

# Textual Criticism: the Old Testament

These studies are designed for believers in Jesus Christ only. If you have exercised faith in Christ, then you are in the right place. If you have not, then you need to heed the words of our Lord, Who said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son, so that every [one] believing [or, trusting] in Him shall not perish, but shall be have eternal life! For God did not send His Son into the world so that He should judge the world, but so that the world shall be saved through Him. The one believing [or, trusting] in Him is not judged, but the one not believing has already been judged, because he has not believed in the Name of the only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son of God." (John 3:16–18). "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life! No one comes to the Father except through [or, by means of] Me!" (John 14:6).

Every study of the Word of God ought to be preceded by a naming of your sins to God. This restores you to fellowship with God (1John 1:8–10). If we acknowledge our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1John 1:9). If there are people around, you would name these sins silently. If there is no one around, then it does not matter if you name them silently or whether you speak aloud.

"You will not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor will you take way from it, that you may keep the commandments of Y<sup>h</sup>owah your God which I command you." (Deut. 4:2).

"For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke will pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished." (Matt. 5:18).

Old Testament Textual Criticism examines the existing manuscript witnesses to the Old Testament in order to produce a text that is as close as possible to the original. There are actually only a few complete Old Testament manuscripts, along with the Dead Sea Scrolls and early translations into ancient languages which are still extant. The task of the textual critic, is to sort through the variants and establish a "critical text" that is intended to represent the original by best explaining the state of all extant witnesses.<sup>1</sup>

There is an 8 page summary of this doctrine found in the exegesis of 1Samuel 14:18 ([HTML](#)) ([PDF](#)) ([WPD](#)).

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<sup>1</sup> Definition mostly taken from [http://www.theopedia.com/New\\_Testament\\_Textual\\_Criticism](http://www.theopedia.com/New_Testament_Textual_Criticism) and adjusted for the Old Testament. Accessed January 16, 2013.

<b>Other Hyperlinks</b>		
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**Preface:** Textual Criticism is the science and art of determining what is the correct reading of any particular verse or passage in the Old Testament. We do not have one definitive Hebrew manuscript which we have judged to be accurate in all respects. In fact, we could not point to even a single chapter of any book of the Old Testament and say that we had the definitive reading of that chapter.

It is important that you recognize that there have been some alterations to the original text, most of which were unintentional. A majority of variant readings go back to times when a scribe made an error in the transcription of a book; however, there are even a few times when the text was actually altered. The science and art of textual criticism is attempting to return to the original text. Because of the fact that there are alterations and mistakes, one must also consider this: how much of my Old Testament can I trust? Given that much of the Old Testament has been around for 3000 years, is there any resemblance between the original text and what we have today?

There are several important questions that we must study in relation to Old Testament textual criticism: (1) How much corruption of the original text took place? (2) Were there actual, intentional changes made to the text and do we have any idea as to what those changes were? (3) What kinds of errors were made in copying the original manuscripts and how do we know? (4) Which manuscripts do we have, in what languages, and what is their relative importance? (5) How was the text of the Old Testament transmitted? (6) Of what importance are the Dead Sea Scrolls? (7) Of what importance are the ancient translations of the Old Testament? (8) Why did God allow His Word to become corrupt? (9) How or why do we choose one reading over another reading (which is the essence of textual criticism)?

Now you may wonder, why Textual Criticism: *the Old Testament*? Why not simply study *Textual Criticism*? We are talking two very different sciences. Whereas there are in excess of 24,000 Greek New Testament manuscripts, we have not even a tenth of that number of Hebrew manuscripts. Furthermore, we only have a handful of essentially complete Old Testament manuscripts. Whereas with the New Testament, we need only be concerned with one language, Greek; in the Old Testament, we have a relatively small number of Hebrew manuscripts which are much later than their translated counterparts. And the rules or customs associated with the copying of a manuscript were much more exacting for the Old Testament than the New. So, even though there are certainly overlaps between the science of textual criticism of both the Old and New Testament's, there are enough differences to warrant separate doctrines.

