in medieval times and not done following that period.

Notice the uniqueness of this letter. It is the fourteenth letter in the Hebrew alphabet called a nun. This is an “inverted nun” adorned with tittles. It was used to indicate that this passage can be found in another section or should be in another place. In a real sense this is telling the reader that the sentence belongs in another section of Scripture, but we are not going to put it there. Why? Because the scribes were so careful to copy the Scripture exactly as the earlier manuscript dictated. They were not going to move it to where that sentence might actually belong because they were committed to replicating a new manuscript exactly as the old one was written. Every time this passage was read, the “inverted nun” was a reminder of how careful the copying of this Torah was to the scribe. It still is to this day.

Inverted Nun

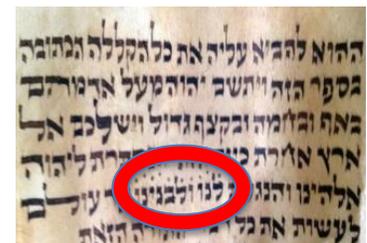


Once Baruch completed the last letter of the last word of this Torah, it had to be certified by other scribes or the rabbi. Some traditions required three separate rabbis to check its accuracy. This meant others had to unroll this seventy-two-foot scroll to check and count every single word and all 304,805 letters. They had to be sure there was the same number of letters in this scroll compared to the Torah from which it was copied. Not only that, when they counted the words they would indicate the center word within the Torah. They knew the center word was found in Leviticus 13:33. If the center word of the new scroll did not fall exactly within verse 33, that scroll could not be certified. They did the same thing for every letter. The center letter was found in Leviticus 11:45. If the new scrolls center letter was in verse 45 then they were confident they had an exact replica of the previous Torah.

To certify the new Torah, it was also common that each word begin in the exact same place as in the Torah that was being copied. If, while copying a given line, a scribe saw that a word that should be retained on this line was about to go to the next, he would compress the letters in order to fit them into the same line. Yet he couldn't touch one letter against another. Conversely, if he saw he was going to have too much space on a given line, he would stretch letters out in order to make the last letter of the last word coincide exactly with the end of the full line.

The right and left margins in each line were to have the exact same letters as the Torah from which he was copying, and each line was to be lettered so that the words would begin and end exactly at the right and left margins. Every precaution was taken to be certain that each new Torah was a duplicate of the previous.

Now notice that there are dots on top of some letters highlighted by the circle in the photograph. Along the top of these letters there are actually five dots. This was a way to caution the reader. It meant that there could be a textual



problem with this passage. Even so, the scribe could not correct this possible problem by copying it differently. Since he was committed to the exactness of each letter and word, he had to copy it as the older manuscript had been written.

As we can see, God instilled in this scribe and every scribe before him a painstaking reverence for the Hebrew Scriptures. When you examine the Lodz Torah you realize the sacrifice that went into preserving the Word of God. There was such devoted care, obsessive detail, and sacred reverence in shaping each letter and word. These dedicated scribes were intent on producing an exact transmission of the Book of the Law so that you and I—and our children—would have an accurate revelation of the God we worship. God wants us to know him for who he is, so he has meticulously and miraculously protected the integrity of his Word. And he has protected it in the most difficult of circumstances and during the most trying of times.

God's Hand of Protection on the Lodz Torah

The Black Death, one of the most devastating pandemics in human history, swept through Europe in the mid-fourteenth century. It is estimated that more than half the population of Europe was wiped out.

Unfortunately, misguided men targeted the Jewish population as scapegoats. Some say it was because Jewish communities were less affected due to better hygienic practices and their protected isolation in the ghettos. Angry mobs driven by resentment and seeking someone to blame, attacked and massacred hundreds of entire Jewish communities.

The medieval Torah, from which the Lodz Torah was copied, was no doubt in existence in Europe during this time. Miraculously, it survived the burnings and destruction of the Jewish population. The plague of the Black Death repeatedly returned to haunt the whole of Europe throughout the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. Jewish communities were repeatedly targeted and killed. Yet, somehow, the caretakers of the Lodz Torah kept the sacred word safe.

