

A GUIDE TO OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY AND EXEGESIS

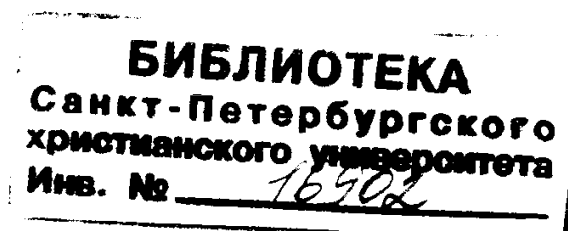
The Introductory Articles from the
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PART I: THE RELIABILITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT TEXT

Vanhoozer has argued that the "Text" is the basis for developing a view of God, one's self, and the world. Hence, the interpreter needs to know the nature of the Text that is the basis for interpretation. In this essay **Bruce** Waltke expertly leads the reader into the craft of the textual critic. The critic is a person who evaluates the present Hebrew text in the light of many ancient texts (Greek, Aramaic, Syriac, etc.). He also affirms that the ancient Text is reliable, in spite of the "fragility" of the process in which ancient texts have come down to us. He evaluates the scribal practices and some of the ways in which errors could have crept into the text. It is amazing that the present text is highly reliable and that the changes, proposed by a consensus of the critical students of the Bible, have little bearing on the life and practice of the church. This is more than coincidence. It is evidence of the providential work of the Spirit of God. (**VanGemeeren**)

2. TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS RELATION To EXEGESIS AND THEOLOGY

A. The Task of OT Textual Criticism: Its Importance and Method

There is always a need in humanities for critics to restore original texts, be they of Homer or Shakespeare, or of Moses or Isaiah. Many texts of the OT, however, were composed over centuries, and not just by an original author, so that it is too simplistic to say that OT textual criticism aims to recover the original text of the OT. Rather, as we shall argue, "original text" in the OT refers to the text-type that lies behind the MT, the received text. The reconstruction of earlier editions of portions of the OT is the task of literary criticism, not of textual criticism.

Textual criticism is necessary because there is no **error-free** MS. (Even in *BHS*, the current standard representation of the MT text, printing errors can be found.) Variants occur frequently in the medieval MSS of the MT tradition, but they are minuscule compared to those found in the Dead Sea Scrolls [DSS]. In fact, the further back we go in the textual lineage the greater the textual differences. Before the text was fixed at ca. AD 100, it was copied and recopied through many centuries by scribes of varying capabilities and of different philosophies, giving rise to varying readings and recensions (i.e., distinct text types).

The restoration of the original OT text is foundational to the exegetical task and to theological reflection. For instance, whether the book of Proverbs teaches immortality depends in part on deciding between textual variants in Prov 14:32b. Basing itself on MT, the **NIV** renders, "even in [their] death (**b^emôôtô**) the righteous have a refuge," a rendering that entails the doctrine of immortality for the righteous. The **NRSV**, however, basing itself on the **LXX**, translates, "the righteous find a refuge in their integrity (**b^etummô**)," a reading that does not teach that doctrine. The consonants of the MT are **bmtw**, and those of the (assumed) Vorlage (i.e., the **retroverted** text lying before a translator) behind the **LXX** were **btmw**. The slight difference due to metathesis of m and t, however, profoundly affects the exegesis of that text and the theology of the book.

To restore the original text the critic must know the history of its witnesses and of scribal practices, and must have exegetical competence. In this essay we will consider each of these respectively. The LXX, however, is such an important witness that we treat it separately. A knowledge of the **text's** history will explain the varying characteristics of the textual witnesses and why we opt for the restoring of the original text behind the MT against other literary editions of OT portions, such as the difference between the MT Pentateuch versus the Samaritan Pentateuch and of the MT Jeremiah versus the Septuagint Jeremiah. We conclude the article with reflections on the reliability of the OT text.

B. History of the Text and Its Witnesses

Because of the varying fortunes of the OT text and of our sources of information about it, its history may be analyzed into six distinct periods: (1) The determinative formative period for the production of OT texts extended from the composition of the Ten Commandments (ca. 1400 *EC* or ca. 1250 BC, depending on the date of the Exodus) to **Nehemiah's Library** (ca. 400 BC), when, according to 2 **Macc** 2:13, Nehemiah founded a library and "gathered together the books about the kings and prophets, and the books of David, and letters of kings about sacred gifts," or even to the late fourth century, if one opts for that date for the composition of the book of Chronicles. (2) The canon and text remained open from Nehemiah's library to when the canon was stabilized (ca. 100 BC). (3) At least two centuries elapsed between the fixing of the OT canon and the fixing of its text, now sometimes called "the **Proto-MT**" (ca. AD 100). (4) The labors of the Masoretes (AD **600-AD 1000**), who based their work on the Proto-MT, came to a conclusion ca. AD 1000, when the Masorete, Aaron Ben Asher, produced the authoritative Masoretic text, as recognized already on the frontispiece of the Leningrad Codex (AD 1009) (see below). (5) The medieval MSS of the MT were produced between AD 1000 and the invention of printing (ca. AD 1500). (6) The Great Rabbinic Bible (ca. 1525) became the standard text of the MT until 1936, when P. **Kahle** got back to the Ben Asher text by basing the third edition of *BH* on the Leningrad MS B 19^a (L). Since the variants that came into the text after AD 1000 are relatively insignificant, we will not discuss the last two periods. N. **Sarna** ("Bible Text") superbly summarized the history of the printed Hebrew Bible.