## Topic One: Those Who Had the Duty of Preserving the Old Testament Text

1. The *Sopherim* (or *scribes*) were the Jewish custodians of God's Word between 500 B.C. and 200 B.C.
  - a. The word *Sopherim* does not come from the Hebrew word *to write* but comes from the Hebrew word *to count*. To be more precise, the Hebrew word is *çâphar* (סָפַר) [pronounced *saw-FAHR*], which means, in the Qal, *to number* (Gen. 15:5 Lev. 15:13 23:16); in the Qal participle, it is often rendered *scribe* (II Sam. 8:17 2Kings 22:9–10), and in the Piel, it means *to recall, to recount, to enumerate, to declare, to celebrate* (Ex. 9:16 Judges 6:13 Job 15:17). Properly, this word properly means *to engrave, to cut into a stone*, which, therefore means *to write*. It has come to mean *to count, to recount*. I would not be surprised if the functions of the Scribe (counting the letters and words) lent this meaning of *to count to çâphar* rather than the other way around. Strong's #5608 BDB #707.
  - b. We will study the famous *emendations of the Sopherim* later in this doctrine.
2. The *Zugoth* (or *pairs* of textual scholars) were custodians of God's Word in the second and first centuries B.C.
3. The *Tannaim* (meaning *repeaters, teachers*) preserved the Old Testament up until 200 A.D. They also preserved the *Midrash* (meaning *textual interpretation*), the *Tosefta* (meaning *addition*) and the *Talmud* (which means *instruction*). The *Talmud* was compiled between 100–500 A.D. (it was based upon Jewish teachings between 300 B.C. and 500 A.D.). The *Talmud* was broken down into two parts: the *Mishnah* (or, *repetitions, explanation, teaching*) and the *Gemara* (or, *the matter to be learned*). These *Tannaim* preserved both the Old Testament and the teachings of the rabbis which had been collected to that point. These texts have several quotations from the Mosaic Law, which is substantially the same as the Masoretic text which has come down to us.
  - a. Geisler and Nix combine these previous groups into one and refer to them as the *Sopherim* and credit them with custodianship of God's Word between 500 B.C. and circa 200 A.D.
  - b. The Jews had a great deal of faith in the inspiration of their Scriptures: Flavius Josephus, the famous 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish historian, wrote: *We have given practical proof of our reverence for our own Scriptures. For, although such long ages have now passed, no one has ventured either to add, or to removed, or to alter a syllable; and it is an instinct with every Jew, from the day of his birth, to regard them as the decrees of God, to abide by them, and, if need be, cheerfully to die for them.*<sup>2</sup>
  - c. There is a theory which I have read in several of my sources that the manuscripts of the Old Testament were standardized around 100 A.D. and that all deviant manuscripts were destroyed.
4. The *Talmudists* preserved the text between 100–500 A.D. ISBE suggests that there was an accepted text at this time; that is, the variants were eliminated and an accepted manuscript was assembled. Their reasoning, in part, appears to be based upon the obvious errors which are repeated in subsequent texts.
5. The Samaritans are those from the northern kingdom who established and practiced a separate and corrupt form of Judaism. They believed the Pentateuch to be canonical, but apparently not the rest of Old Testament Scripture. They were not a continuation of the Talmudists or the predecessors of the Masorites; they would be considered a different branch altogether, but stemming from the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. Apparently, they maintained a copy of the Law in a temple on Mount Gerizim I Shechem for some time. Our oldest copy of

<sup>2</sup> Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*; Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville; ©1999, p. 76.

this manuscript dates back to 1100–1200 A.D.<sup>3</sup> We believe it to ultimately be based upon manuscripts which date back to the time of the Maccabeans. There are certainly differences between the Masoretic text and the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the reasons will be found in the section on **variants**.

