THE 13 PRINCIPLES: #8. The accuracy of the Biblical Text

The Eighth of the Thirteen principles of Jewish faith asserts that the Tora which at present time is in our possession is the same that was given to Moshe Rabbenu (Moses) in Sinai.
The Tora, as we have it today, contains the words which God gave to Moses. These words have been preserved all these centuries by the care of our scribes or writers (Soferim), our rabbis and other learned and pious men. The scribes were called Soferim, a term related to "counting", not "writing", because they counted the letters of the Tora. From a very early time we know by actual count how many sentences, words and letters are in each of the five books of the Tora. We know also how many times each letter is used. We reproduce in every copy the exceptional letters, those enlarged or reduced letters, etc. A scroll of the Tora found incorrect or missing one single letter is not used in public worship until corrected. These are all precautions adopted to secure the accuracy of the text and that no alterations whatsoever take place.
I have a personal simple example to show how knowing the number of letters reassures the accuracy of the transmission of a word. My email is "rabbibitton@yahoo…". When I dictate the first part of my email address to someone over the phone I always clarify and say: "one word, 11 letters". Many times they tell me that they counted the letters and then they realize that they have to write a double "t". Knowing the exact number of letters prevents mistakes which could be made in such areas. Bear in mind that in Biblical Hebrew you can write the VAV or the YOD, or omit them (*chaserot veyeterot*) without altering the meaning of the word. That is why it was so critical to know the exact number of the letters in order to preserve the precise text during centuries of exiles, persecutions, etc.
Adapted from the book: Jewish Religion Ethically Presented, by Rabbi Hayim Pereira Mendes.
(To be continued…)

	Words	Letters
Bereshit	20,512	78,064
Shemot	16,723	63,529
Vayqra	11,950	44,790
Bamidbar	16,398	63,530
Debarim	14,294	54,892
TOTAL	**79,847**	**304,805**