1. *From the Ten Commandments to **Nehemiah's Library***. We have virtually no external, extant data regarding the OT text during its most formative period, aside from two recently discovered silver amulets, about the size of a "cigarette butt," containing the priestly benediction (Num 6:24-26) (ca. 600 BC). From internal notices within the OT and from our knowledge of the way ancient Near Eastern literature was composed, we can infer that during this era earlier pieces of canonical literature were collected into developing books. For example, the Bible presents the Ten Commandments as the first piece of canonical literature (i.e., literature inspired by God and recognized as such by the faithful) (Exod 20:1-19; cf. Deut 5:6-27). To this original core the Book of the Covenant, mediated by Moses, was added (Exod 20:22-23:33), and to this still other pieces were added to make up the book of Exodus. We do not know how or when the book of Exodus took its final shape. In a roughly comparable way isolated hymns were collected into books, and these in turn edited to form the book of Psalms. The same dynamic processes were involved in the composition of other books of the Bible. From data within the Bible and from knowledge of ancient Near Eastern scribal prac-

tices we can infer that during the formation of the OT books, there was a tendency both to preserve and to revise earlier texts.

(a) *The tendency to preserve the text.* Elsewhere we argued (*IBHS*, 16-17:

The very fact that the Scripture persistently survived the most deleterious conditions throughout its long history demonstrates that indefatigable scribes insisted on its preservation. The books were copied by hand for generations on highly perishable papyrus and animal skins in the relatively damp, hostile climate of **Palestine**....

Moreover, the prospects for the survival of texts were uncertain in a land that served as a bridge for armies in unceasing contention between the continents of Africa and **Asia**—a land whose people were the object of plunderers in their early history and of captors in their later history. That no other Israelite writings, such as the Book of **Yashar** (e.g., 2 Sam 1:18) or the Diaries of the Kings (e.g., 2 Chr 16:11), survive from this period indirectly suggests the determination of the scribes to preserve the books that became canonical. The foes of Hebrew Scripture sometimes included audiences who sought to kill its authors and destroy their works (cf. Jeremiah 36). From the time of their composition, however, they captured the hearts, minds, and loyalties of the faithful in Israel who kept them safe often at risk to themselves. Such people must have insisted on the accurate transmission of the text.

In addition, both the Bible itself (Deut 31:9ff; Josh 24:25, 26; 1 Sam 10:25; etc.) and the literature of the ANE show that at the time of the earliest biblical compositions a mindset favoring canonicity existed. This mindset must have fostered a concern for care and accuracy in transmitting the sacred writings. For example, a Hittite treaty (of the Late Bronze Age), closely resembling parts of the **Torah**, contains this explicit threat: "Whoever ... breaks [this tablet] or causes anyone to change the wording of the **tablet**—... may the gods, the lords of the oath, blot you out." Undoubtedly this psychology was a factor in inhibiting Israelite scribes from multiplying variants of the texts.

Moreover, scribal practices throughout the ANE reflect a conservative attitude. W. F. **Albright** noted, "The prolonged and intimate study of the many scores of thousands of pertinent documents from the ancient Near East proves that sacred and profane documents were copied with greater care than is true of scribal copying in **Graeco-Roman** times.

(b) *Tendency to revise the text.* We also argued:

On the other hand, scribes, aiming to teach the people by disseminating an understandable text, felt free to revise the script, orthography (i.e., spelling), and grammar, according to the conventions of their own times. Albright said, "A principle which must never be lost sight of in dealing with documents of the ancient Near East is that instead of leav-

ing obvious archaisms in spelling and grammar, the scribes generally revised ancient literary and other documents **periodically....**" (*IBHS*)

Moreover, the many differences between synoptic portions of the OT show that authors **and/or** scribes, "the authorized revisers of the text" at this time, felt free to edit earlier works into new, mutually independent, literary achievements (cf. 2 Sam 22 = Ps 18; 2 Kgs 18:13-20:19 = Isa 36-39; 2 Kgs 24:18-25:30 = Jer 52; Isa 2:2-4 = Mic 4:1-3; Ps 14 = 53; 40:14-18 = 70; 57:8-12 = 108:2-6; 60:7-14 = 108:7-14; Ps 96 = 1 Chron 16:23-33; Ps 106:1, 47-48 = 1 Chron 16:34-36; and the parallels between Samuel-Kings and Chronicles). Literary critics, not textual critics, should concern themselves with the differences between these portions of the OT.

(c) *Need to emend the text.* Accidental textual errors, however, probably corrupted the text during this formative period. In cases where none of the transmitted variants satisfies exegetical expectations, text critics propose a textual emendation (a conjectured variant based on the known variants). The **DSS** have now validated this procedure in certain instances. F. M. Cross ("Problems of Method," 37) comments: "No headier feeling can be experienced by a humanistic scholar, perhaps, than that which comes when an original reading, won by his brilliant emendation, is subsequently confirmed in a newly-found MS." The confusion in Ezek 3:12 of the similarly formed consonants **k** and **m** in the preexilic angular script offers a good illustration of the need for emendation (Kennedy, *An Aid to the Textual Amendment*, 83-84).

All texts: *brwk kbwd-yhwh mmqwmw*

"May the glory of YHWH *be praised* in (sic!) his dwelling place" (cf. **NIV**).

Emendation: *brw[m] kbwd-yhwh mmqwmw*

"As the glory of YHWH *arose* from its place" (cf. **NRSV**).

"Be praised," *brwk*, is attested in all textual witnesses. However, the phrase is unique, awkward, and contextless. Text critics salvage the line by emending *brwk* to *brwm*, "when [it] arose." The emendation nicely satisfies exegetical expectations, Heb. syntax, and the context of the verse (cf. Ezek 10:4, 15-18).

Scholars associated with HUBP and the United Bible Societies Hebrew Old Testament Text Critical Project disallow conjectured emendations. Their stance serves as a healthy corrective away from the extremes of Duhm and the "eccentricity in the later work of **Cheyne**" (**Jellicoe**, 320). However, it is too extreme. J. M. Sprinkle (*JETS*, 28, 1985, 469) complained: "What we as students of the Hebrew Bible actually **want** ... is not a later stage of the text but the original."