6. The Masorites preserved the Old Testament text between 500–900 B.C. The name *Masorettes* comes from *masora*, which means *oral tradition*.
  - a. These Jewish scholars gave the Old Testament text its final form.
  - b. There were two principal independent schools or centers of Masorettes—in Babylon and in Palestine, and there appear to have been two major groups within Palestine.
    - i. The output from the Babylonian Masorites appears to have been given the widest distribution. They developed a vocalization of the Scriptures known as *supralinear*, which means *above the text*, as did the Palestinian Massorites.
    - ii. However, it was the work of the Tiberian Masorites (Tiberias is in Palestine) which was accepted as the most authoritative throughout the Jewish world. They employed an *infralinear* system of pronunciation (the vowel points were all below the line, with the exception of the *cholem*).
  - c. The Jews were scattered throughout the world and no longer occupied their native Jerusalem.
  - d. Hebrew had become a dead language. It was spoken in the synagogues when the Old Testament was read, but Jews in general did not speak, read or write Hebrew. Even Aramaic, the language in which some of the margin notes of the ancient manuscripts was written, had become a dead language.
  - e. The primary task of the Masorettes was to preserve the consonantal text of the Old Testament, which was a continuation of the work of the scribes. However, there were several other responsibilities concerning the text that they preserved:
    - i. The Masorites recognized the importance of standardizing the text and adding vowel points so that the text could continue to be read aloud. There were actually three different vocalizations which were produced, but *the Tiberian system established itself as supreme*.<sup>4</sup> In other words, we do not know exactly how the original Hebrew was pronounced. The speech habits and common dialects of the areas in which these three systems were developed certainly weighed in heavily with respect to the pronouncing of these words. However, there are some today (e.g., Paul Kahle) who maintain that the Masorites of Tiberias endeavored to produce pronunciations which were as faithful as possible to the original Hebrew.
    - ii. The scribes had filled the margins with notes (called the *Massorah*) in both Hebrew and Aramaic. They had apparently added certain marks and had written letters in peculiar ways and some of their additions were not even understood. Nevertheless, the Masorites carefully included these additions.
    - iii. There were a number of instances where the text would read one way, but it would be read aloud in another. The Masorites had to indicate in the text that the favored reading was this, but that the actual text read differently. These instances were known as *permanent Qere's*.
      - (1) The most common instance is with respect to the sacred name of God, *Y<sup>e</sup>howah*. Over time, even the actual pronunciation of *Y<sup>e</sup>howah* had been lost because the Jew would not pronounce His Name when reading aloud in the synagogue. It had become customary to read *Adonai* instead. Our current most common pronunciation, *Jehovah*, is a combination of the Anglicization of the original consonants *YHWH* combined with the vowels of *Adonai*. With a first person singular suffix (*my Lord*), the word is *ʾădônây* (אֲדֹנָי) [pronounced *uh-doh-NAY*], and these apparently are from whence come the inserted vowels. So, the text reads *YHWH*, which has come to be pronounced *Jehovah*, *Yahweh* and *Y<sup>e</sup>howah*. However, it is not generally pronounced by the Jew when His Name is read aloud in the synagogue—they will read *Adonai* instead.
      - (2) A second, but much less frequent *qere*, occurred when the *third feminine singular pronoun* was written with a vowel letter which properly belong with the *3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular*

<sup>3</sup> See Norman Geisler and William Nix; *A General Introduction to the Bible*; Chicago; Moody Press, ©1968, pp. 301–303 for more details.

<sup>4</sup> *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 5, p. 689.

- pronoun*.<sup>5</sup> The Masorites did not know if the masculine gender pronoun could be applied to males or to females,<sup>6</sup> and thus take on a feminine verb. The Masorites made a note of this.
- (3) There are 1300 instances in Scripture (apart from those mentioned), where the text is written in one way, but typically read in another. These instances are noted by the Masorites. There are times when the qere is correct (which is how the text is typically read aloud) and there are times when the kethibh is correct (the way the disputed consonants in question are written in the text). Rather than making the decision that the text should be read this way or that, the Masorites provided us with both opinions.
  - (4) A fourth uninteresting but very time-consuming responsibility that the Masorites took upon themselves was to indicate where the emphasis should be placed on a word when the Scripture is chanted (or, *canted*). This is known as cantillation.
  - (5) Whereas the consonantal text was quite consistent from manuscript to manuscript, the Massorah and the extra markings were not.
  - (6) It is just possible that these various instances intrigued you, and you are wondering, *how is it possible for me to know where these readings are?* Rotherham's *Emphasized Bible* is filled with footnotes which say, *written \_\_\_ but read \_\_\_*.
- f. The Masoretes were every bit as particular<sup>7</sup> about transmitting the Hebrew text as those who went before them.
    - i. They counted the number of times that each letter of Scripture occurred in each book.
    - ii. They knew the middle letter of the Pentateuch and the middle letter of the Old Testament.
    - iii. There were a whole host of things which were counted and placed, and they had a set of mnemonics which helped them to remember these various totals and placements.
    - iv. They did practice a certain amount of textual criticism even then and had a unique way of dealing with words they suspected as being corrupt in the text.
  - g. Just as we reference specific manuscripts which we possess all or part of, the Masoretes also referred back to particular manuscripts, e.g. as the manuscripts out of Jericho, Jerusalem, Sinai and Babylon and the one produced by Rabbi Hillel. We know of these manuscripts only through the references made by the Masoretes.
  - h. Around the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D., two primary traditions arose—these appear to both be in Tiberias—one following the ben Asher family and the other following the ben Naphtali family. The differences between these two sets of Masoretic manuscripts were noted in various extinct and semi-extinct lists and 875 of them were collected and published by Mishael ben Uzziel. Most of the differences have to do with the pronunciation and the accents, which differences are immaterial to the meaning of the text. In other words, even though we have differences between the groups of texts produced by the Masorites, even those differences are fairly inconsequential. There were no important differences in the consonantal texts.
    - i. Because of a bold statement made by Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) in one of his books, the Tiberias version of the Masoretic text began to be generally accepted as the authoritative text.
    - j. The particular text that Moses Maimonides approved is thought to have been taken to Aleppo and kept there by the Sephardic synagogue.
7. One interesting fact about these various groups is that they did not accord the same reverence to the age of a manuscript that we do. In fact, they felt just the opposite. Frederic Kenyon writes: *The same extreme care which was devoted to the transcription of manuscripts is also at the bottom of the disappearance of the earlier copies. When a manuscript had been copied with the exactitude prescribed by the Talmud, and had been duly verified, it was accepted as authentic and regarded as being of equal value with any other copy. If all were equally correct, age gave no advantage to a manuscript; on the contrary, age was a positive disadvantage, since a manuscript was liable to become defaced or damaged in the lapse of time. A damaged*