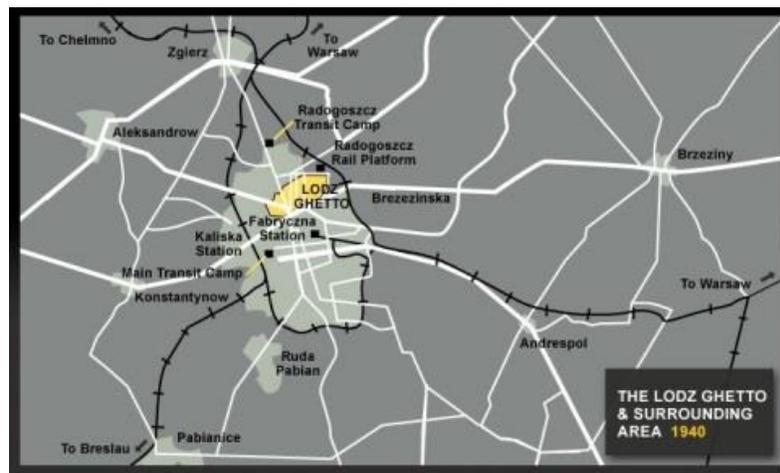
Then in the mid-1500s Jewish communities again suffered under the misguided thinking of many in the Reformation movement. Believing the Jewish people were to blame for the death of Christ, they were targeted for persecution. Synagogues were set on fire, destroying prayer books and Torahs. Yet again the Lodz Torah survived.

The Enlightenment period of the late 1600s challenged ideas grounded in tradition and faith. The authenticity and historical reliability of Scripture were questioned. Yet the small Jewish community held on to their strong traditions and sacred writings. And this Torah was preserved.

Then came the greatest threat of all to the survival of the Lodz Torah and the Jewish people at large—the Nazi extermination of the Jews during World War II. After Hitler took total control of Germany, he set out to conquer other nations and peoples.

On September 1, 1939, Hitler shocked the world by attacking Poland. In just over three weeks the entirety of Poland was under Nazi occupation. At the time the city of Lodz was one of the largest Jewish communities in Europe, totaling some 230,000 Jews. In fewer than six months the Nazis established the Lodz Ghetto with the intent first to incarcerate and then exterminate the Jewish population of German-occupied Europe.

The entire Jewish population of Lodz was herded into the ghetto—a fenced-in area of just over two-and-one-half square miles. Every able-bodied man, woman, and child was forced to work in factories or at menial jobs for which they were paid only in food. The quality and quantity of the food was less than minimal. Health and sanitation conditions quickly deteriorated.



This gathering and isolation of the Jewish population throughout Poland continued. By late 1941 the deportations of Jews from the Lodz ghettos began. The deportees were told they were being sent to Polish farms to work. In reality they were being sent off to death camps to be gassed. On August 4, 1944, a final liquidation transport of 74,000 Jews from Lodz was sent off to the gas chambers. Five months later the Soviets liberated the Lodz Ghetto. Only 877 Jews remained from the more than 230,000 who were interned in the ghetto since its opening in 1939. It is estimated that upwards of three million Jews were exterminated in Poland alone.

The Jewish community throughout Germany endured starvation, torture, and near-total annihilation. Yet this sacred Torah copied by the Ashkenazi scribe almost 500 years before survived! It was soon carried to Israel by a very poor group of Jewish families. They wanted to settle in their promised land, but they didn't have sufficient funding. In order to survive, they had to sell their precious Torah, which must have been extremely painful for them. The sale provided enough money to give them a new start in their promised land.

His Word is Eternal

It is overwhelming to realize that the God of the universe has superintended the writing and passing down of his words from generation to generation so that you and I can have an accurate revelation of him. He has gone to extraordinary lengths to restore the intimate relationship with you and me that he once had with the first couple in the Garden of Eden. And he has chosen the Bible, partially represented in this Lodz Torah, as the means to reach out in human language, reveal the essence of his relational heart, and share the Good News of Christ as our salvation.

Since the time the original manuscripts of Scripture were written—some dating back to over 3,000 years ago—skeptics have tried to refute them, infidels have tried to stamp them out, and dictators have tried to burn them. The present existence of the Lodz Torah is unassailable proof that God’s Word has not only prevailed, but it has also proliferated. Since the invention of the printing press, hundreds of millions of Bibles and selections from the Bible have been distributed and translated into more than 2,400 languages.

It has been said (but difficult to verify) that Voltaire, the noted eighteenth-century French skeptic who was alive when the Lodz Torah was being read, made a bold prediction. He stated that within a hundred years after his death, the Bible would become extinct and Christianity would be but a footnote in history.

Ironically, in 1828, fifty years after Voltaire’s death, the Geneva Bible Society moved into his house and used his printing press to produce thousands of Bibles to spread the Good News of the Gospel. “People are like grass that dies away,” Peter wrote, quoting Isaiah the prophet, “but the Word of the Lord will last forever” (1 Peter 1:24-25). The Lodz Torah is an eloquent testimony that God’s Word is eternal and that he has promised us eternal life in Jesus Christ!

Now I hope you can understand why I felt such strong emotion when I acquired this centuries-old medieval copy of ancient Scripture. It is a tangible embodiment of all the dedication, labor, martyrdom, deprivation, and persecution that went into preserving God’s message of love to you and me.