2. *From 400 BC to 150 BC.*

(a) *An open canon.* Though we possess a good knowledge of the OT's theology, we do not know when or where the OT books were first published or precisely how they gained admission into the select group of writings we call the OT. We do know, however, that by the time of the NT the OT canon was closed (**Bruce**, 28). Jesus and the apostles held the same OT in hand that Protestants do today. Beckwith (165) argues convincingly that Judas Maccabeus, at a date around 164 BC, gave the OT canon its final shape. The Qumran scrolls, however, reflect a Jewish community that embraced a somewhat different canon, at least to judge from the absence of Esther among them and from the slightly different shape of 11QPs^a as compared with the MT (Sanders, *ZAW* 65, 1964, 57-75).

(b) *The DSS and the LXX*. During these two and a half centuries there was also a tendency both to preserve and to revise the text. We can now sketch the history of the text for this period on the basis of the DSS and the LXX (ca. 250 BC to 150 BC).

(i) The DSS. By the techniques of paleography, numismatics, and archaeology the DSS are dated from the middle of the third century BC to the revolt of **Bar-Kochba** (AD 132-35). Most MSS were found in the eleven mountain caves just west of **Khirbet Qumran**. These caves yielded some 800 scrolls of all the books of the **HB** except Esther. The other principal sites, **Nahal Hever** and Wadi **Murabba'at**, yielded texts mostly from the early second century AD. Scrolls were also found at Masada, which fell to the Romans in AD 70.

(ii) The LXX. According to the pseudepigraphic Letter of Aristeas (ca. 130 BC), the Pentateuch was translated into G at ca. 285 BC by seventy-two translators (hence its title, Septuagint). This tradition was later expanded to include all the OT books translated into G.

P. **Kahle** argued that a great number of independent G translations existed for all the books and that the LXX as we know it now was a creation of the church. We have argued (*EBC* 1.220-21) that studies by **Margolis** on Joshua and Montgomery on Daniel, as well as the realization that recensional activities to conform the OG to the Proto-MT, which had given the illusion that all these variants could not go back to one original, have led to a widening consensus that agrees with Lagarde's view that all the Greek MSS go back to one textual tradition.

It is impossible to speak generally of the character of the LXX because it is not a uniform translation. Rather, different translators with varying capabilities and philosophies of translation rendered assorted portions of the OT. Elsewhere this writer collected the conclusions of scholars about these translations:

Swete [drew the conclusion] that the majority of the translators learned Hebrew in Egypt from imperfectly instructed teachers, and **Barr** ... that these translators invented vowels for the unpointed text.... Except in passages such as Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 32, 33, the Pentateuch is on the whole a close and serviceable translation of a smoothed Hebrew recension. The Psalter is tolerably well done, though **Ervin** concluded that the theology of Hellenistic Judaism left its mark on it. About Isaiah, **Seeligman** concluded, "The great majority of the inconsistencies here discussed must be imputed to the translator's unconstrained and carefree working method, and to a conscious preference for the introduction of variations." He added, "We shall not, however, do the translator any injustice by not rating his knowledge of grammar and syntax very highly." Regarding Hosea, **Nyberg** found that "it is overly composed of gross misunderstandings, unfortunate readings and superficial lexical definitions which often are simply forced conformity to similar Aramaic cognates. Helplessness and arbitrary choice are the characteristic traits of this interpretation." **Albrektson** said of Lamentations: "LXX, then, is not a good translation in this book. But this does not mean that it is not valuable for textual criticism. On the contrary, its literal character often allows us to establish with tolerable certainty the underlying Hebrew text. It is clearly based on a text which was in all essentials identical

with the consonants of the MT; indeed the passages where it may have contained a variant are notably few." Gerleman said of Job that the translator interprets the text as well as he can, and, with the help of his imagination, attempts to give an intelligible meaning to the original, which he does not understand. He added that the many deviations between the Hebrew and the Greek translations of Job are not the result of an essential difference between the original of the LXX and our Hebrew text. They have come about in the course of translation when the translator has not mastered the difficulties of the original. Swete concluded, "The reader of the Septuagint must expect to find large number of actual blunders, due in part perhaps to a faulty archetype, but chiefly to the misreading or misunderstanding of the archetype by the translators.... ("Textual Criticism," 221-22)

Gerleman (85-86) evaluated the LXX of Zephaniah thus: "The *Vorlage* of the Greek translator was not identical with the consonantal text of the MT but close to it.... The translator is very free in his interpretation of the MT. His work points to an innumerable number of wrong vocalizations, unfortunate divisions of the text, and superficial lexical **definitions**.... Finally, it seems fairly clear that the capabilities of the translator were not always up to mastering certain words and expressions that are difficult to translate."

This writer (*Micah*, 1993, 597) reached independently a similar conclusion for Micah as Nyberg had for Hosea and Gerleman for Zephaniah. This is not surprising, for J. Ziegler ("Die **Einheit der Septaginta**") demonstrated the unity of the Septuagint in the Minor Prophets.

It is well known that the LXX translator of Proverbs was influenced by Greek ethical thought, especially Stoic, along with early Jewish midrashic tradition, and that he modified a number of proverbs and made additions (Gerleman, *OTS*, 15-27; Jellioce, 68, 317-18). Barr (158) says of this translation: "In fact the term 'free,' as applied to a translation like the Greek Proverbs, must mean something considerably different from what we mean when we speak of 'free translation' in a modern context.... For a translator like that of Proverbs free technique meant ... that after having translated *some* elements in the text in a rather 'literal' way, he could then break loose from **literality** and complete the sentence with a composition so loosely related to the original that it might equally be considered as an original composition rather than a rendering...."

On the other hand, this writer also noted (*EBC*, \:222): "The LXX of Samuel, parts of Kings, and Ezekiel is of special value because the text preserved by the Masoretes of these books suffered more than usual from corrupting influences."

With regard to the chronology from Omri to Jehu, Shenkel concluded that the OG, represented in several MSS, preserves the original chronology better than the recensional developments, represented in the majority of MSS.

(c) *Tendency to preserve the text*. Some of the oldest MSS of the DSS show a striking similarity with the MT. Their silent testimony shouts out the achievement of scribes to preserve faithfully the OT text. This text-type undoubtedly existed before the time of these scrolls. The many archaic forms within the MT confirm the inference.