<sup>5</sup> *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 5, p. 689. I quoted this, as it was not clear to me as to whether this was a vowel sound which was typically pronounced with the word or whether we are referring to a consonant which acted like a vowel which was typically added. In any case, we have a problem with the gender of the pronoun not matching the gender of the verb.

<sup>6</sup> This is not a reference to the gender-neutral use of the masculine pronoun, a feature of most languages.

<sup>7</sup> Or, *anal*, if you would.

or imperfect copy was at once condemned as unfit for use.<sup>8</sup> Once a new manuscript was completed and verified as accurate, an older manuscript which had become worn and unreadable in places would be destroyed. The scribes had enough confidence in their copied manuscripts to destroy the older manuscripts.

- a. I should point out that there are some who believe that the Bible was tampered with; that some religious organization got a hold of it and made wholesale changes in Scripture in order to get across this theological idea or that. When I was young, I was taught that all of the references to reincarnation were removed from Scripture and that there were all of these hidden books which should have been put into the Bible but were not.
  - b. These assertions are generally made by people whose academic skills in this realm are sorely lacking. I've gone online and found people who assert the Catholic church made wholesale changes to Scripture in order to promulgate their own doctrines. This is completely false. We have the Old and New Testaments translated into a number of different languages sent out in a number of different directions, so that the Catholic church, even though it became large and even vicious, was not the only church in town. It may have dominated some areas and even some countries, but we have manuscripts of the Bible (primarily the New Testament) which pre-date the Catholic church; or were associated with completely different traditions and churches, which are barely different. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, we did not find out new, hidden information which scribes had destroyed over the years; we found out that the Old Testament Scriptures, as handed down by the Masorites, had changed very little over the period of 1000 years.
  - c. What is important to know is, there has never been a discovery of any ancient Bible manuscript which differed fundamentally from existing manuscripts; and there has never been a discovery of an ancient Bible manuscript which differed in doctrine from what we have come to believe.
  - d. In comparing the MT to the Dead Sea Scrolls, we find that the Bible was transmitted much more accurately over this period of 1000 years than Shakespear has been over the past few hundred years. Even though Shakespear wrote after the advent of the printing press, there are a whole host of disputed readings in Shakespear upon which whole plot turns and twists depend upon. There are barely a handful of secondary doctrines that one might call into question based upon differences of various Old and New Testament manuscripts. In fact, the only example I can come up with is, at the end of the book of Mark, there is about half of a chapter which was added which asserts that the disciples of Christ would pick up dead snakes and drink deadly poison and not be hurt. Textual criticism clearly has shown that this passage was an addition made several hundred years after the writing of the book of Mark.
  - e. What we find in Scripture are much greater differences in the various English translations than we have between ancient manuscripts. For instance, some English translations appear to support Christian mysticism and ecstatic spiritual experiences (James Moffatt Translation, JPS—Tanakh, NAB, NJB, NRSV, REB, TEV), whereas, most do not.
  - f. This is particularly true of the New Testament (not our topic here), as we have 24,000+ partial and full ancient manuscripts of the New Testament. There is no way that you can assert that any organization, large or small, came along and made vast doctrinal changes to Scripture in order to support this viewpoint or that. There is absolutely no historical or archeological evidence to support such an opinion.
8. With reference to the accuracy of the Old Testament text, William Green writes *It may safely be said that no other work of antiquity has been so accurately transmitted.*<sup>9</sup>

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## Topic Two: Ancient Old Testament Manuscripts

There is no definitive manuscript of the Old Testament which we can base our exegesis upon. There are several texts which are listed below.

<sup>8</sup> Josh McDowell, *A Ready Defense*; Here's Life Publishers; ©1990; p. 49. Taken from Frederic Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*; New York: Harper and Brothers; p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> Taken from Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*; ©1972 by Campus Crusade for Christ; p. 59. It came from William Green, *General Introduction to the Old Testament—The text*; New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1899; p. 181.

1. The *Autographs*: this is the definitive Old Testament manuscript.<sup>10</sup> It is an exact copy of the original manuscript of the Old Testament.
  - a. There are only two problems: (1) we do not have a copy of any manuscript which could rightly be called an *autograph*; and (2) no such manuscript of the entire Old Testament has ever existed.
  - b. Why has there never been such a manuscript in existence?
    - i. Although God has known the entire canon of Scripture from eternity past, man had to discover which books were inspired and which books were simply books. For instance, what I write is inspired by the Holy Spirit, however, not in the same way that the Old Testament canon was. I could not write what I write apart from God the Holy Spirit and I make every attempt to keep error from seeping into my writings; however, my writings and theology often contain errors. Books recognized as being canonical are those written by man as led by the Holy Spirit, but as reflecting their writing styles, personalities, etc. What separates their writing from mine is that they are 100% accurate in all matters historical and theological.
    - ii. The various books of the Old Testament canon were composed over a period of thousands of years. Therefore, an older book would have been copied and recopied many times prior to the writing of a more recent book. For instance, portions of the book of Genesis were written easily two thousand years prior to portions of the book of Chronicles. So, once we had an *autograph* of the book of Chronicles, we no longer had an autograph of the book of Genesis.
    - iii. Some books were not authored by simply one author. It is clear that the book of Genesis and the book of Samuel were written by several authors. We do not know exactly what was the process of assembling these books. The book of Genesis appears to be a book that one author would lay down and another would pick up. However, there are some additions made to this book after the original portion had been written. Did Moses assemble the final edition of Genesis (which would make it completely inspired)? Did a scribe later add this bit of information or that bit of information, which would then be considered a corruption of the text?
    - iv. The result is that we have this idealized concept of an autograph which has actually never existed. It is actually more of a bit of shorthand rather than anything else. We refer back to what was in the autographs, whether they actually existed or not.
  - c. So, why do we make reference to a non-existent text? Such an original manuscript exists before God, and part of what we would like to do is to set up a system for determining, as closely as possible, the text of this theoretical manuscript.
  - d. What did exist, at one time, were autographs of the various individual books of the Old Testament.
2. Until the translation of the Septuagint, we do not know if there were any complete Old Testament manuscripts in one place. We see the Old Testament as one unit. However, in the ancient world, this was a collection of books which, although they were understood to be the Word of God, it was unclear as to which books were and which were not. Therefore, at any given time in any given place, we are not assured that we ever had a full collection of each and every Old Testament book. Some of the unevenness of the translation of the Septuagint could be based upon the fact that the manuscripts of some books were better than the manuscripts of others.
3. Before we examine the extant manuscripts of the Old Testament, we should discuss *why* there are so few, as compared with the New Testament.
  - a. The early writing materials were scrolls made from animal hides. Being organic and over 2500 years old, the vast majority of these skins can be expected to have deteriorated to dust.
  - b. We have a theory that when the Masorites completed and corrected a new manuscript, they would destroy the older manuscript upon which it was based. Generally, the purpose of creating the new manuscript was to *replace* the old one. When an older manuscript began to deteriorate to the point where portions were difficult to read, then a new manuscript was of necessity created.
  - c. Every synagogue had its *geniza*, whose root means *to hide*. In these *genizas*, documents and manuscripts which were no longer of value were kept until they could be buried in consecrated ground. Therefore, many valuable manuscripts found their way first to the *geniza* and then they were buried, sometimes with revered men.

<sup>10</sup> I believe that Brotzman refers to this as the *Urtext*. See Brotzman, Ellis R.; *Old Testament Textual Criticism A Practical Introduction*; ©1994; ©Baker Books; Grand Rapids, MI; p. 125.