The studies of M. Martin show that the DSS reveal a conservative scribal tendency to follow the exemplar both in text and form.

(d) *Tendency to revise the text.* Though the author of 1 Macc (ca. 125 BC), for example, recognized that prophecy had ceased in Israel years before his time (cf. 1 Macc 9:27), the text of the OT was still open during this period. Scribes of this era were still the authorized revisers of the text, not just copyists. They continued to expand portions of the OT and to alter it to such an extent that their productions might equally be considered as distinct literary editions rather than as copies. In addition, they continued to revise older texts philologically to make them more intelligible to later generations.

As a result of their literary achievements the line between literary criticism and textual criticism has become attenuated. The texts of some portions of the OT have come down to us in two forms, attested in both the DSS and the LXX. There is, for instance, a short form of Jeremiah preserved in 4QJer^b and in the LXX, and a long form preserved in 4QJer^a and the MT. In the following example the additions in the long text are noted with italics:

This is what the *Lord Almighty, the God of Israel*, said to me: "I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring back to this place *all the articles of the house of the LORD that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from this place and took to Babylon*, and Jeconiah *son of Jehoiakim king of Judah* and *all the exiles from Judah who went to Babylon, I am going to bring back to this place,*" declares the LORD (Jer 28:1-4a; 35:1-4a).

One is reminded of the editorial comment in Jeremiah 36:32:

So Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to the scribe **Baruch** son of **Neria**, and as Jeremiah dictated, Baruch wrote on it all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them.

E. Tov (*Textual Criticism*, 314-49) established on the basis of the ancient texts and versions the existence of two editions of Joshua (1986), 1 Sam 16-18 (1985), Ezekiel (1986), and Proverbs (1990). The different literary editions of Daniel and Esther are well known. This scribal practice is entirely consistent with known practices of composing books in the ANE. From cuneiform texts (ca. 2000 BC) to **Tatian's** *Diatessaron* (ca. AD 200) one can observe that ANE literatures were composed by supplementing earlier editions of a text with later materials (see Tigay, cf. R. P. Gordon, 57-69). We drew the conclusion elsewhere (*ABD*, 5.938f.) that the major contribution of the Samaritan Pentateuch [SP] to biblical studies is to literary criticism, not of textual criticism. For example, it involves the insertion of material from Deuteronomy into Exodus and the extensive repetition of other texts.

The scribal editors not only effected literary changes, they also altered the text for both philological and theological reasons. We noted elsewhere (*IBHS*, 19):

They modernized it by replacing archaic Hebrew forms and constructions with forms and constructions of a later age. They also smoothed out the text by replacing rare constructions with more fre-

quently occurring constructions, and they supplemented and clarified the text by the insertion of additions and the interpolation of glosses from parallel passages. In addition, they substituted euphemisms for vulgarities, altered the names of false gods, removed the phrases that refer to cursing God, and safeguarded the sacred divine name or **tetragrammaton** (YHWH), occasionally by substituting forms in the consonantal text.

Philological alterations were already taking place at the time of Malachi, the last representative of mainstream OT prophecy. The book of Chronicles in its synoptic parallels with the Pentateuch and Former Prophets as preserved in MT exhibits similar revisions (**Kropat**). **Ezra-Nehemiah** explicitly states that as Ezra read from the book of the Law of God, he made it clear and gave the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read (Neh 8:8).

3. *From 150 BC to AD 135*. The bulk of the DSS belong to the period between the closing of the canon and the closing of its text. During this time, the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) began a life of its own.

(a) *Samaritan Pentateuch*. At ca. 110BC scribes of the Samaritans, a sect similar to the Jews apart from its worship on Mount **Gerizim** instead of at Jerusalem (John 4:19-22), adopted and adapted a distinct recension of the text attested as early as the Chronicler to constitute the SP. They probably accepted only the Pent as their canon because OT's second division, the Prophets, and its third, the Writings, celebrate Jerusalem.

(b) *Tendency to preserve the text*. In addition to the evidence adduced above for the tendency to conserve the text, there is a Talmudic notice that the scribes attempted to keep the text "correct" (b. *Ned* 37b-38a). Moreover, the MT itself preserves the following remnants of scribal concern with preserving the text, probably from this era: (i) the fifteen extraordinary points either to condemn the Hebrew letters as spurious or to draw attention to some peculiar text feature; (ii) the four suspended letters to indicate intentional scribal change or scribal error due to a faulty distinction of gutturals; and (iii) the nine inverted *nuns* apparently to mark verses thought to have been transposed (E. Tov, *ABD*, 6:397).

(c) *Tendency to revise the text*. On the other hand, the text was not fixed, and continued to be revised. E. Tov (*Textual Criticism*, 114-17) classifies the DSS into five different text-types.

(i) There are the *Proto-Masoretic* texts, which others call "the rabbinic text," during this period. About 60 percent of the scrolls belong to this type and may reflect its authoritative status (*Textual Criticism*, 115).

(ii) The *Pre-Samaritan* text scrolls have the characteristic features of the SP, aside from the thin layer of ideological and phonological changes the Samaritans added. Basing himself on Gesenius (1815), the first to classify the variants between SP and MT in a thorough and convincing way, the present writer (*ABD* 5:936-38) hoped to demonstrate from recent philological and textual research that the SP presents a secondarily modernized, smoothed over, and expanded text. The theological changes imposed on this text, though thin, are significant. For example, the Samaritans were able to make the worship on Mount Gerizim the tenth commandment by combining the first two commandments into one and by inserting texts about Mount Gerizim (Deut

11:29a; 27:2b-3a; 28:4-7; cf. also 11:30) after Exod 20:17, numbering the material from Deut 28:4-7 and 11:30 as the tenth commandment.

(iii) About 5 percent of the DSS are *Septuagintal* in character. Some DSS scrolls, most notably Jeremiah (4QJer^{b,d}), bear a strong resemblance to the LXX's *Vorlage*.