4. Other information about manuscripts:
  - a. ZPEB tells us that there were two types of manuscripts: those for synagogue use, which would be the most accurate, but also the most rare; and those for private use, whose creation may not have been subjected to the same standards of rigor as the synagogue manuscripts. ZPEB also tells us that Jewish law required every Hebrew family to have a copy of the Law in their homes. What is left unstated is the time period to which ZPEB refers.<sup>11</sup>
    - i. The private manuscripts would often have the consonants written in one ink, with the vowels added later, often in a different colored ink, and possibly by another copyist.
    - ii. In fact, ZPEB suggests that several people might prepare the same text: one would write the consonants, another would add the vowel points, a third might correct the text, a fourth would add the Masora, and, years later, a fifth person might retouch the manuscript to correct portions which had become defaced due to age and use.
    - iii. First words or letters might be ornamented, and there were even pictures of trees, flowers or animals in the margins.
  - b. At the end of some manuscripts, there was a colophon, which is somewhat like the *Document Summary* feature in WordPerfect. Those who performed the various functions were named and the year of the manuscript was often given, although this required some deciphering for two reasons:
    - i. The year could be figured from creation, from the destruction of the second Temple, from the hegira of Mohammed, or from the time of the Seleucidæ (312 B.C.).
    - ii. The indication of time might lack the number of thousands of years or even the number of hundreds of years.
    - iii. However, when more than one reference to time is given, it is easier to pinpoint the date of the manuscript (see the [Leningrad Codex](#) below).
5. The Masoretic text:
  - a. First of all, the Masoretic text is not one manuscript. So, even though I will refer to it in the singular (as does everybody else), it is actually a group of manuscripts.
  - b. Secondly, we need to discuss the transmission of the Masoretic text:
    - i. The Masoretes (also spelled Massorettes), which is an abbreviation for *masters of tradition*, were the evolutionary end of the scribes. They arose after the destruction of Jerusalem with the intent of preserving the Jewish tradition and religion by preserving Jewish Scriptures.
    - ii. Although their name appears to go back to circa 800 A.D. or before, the Masoretes appear to have begun as a group around 500 A.D., at which time they referred to themselves as *Scribes*.
    - iii. The historical context was this: the second Temple had been destroyed, as was the capital city of the Jews (Jerusalem), and the Jews had been scattered throughout the ancient world. Therefore, the only thing which gave them their unique identity was their Scriptures, the Old Testament. Therefore, from 70 A.D. on, of utmost importance to the Jew was the preservation of God's Word.
    - iv. By this time, Hebrew was, for all intents and purposes, a dead language, so the pronunciation of the words of the Old Testament was in question, as Old Testament manuscripts were written only with capital letters. Hebrew was not unlike *Latin* in the previous century. Many Catholic churches gave the Mass in Latin, although none of the parishioners knew exactly what was being said. The Catholic priests knew Latin well enough to speak at least the Mass in Latin. Similarly, there were religious scholars who knew the Hebrew, although there were limitations even here.
    - v. The Old Testament text was written in all consonants; the Hebrew had no written vowels. The correct pronunciation was based upon centuries and centuries of reading the Old Testament text in Hebrew in the synagogues.
    - vi. The Masoretes inserted vowel points to indicate the pronunciation of the words; however, these vowel points were written above or below the consonants in order to preserve the original text of consonants. ZPEB suggests that this was done between 800–900 A.D.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 5, p. 686.

<sup>12</sup> *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 5, p. 685. This same page covers in great detail the concept of writing without vowels and how the meaning of the text can be preserved even without the vowels.



- (1) I should add that there were actually several groups who added vowel points. When the Hebrew text was read in a home or in the synagogue, the actual pronunciation would be affected by whether the Hebrews spoke Aramaic, some form of Greek or Arabic.
  - (2) Although many were able to retain their own pronunciations, which was affected by their native language, these pronunciations would be slightly different. Even some consonant sounds (א, י, ו—aleph, wâw and ayin) were somewhat lost to antiquity.
  - (3) Therefore, there were at least three different systems of vowel pointing developed: in Babylon, Palestine and in Tiberias, which is in Palestine. This latter system became dominant.
- vii. Related to this, the modern chapter division and verse numbering did not come about until the 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (this was actually a process rather than a sudden occurrence).
  - viii. Certainly, there were discrepancies and problems with the text. Even when I examine the Hebrew text which is accepted, there are places where it is clear that there was a problem in the transmission of the text. The Massoretes would write notes and critical annotations in the margins (called *masora* or *massorah*) so that the text would be preserved along with any pertinent comments about the text itself.
  - ix. The importance of these manuscripts prepared by the Masoretes cannot be overemphasized. ZPEB makes this comment about manuscripts produced by the Masoretes after 900 A.D.: *Many new manuscripts of the Masoretic text were prepared in the following centuries, but in their essential feature, that of the consonantal text, they were remarkably uniform, even though written in widely separated portions of the earth.*<sup>13</sup> This seems to indicate that there were groups of Masoretes scattered throughout the world.
- c. ZPEB was the only source which mentioned a group similar to the Masorites who came on the scene after the Masorites: the *grammarians*, or, more accurately, the *punctuators* (*naqdanim*). Like the Masorites, they endeavored to preserve the Old Testament text. The fundamental portion of the original text, the consonants, has remained exceptionally consistent, despite the fact that texts were prepared throughout the world.<sup>14</sup>
  - d. The actual number of Old Testament manuscripts is quite small, particularly prior to 1947. Kittel's 1937 *Biblia Hebraica* is based upon a the first four of the Masorite manuscripts listed below:
    - i. The Cairo Codex (895 A.D.):
      - (1) Often designated as C.
      - (2) The Cairo Codex contains both the Former and Latter Prophets (who are not who you think they are). Together, the Former and Latter Prophets make up the Neviim, which means *The Prophets*.
        - (a) The Former Prophets are Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings.
        - (b) The Latter Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve (who we refer to as the minor prophets).
        - (c) To help you with *who's missing?*, Lamentations and Daniel are both part of the *Writings* (also called the *Kethuvim*).
      - (3) The Cairo Codex was written and pointed by Moshe ben Asher, who was the second to the last of the ben Asher family. The text was in three columns with Tiberian vowel pointing.
      - (4) The manuscript was originally presented to the Qaraite community in Jerusalem, only to be seized during the Crusades, and finally given to the Qaraites in Cairo.
    - ii. The Leningrad Codex of the Prophets:
      - (1) Designated as MS Heb. B 3
      - (2) This contains only the Latter Prophets and was written with Babylonian punctuation.
      - (3) At least two of my sources date this manuscript 916 A.D.<sup>15</sup>
      - (4) You may recall my reference to the colophon—information given about the manuscript at the end of the manuscript.