(iv) The many *non-aligned* DSS are not exclusively close to any one of the types mentioned so far. Tov (*Textual Criticism*, 116) explains: "They agree, sometimes insignificantly, with MT against the other texts, or with SP and/or LXX against the other texts, but the non-aligned texts also disagree with the other texts to the same extent. They furthermore contain readings not known from one of the other texts."

(v) Tov (*Textual Criticism*, 114) identifies a group of texts that reflect a distinctive *Qumran practice* with regard to orthography (i.e., spelling, similar to "favor" versus "favour"), morphology, and a free approach to the biblical text visible in content adaptations, in frequent errors, in numerous corrections, and sometimes in negligent script. Tov thinks that only these scrolls were produced in Qumran.

These variant recensions also find parallels in Jewish and Christian literature originating during the time in question, such as the book of Jubilees (either early or late postexilic) and, most importantly, the NT (AD 50-90). For example, Stephen's sermon (Acts 7) and Hebrews are based on the **pre-Samaritan** recension.

The fall of the Second Temple (ca. AD 70), the debate between Jews and Christians, and Hillel's rules of **hermeneutics** all contributed to producing a stable text by about AD 100. The Nahal Hever and Mur DSS, which date between AD 100 and AD 135, attest the Proto-MT.

4. From AD 135 to AD 1000.

(a) *Other early versions*. From ca. AD 100 to ca. AD 500 the official Aram. Targums (Tg.), the **Syriac Peshitta (Syr.)**, various recensions of the LXX, and the Latin Vulgate (Vg.) were produced. They all have as their common denominator the Proto-MT and so are not as useful witnesses to the early stages of the still open text as are the DSS and the LXX. We need note only here that the Syr. has been influenced both by the LXX and the Tg. Nevertheless, each of these versions sometimes contains an original (i.e., an **uncorrupted**) reading.

(i) **Targum** means specifically a translation into Aram. When knowledge of Hebrew decreased among the Jewish people during the postexilic period, **targums** were created orally and later committed to writing. The **targum** fragments found at Qumran show that both free and literal targums were made. Scholars are divided about their dates (first to fifth century AD) and their places of origin (Babylon or Palestine). These more or less paraphrastic targums are of more value for understanding the way Jewish people understood their OT than for textual criticism. For example, the Tg. of Isa 52:13 reads: "Behold, my servant, the Messiah."

(ii) Early recensions of the LXX. Some scribes deliberately revised the original LXX, known as the Old Greek (OG), according to the Proto-MT. Prior to **Origen** (AD 200), who brought this process to completion in his famous Hexapla, **Aquila** (AD 125), **Symmachus** (AD 180), and **Theodotion** (180) revised the OG **and/or** earlier recensions of it according to this principle. A Greek scroll of the Minor Prophets recovered at Nahal Hever shows that this process had already begun by the middle of the first century BC. Its distinctive translation techniques enabled scholars to link it up with other

texts bearing witness to an early stage of the OG. Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue* complains against the Jew **Trypho** about the attitude the rabbinate had taken toward the LXX in order to remove an essential arm from the Christian apologist. **Barthélemy** who brilliantly edited this text, showed that Justin forced himself to use this revision in order to be acceptable to his adversaries.

(iii) *Vulgate*. Pope Damasus I commissioned Jerome (Hieronymus, AD 345-420) to produce a uniform and reliable Latin Bible. Jerome based his original translation of the Psalms (*Psalterium Romanum*) on the *Vetus Latina*, viz., Old Latin texts based largely on the LXX. His second translation of the Psalms was based on the Hexapla (*Psalterium Gallicanum*). Dissatisfied with these translations, Jerome finally translated *The Vulgate* ("the common one") from, as he put it, "the original truth of the Hebrew text." However, the Vg. includes the Gallican Psalter.

(b) *The MT*. The Masoretes (AD 600-1000) were groups of Jewish families who produced the final form of the OT text. They added four features to the inherited Proto-MT.

(i) They "hedged in" the consonantal text with a **Masorah**, consisting of scribal notes in the margin with instructions to ensure its precise transmission. Scribal precision in transmitting the consonants before the Masoretes is reflected in the Talmud. R. Ishmael cautioned: "My son, be careful, because your work is the work of heaven; should you omit (even) one letter or add (even) one letter, the whole world would be destroyed" (*b. Soṭa* 2a) (cited by Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 33).

(ii) They added vowel points above and below the consonants to preserve as perfectly as possible the accompanying tradition of pronunciation. These points supplemented the early consonants (' , *h*, *w*, and *y*), known as the *matres lectionis* ("mothers of reading"), which were used to mark vowels in the prevocalized stage of the text. A Talmudic anecdote illustrates an acute awareness of the importance of an accurate oral tradition. David reprimanded Joab when he killed only the men of Amalek and not the "remembrance" (*zēker*) of them. Joab defended himself, noting his teacher taught him to read: "all their males" (*zākār*). Joab subsequently drew his sword against his teacher who had taught him incorrectly (*b. Bathra* 21a-b).

A complex body of evidence indicates the MT could not, in any serious or systematic way, represent a reconstruction or faking of the vocalization. Among other things we argued (*IBHS*, 28):

On the whole the grammar [which depends heavily on vocalization] of the MT admirably fits the framework of Semitic philology, and this fact certifies the work of the Masoretes. When in the 1930s Paul **Kahle** announced his theory that the Masoretes made massive innovations, Gotthelf **Bergsträsser** sarcastically observed that they must have read Carl Brockelmann's comparative Semitic grammar to have come up with forms so thoroughly in line with historical reconstructions.

J. **Barr** (*Comparative Semitic Philology and the Text of the Old Testament*, 213) demonstrates that the Masoretes were preservers of the oral tradition, not innovators like the LXX translators, by contrasting Jerome's earlier version of the Psalter, based on the LXX, and his later one, based on the Hebrew. The consonants of Ps 102:23-24a[24-25a] are:

'nh bdrk khw [Qere khy] qsr ymy: 'mr 'ly
The LXX and the Gallican Psalter read this as:

'ānāh[û]b^ederek kōhō qoşer yamay 'e^emor 'ēlay

"He replied to him in the way of his force; the fewness of my days report to me" (no major Eng. version).