<sup>13</sup> *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 5, p. 685.

<sup>14</sup> *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 5, p. 685.

<sup>15</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix; *A General Introduction to the Bible*; Chicago; Moody Press, ©1968, p. 249. *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 5, p. 691.

- (a) We are told that this manuscript was prepared 4770 years after creation, 1444 years after the exile of King Jehoiacin, in the year 319 of the empire of the Greeks, 940 years after the destruction of the second Temple, and 399 years after the rule of the little horn.
  - (b) The first number dates the manuscript at 1010 A.D.; the third, if the number for 1000 had been left out, would put us at 1008 A.D. (1319 years after 312 B.C.); the fourth indicates 1009; and the fifth, 1008 (if the *little horn* refers to the beginning of Islam). The second date is completely out of wack with the other four.
- (5) The Leningrad Codex follows the Tiberian system of vowels, although it employs the *Babylonian supralinear system of vocalization*.<sup>16</sup>
- iii. The Aleppo Codex (930 A.D.):
- (1) The Aleppo Codex is often designated as A.
  - (2) The colophon of this manuscript tells us that Aaron ben Asher (who was the son of Moshe ben Asher) added the vowels and Masora to this manuscript. This helps us to date the manuscript, as Aaron ben Asher died in 940.
  - (3) The manuscript was first kept in Jerusalem, then in Cairo, and finally it was taken to Aleppo, the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city in Syria.
  - (4) It was, at one time, apparently a complete Old Testament. During its stay at a Sephardic synagogue in Aleppo, they resolutely refused to allow this manuscript to be studied or photographed. Later, this synagogue was set afire during the riots of 1948, and it was feared that this invaluable manuscript had been destroyed. However, about  $\frac{3}{4}$ <sup>th</sup> of it had been rescued from the burning synagogue and was then smuggled out of Syrian into Israel.<sup>17</sup> The portion which was lost was a majority of the Pentateuch. This manuscript is a primary authority for our present accepted Hebrew text. Interestingly enough, although the synagogue of Aleppo steadfastly refused to allow this manuscript to be studied or photographed, it did allow two Christians on two different occasions to photograph one page of the manuscript. These photographs were used in a book on Hebrew accents and the other in a travel book. The consonantal text of Gen. 26:17–27:30 and Deut. 4:38–6:3 were thus preserved (although the photographs are not good enough to allow us to see the masora or the vowel points).
- iv. The British Museum Codex (Oriental 4445) (950 A.D.) contains only Gen. 39:20–Deut. 1:33.
- v. The Leningrad Codex (1008 A.D.):
- (1) Called MS B-19A.
  - (2) It is the only complete manuscript of the Old Testament. It is believed to have been copied from a corrected manuscript which was prepared by Rabbi Aaron ben Moses ben Asher prior to 1000 A.D.<sup>18</sup> This, at one time, was the primary source of *Biblia Hebraica*. This manuscript was apparently produced in Babylonia.
- vi. The Reuchlin Codex of the Prophets (1105 A.D.), like the Leningrad Codex, was based upon a corrected manuscript prepared by ben Naphtali, a Tiberian Masorete.
- vii. When the synagogue in Cairo, Egypt was rebuilt in 1890, the Cairo Geniza fragments were discovered, which are bits and pieces of the Old Testament that date back between the sixth and ninth centuries A.D. There are 120+ manuscripts within these fragments which have been scattered throughout the world's museums (they can be found, among other places, in the British Museum, the Bodleian Library, and in Oxford and Cambridge).
- viii. Kahle states that he found an additional 14 manuscripts, dated from 929–1121, in Leningrad in 1926, all attributed to the text of ben Asher.<sup>19</sup> Several of my sources did not mention this and it is not clear whether these manuscripts have been studied or photographed or even seen. This seems like quite a find to be ignored by most of my sources.
- ix. Codex Reuchlinianus and three manuscripts formerly of Erfurt:

<sup>16</sup> *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 5, p. 691.