The MT and Psalter, "**Juxta Hebraeos**," however, vocalize:

'innāh badderek kōhî qışşaryamay: 'ōmar 'ēlî

"He broke the strength on the way, he cut short my days. I said, My God ..." (cf. Eng. versions).

(iii) The Masoretes added a system of conjunctive and disjunctive accent signs to mark the chant or music (**Haik-Vantoura**). These diacritical marks serve to beautify, to add dignity, to denote the stress of the word, which can be as meaningful as the difference between English "**pre-sént**" and "**prés-ent**," and, most importantly, to denote the syntactical relationship of words. It makes some difference where one places the accents in **Isa 40:3**:

The voice of him that **crieth** in the wilderness, Prepare ... (KJV).

A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare ..." (NIV).

Here, too, the Masoretes are preservers, not innovators, unlike the LXX, whose translators seem to have been flying by the seat of their pants. Revell (181) suggests that the punctuation was the first feature after the consonantal text to become stabilized in the Jewish biblical tradition.

(iv) The Masoretes also added various paratextual elements—the verse and paragraph divisions and ancient textual corrections. Its variants known as *Kethiv* [K] (the consonants of the **Proto-MT**) and *Qere* [Q] (the text they read aloud) are most important among these last-named. At first the Q readings were optional corrections of the text, but by the time of the Masoretes they became obligatory. We already noted a preferred Q reading in Ps 102:23[24]. However, sometimes the K is preferred. Prov 17:27b K (+ the LXX, Syr., Vg.) reads *w^eqar-rûah*, "and cool of spirit," but Q (+ Tg.) reads *y^eqar-rûah*, "precious of spirit," which was variously and dubiously understood to mean "heavy in spirit" (Tg.), "sparing of words" (Rashi), "of worthy bearing" (Saadia) (cited by Toy, 353). Both K and Q are hapleg. K now finds support from the Egyptian side. **Grollenberg** (42-43) showed that the Egyptians used "hot" and "cold" in a metaphorical sense for two distinct personality types.

The title page of L, the diplomatic text of *BHK* and *BHS*, reads: "Samuel Jacob copied, vowel-pointed and Masoretically annotated this Codex of the Sacred Scripture from the correct MSS which the teacher Aaron b. Moses Ben-Asher redacted (his rest is in Paradise!) and which constitutes an exceedingly accurate Exemplar." In fact, however, L probably contains too many corrections and errors to have served as a synagogue scroll.

Conclusion. In the light of this history we can now restrict the aim of OT text criticism to that of recovering the original text that lies behind the Proto-MT recension. The witnesses show such diverse text-types for some portions of the OT, like Joshua, Proverbs, and Esther, that they are best regarded as either distinct, literary stages in the development of the text or as distinct compositions. Tov (*Textual Criticism*, 177) summarizes: "The differences between the textual witnesses show that a few books and parts of books were once circulated in different formulations representing different lit-

erary stages, as a rule one after the other, but possibly also parallel to each other." In Tov's view the text critic ought to reconstruct the edition represented in the Proto-MT. **Socio-religious** and historical reasons validate his view. That recension became the authoritative text both within Judaism and the church. Tov argues this case for Judaism, but he failed to note that both **Origen** and Jerome, the two most formative OT text critics in church history, also established the MT recension for the church. Our English versions are based on it. "This history," we said (1994, 175-76), "should not be underestimated in deciding the question, 'What is the original text?' The MT inherently commended itself to both the synagogue and the church. As the canon of the OT emerged in the historical process, so also the MT surfaced as the best text of that canon." Childs (96-97) reached a similar conclusion.

We do not agree with the theory of **Ackroyd** and of Sanders ("Text and Canon," 5-29) that the different recensions enjoy equal canonical status. That view is unsatisfying from both a theologian's and historian's point of view. A serious theologian will want to know whether or not the Tenth Commandment prescribes worship on Mount **Gerizim**, and a resolute historian needs to know whether the biblical historian recorded in Exod 12:40 that Israel spent 430 years before the Exodus in just Egypt (MT) or in Egypt and Canaan (LXX, SP). Both theology and history demand the critic decide upon an original text.

C. The Practice of Textual Criticism

Text critics traditionally distinguish between *external criticism* (i.e., the evaluation of the textual witnesses), and *internal criticism* (i.e., the transcriptional and intrinsic probability of the readings themselves). For the former critics need to know the history of the witnesses; for the latter, the kinds of errors scribes made along with a sensitivity to exegetical expectations.

1. *External criticism*. Before critics can evaluate the variants, however, they must first be collected and collated. Unfortunately the apparatus in *BHS* still swarms with errors of commission and omission. True variants, we said, are restricted to those that pertain to the editing of Proto-MT, not to the literary achievements of earlier scribes. For example, the shorter readings of Jeremiah should be passed over. This also applies to Joshua. Compare these variants of the MT and the LXX in Josh 1:1. MT reads *'hrymwt msh 'bd yhw*, "After the death of Moses servant of YHWH," but LXX read *'hrymwt msh*, "After the death of Moses." The MT of Josh 1 has more than twelve additional words or phrases that are not found in the LXX, and the LXX rendering of Joshua is about 4-5 percent shorter than the MT. Plausibly the LXX reflects an earlier, shorter stage of the text and in this case should be ignored. Radically dissimilar to his NT counterpart, the OT text critic does not prefer the earlier and shorter readings! In fact, he turns them over to the literary critic.

2. *Intrinsic criticism*.

(a) *Unintentional errors*. Following are a few illustrations of some kinds of unintentional scribal errors. In each case we *retrovert* the LXX to its Hebrew Vorlage.

(i) Confusion of consonants. Scribes confused *b/k*, *b/m*, *b/n*, *g/w*, *g/y*, *d/r*, *h/h*, *w/z*, *w/y*, *w/r*, *k/n*, *m/s*, and *Vs*. Javan's sons are called *ddnym* ("Dodanim") in Gen 10:4 of MT and *rdnym* in Gen 10:4 of SP, LXX and in 1 Chron 1:7 of MT.

(ii) Haplography ("writing once") as a result of homoioteleuton (i.e., words with similar endings) or homoioarcton (words with similar beginnings). MT for Gen

47:16 reads: *w'tnh lkm bmqnykm*, "I will give you for your cattle" (cf. KJV), but SP and LXX read *w'tnh lkm lhm bmqnykm*, "I will give you bread for your cattle" (cf. NIV, NRSV). The scribe may have skipped *lhm*, bread, not only because of words with similar beginnings and endings but because of the similar sound of *k* and *h*.

(iii) Metathesis (the accidental exchange or transposition of two adjacent letters within a word). The MT of Deut 31:1 reads *wylkmsh*, "and Moses went" (cf. NIV), but 4QDeutⁿ and the LXX, *wyklmsh*, "and Moses finished" (cf. NRSV).

(iv) Different concepts of word and verse division. The MT of Hos 6:5 reads *wmsptyk 'wryš'*, "and your judgments, light goes forth" (cf. KJV, NASB), but the LXX reads *wmsptyk'wr yš'*, "and my judgments went forth as light" (cf. NIV, NRSV).

(v) Dittography ("writing twice"). Isa 30:30 in the MT, LXX, Tg., Syr., and Vg. all read *whšmy'yhwh*, "and YHWH will cause to be heard," but 1QIs^a reads *whšmy'hšmy'yhwh*, "and YHWH will cause to be heard, to be heard."

(vi) Doublets (conflation of two or more readings). MT of 2 Kgs 19:9 reads *wysb wyslh ml'kym*, "and he again sent messengers," and the MT of its synoptic parallel in Isa 37:9 reads *wyšm' wyslh ml'kym*, "and when he heard it, he sent messengers." The LXX and 1QIs^a of Isa 37:9 read *wyšm' wysb wyslh ml'kym*, "and when he heard it, he again sent messengers."

(b) *Intentional changes*. Following are a few illustrations of some kinds of intentional scribal changes in the text.

(i) Linguistic changes. Scribes sometimes modernized archaic features of a verse. In Num 15:35 the SP replaces the old infinitive absolute construction of the MT (*rāgōm*) for probably the imperative, *rigmu*, stone.

(ii) Contextual changes. In Gen 2:2, according to the MT, the Tg., and the Vg., God completed his work on the seventh day, but according to the SP, the LXX, and the Syr., he finished on the sixth day to avoid making it appear that God worked on the Sabbath.

(iii) Euphemistic changes. In Gen 50:3 the SP changes *'l-brkyywsp*, "upon the knees of Joseph," into *'l-bymy ywsp*, "in the days of Joseph," because it seemed improper that Joseph's grandchildren should be born upon his knees.

(iv) Theological changes. We have already noted how SP altered the Ten Commandments. Better known are the changes of early names with the **theophoric** element *ba'al*, lord, by the derogatory element, *bōšet*, shame (cf. 1 Chron 8:33 and 2 Sam 2:8). On the whole, however, theological changes are rare in the MT. G. R. Driver (153) noted: "Theological glosses are surprisingly few, and most are enshrined in the *tiqqunê sōp^e rîm*, which are corrections of the text aimed chiefly at softening anthropomorphisms and eliminating the attribution of any sort of impropriety to God."

D. Textual Criticism and Exegesis

Variants often impact the exegesis of the text and ultimately, to a greater or lesser extent, OT theology. At the same time, however, the critic must decide between them on the basis of exegetical expectations.

The basic canon for deciding between variants is: That reading is preferable which would have been more likely to give rise to the others. To say this another way: The variant that cannot be explained away is more probably the original. To apply this canon effectively demands extensive knowledge of the textual witnesses, scribal practices, exegetical factors, and also common sense. P. K. McCarter (22-24) wisely coun-

sels the text critic to: (1) keep a clear image of the scribe in mind; (2) look first for the unconscious error; (3) know the personalities of your witnesses; (4) treat each case as if it were unique. Regarding the last he cites Housman's memorable metaphor: "A textual critic engaged upon his business is not at all like Newton investigating the motion of the planets; he is much more like a dog hunting fleas.... They require to be treated as individuals; and every problem which presents itself to the textual critic must be regarded as possibly unique."

Let us illustrate the practice of textual criticism by returning to the metathesis in Prov 14:32b: *w^ehōseh b^emôtôṣaddîq*, "the righteous is *hoseh* in his death" (MT) versus *w^hoseh b^etummô ṣaddîq*, "the righteous is *hoseh* in his blamelessness." The key to deciding the original text lies in a correct understanding of the q. part. of *hsh*. The lexeme occurs 37x and always with the meaning "to seek refuge," never "to have a refuge" (pace NIV) nor "to find a refuge" (pace NRSV). Thirty-four times, not counting Prov 14:32b, it is used with reference to taking refuge in God or under the shadow of his wings (cf. Prov 30:5). The two exceptions are Isa 14:32 and 30:2. In 14:32 the afflicted take refuge in Zion, a surrogate for God; in 30:2 Isaiah gives the expression an exceptional meaning because he uses sarcasm: *lahsôt b^esēl miṣrāyim*, "to take refuge in the shadow of Egypt!" His intended meaning is that the Jerusalemites should have sought refuge in the Lord. The q. part. of *hsh* or the occurrence of *hsh* in a relative clause denotes a devout worshiper, "one who seeks refuge in Yahweh." One other time beside Prov 14:32b the q. part. is used absolutely: "[Show the wonder of your love], O Savior of those who take refuge (*môšîa' ḥôšîm*)" (Ps 17:7). NIV here rightly glosses, "Savior of those who take refuge in you."

Gamberoni (TDOT 5:71) agrees that the q. part. has the same "religio-ethical" sense in Prov 14:32b as in Ps 17:7. O. Ploeger (176) and A. Meinhold (*Die Sprueche*) independently also reached the conclusion that YHWH is the unstated object of *hoseh* in Prov 14:32b. W. McKane (475), citing A. Barucq (*Le livre des proverbes*), recognizes this as the meaning of the MT. The LXX, NIV, NRSV, however, misunderstood the term. The unequivocal meaning of *hoseh*, however, nicely satisfies the exegetical expectation of "in his death," but not of "in his righteousness." McKane rejects the MT because, as he says, "I do not believe that the sentence originally asserted this [a belief in the after-life]." He follows the LXX and renders: "But he who relies on his own piety is a righteous man." His interpretation, however, violates both the lexical expectations of this word and the exegetical expectation of the book as a whole. Proverbs consistently encourages faith in the Lord (cf. 3:5; 22:19), never faith in one's own piety. In sum, the exegetical expectations of *hsh* and of the book favor the MT, suggesting that the corruption occurred in the LXX tradition.

In this treatment we have focused on scholarly competence. Exegetical competence also entails spiritual virtues, as we have argued elsewhere ("Exegesis and the Spiritual Life").

E. The Reliability of the OT Text

In the light of the OT text's complex history and the welter of conflicting readings in its textual witnesses, can the church still believe in an infallible OT? Can it still confess with the Westminster divines: "by His singular care and providence" the text has been "kept pure in all ages" (Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:8). We argue that

in fact this history of the text and its witness and other reasons give the church good reason to continue to confess *ex animo* both the reliability of the OT text and its purity.

1. In every era there was a strong *tendency to preserve the text*, as argued above.

2. The *antiquity of the MT* can be inferred from both the DSS and from comparative Sem. grammar. There is a continuous witness to the received text-type that lies behind some of the oldest biblical MSS at Qumran and the whole versional tradition (apart from some portions of OG) that stretches from ca. AD 100 to the most modern translations into Eng. and a host of other modern languages and dialects. Moreover, the grammar of this text-type admirably fits the framework of ancient Semitic philology. In fact, it accurately preserves hapleg. such as *qar-ruah*, cool of spirit, even though they were not understood later on in the text's transmission.

3. The *MT recension* can be distinguished from the scribal activity that in effect produced other literary editions of OT materials. If the church confesses that the Holy Spirit superintended the selection of books that comprise the canon of the OT, why should it not confess that the Holy Spirit also superintended the selection of the MT recension? To be sure, the NT authors exhibit the Septuagintal and pre-Samaritan recensions and unique readings, but they also had a freedom in citing noncanonical, religious literature. Even though the canon was closed, they felt free to cite noncanonical literature for theological reasons. How much more should we expect them to use texts freely before the text was finalized?

4. One needs to *keep the data in perspective*. A quick count of the textual variants in *BHS* shows that on average for every ten words there is a textual note. The humanists that produced its text-critical notes for recovering an original eclectic text imply that 90 percent of the text in hand is unquestioned. Textual criticism focuses on the problem readings, not on uncontested readings, giving a sense of disproportion to the amount of contaminated text.

5. The *significance of these variants* must be kept in view. In this essay we featured significant variants to make our points, but in truth most variants, including the 10 percent collated in *BHS*, are insignificant and do not affect doctrine. Most text-critical work is boring because the differences are inconsequential. If we restrict ourselves to the MT recension, D. Stuart (98) rightly observes: "It is fair to say that the verses, chapters, and books of the Bible would read largely the same, and would leave the same impression with the reader, even if one adopted virtually every possible *alternative* reading to those now serving as the basis for current English translations." Even if we accepted the earlier *and/or* other literary editions of portions of the OT, no doctrinal statement within the Protestant tradition would be affected. S. Talmon (*Textual Study of the Bible*, 326) notes regarding the variants both within and between textual traditions:

The scope of variation within all textual traditions is relatively restricted. Major divergences which intrinsically affect the sense are extremely rare. A collation of variants extant, based on the synoptic study of the material available, either by a comparison of parallel passages within one Version, or of the major Versions with each other, results in the conclusion that the ancient authors, compilers, tradents and scribes enjoyed what may be termed a controlled freedom of textual variation.

6. Paradoxically, *the variety of texts bear witness to an original text*. Even in those portions of the OT that have been preserved in different literary editions there is still a relatively large consensus and close genetic relation among the MSS. This is best explained by a schema that commences with an Ur-text. Within the MT tradition, of course, there is a much greater agreement and closer genetic connection. The variants within this tradition point unmistakably to an original text from which they sprang. With respect to this agreement Harris (88-89) provides an apt illustration of the reliability of the text, in spite of there being no perfect witness to it. He notes how the loss or destruction of the standard yard at the Smithsonian Institution would not enormously affect the practice of measurement in the United States, for a comparison of the multitudinous copies of that yard would lead us to something very close to the original standard.

7. *The correctibility of the text* must also be kept in view. Normally an error in the transcriptional process is subject to human correction. In the same way that an average reader can normally correct errors in a book or manuscript, the text critic can correct a textual error in the OT. A good exegete can reduce the number of problematic readings considerably. Moreover, we are the heirs of the work of many competent text critics. Just as electrical engineers can remove unwanted static from a telecommunication signal, so text critics can remove scribal corruptions by their knowledge of the text's history and character and by their exegetical expectations.

8. *The variants in the NT are similar to those found in the DSS*. Our Lord and his apostles confronted OT variants qualitatively similar to the ones that confront us, yet they did not hesitate to rely on the authority of Scripture. These difference did not prevent Jesus from saying that Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35), nor Paul from confessing that "all Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim 3:16). Why should the contemporary church, which is built upon Christ and his apostles, hesitate any more than they to confess the reliability and inspiration of Scripture?

9. *The variants in the DSS are not qualitatively different from those already known*. The Westminster divines knew the variants in the Samaritan Pentateuch and the ancient versions, which are qualitatively the same as those in the DSS, and yet did not hesitate to confess their conviction that the same Spirit who inspired the OT also preserved it. There are no new data to change the confession.

10. *The preserved OT achieves the work of the Holy Spirit*. Paul says: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). The OT we have in hand does just that.

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