<sup>17</sup> More details on this can be found in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 5, pp. 695–696.

<sup>18</sup> Moses ben Asher, his son Aaron and Moses ben Naphtali were three Masorite scholars living in Tiberias of Galilee in the late 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. They are thought to be responsible for the Aleppo Codex and for Codex Leningradensis B19 A (L).

<sup>19</sup> *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 5, p. 691.

- (1) These are thought to be by some the only ben Naphtali text which may still be in existence.
  - (2) Codex Reuchlinianus is kept at Karlsruhe, Germany.
  - (3) Since the three manuscripts were apparently discovered in Erfurt, they are designated E1, E2 and E3.
  - (4) Some scholars believe that this text is actually a cross between the Babylonian and Tiberian Masorites.
- x. After 1100 A.D., there are a considerable number of manuscripts, many of which have additional notes both from the traditions of ben Asher and ben Naphtali.
- (1) It was around this time that the importance of the Masora ceased to be fully appreciated.
  - (2) Often decorative elements were added to the margins, like animals or flowers.
  - (3) Of course, with the advent of printing in the early 1400's, we had a huge number of Hebrew books printed.
- e. There are several reasons for the scarcity of Old Testament manuscripts (as compared to 24,000+ New Testament manuscripts or fragments):
- i. Although we do have 20,000 cuneiform tablets of the Mari Letters (which go back as far as 1700 B.C.), we do not have any similar finds for the Old Testament.
  - ii. Several times in the Old Testament, it is made clear that copies of the Bible were made. A king was to make a copy of the writings of Moses. There obviously needed to be copies of Scripture which was moved with the Tent of God. For whatever reason, and possibly because copies of Scripture were made regularly, animal skins were used for these manuscripts. Quite obviously, these do not last as do clay tablets.
  - iii. Even Old Testament Jews were moved out of the land—the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. and the southern kingdom in 586 B.C. Jerusalem, a city that we see as the center of Jewish religious history, was conquered 47 times between 1800 B.C. and 1948 A.D. This sort of history was not conducive to maintaining vast libraries. Since 70 A.D., the Jew had no permanent home, although they maintained their religious and racial identity.
  - iv. There was a Talmudic tradition to be a tradition of destroying manuscripts which were flawed.
  - v. It even appears that the Masoretes themselves, after producing several good manuscripts with vowel points, allowing for the Hebrew to be spoken, would destroy deviating manuscripts as did those from the Talmud era.
6. Texts from the Talmudic period (300 B.C.–500 A.D.):
- a. First of all, we have no manuscripts which date back prior to the Babylonian captivity (586 B.C.).
  - b. There are the synagogue rolls; that is, manuscripts which were designed to be used in the synagogue (primarily for oral readings).
    - i. These were written on the skins of clean animals which had been prepared specifically for use in the synagogue by a Jew.
    - ii. The ink used had to be black, although other inks certainly existed at that time.
    - iii. No word or letter was to be copied from memory, not even a *yodh* (׳).
    - iv. There were an additional dozen rules which,<sup>20</sup> although they did not necessarily act to preserve the text, they certainly indicated the seriousness involved in copying a new manuscript.
  - c. There were copies of the Old Testament which were for personal use and were not read from publically in the synagogues.
    - i. My guess that if a manuscript above got screwed up in any way, then it became a private copy. Certainly, private copies must have been made specially. Although these copies were not made followed the same litany of rules as the synagogue copies, we can rest assured that they were very accurately reproduced.
    - ii. As you may write notes in the margins of your Bible, so it was with these private copies.
    - iii. These private manuscripts often took the form of a **codex**, meaning that they were more like a book than a roll.
    - iv. Few individuals would have had a copy of the entire Old Testament.

<sup>20</sup> See Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*; Chicago; Moody Press, ©1968, p. 241 or Josh McDowell, *A Ready Defense*; Here's Life Publishers; ©1990; pp. 48–49.

- v. It is theorized that there were private groups who provided manuscripts for a fee. So, rather than go to Jerusalem for an official copy (which would have been extremely expensive), it is theorized that groups like those who held the Dead Sea Scrolls possibly provided copies of various books for a price. It would still be expensive, but far less than buying an official copy. These manuscripts, although reproduced with great care, may not be up to the standards that we would hope, which would better explain many of the errors found in the Old Testament manuscripts. There would be times when these other manuscripts would be depended upon, in full or in part, for the production of a new manuscript. It is actually not until the discovery of the **Dead Sea Scrolls** (see below) that we have any evidence of this theory.
  - d. Prior to 1947, the oldest Old Testament manuscripts in our possession could be dated circa 100 A.D. Since these manuscripts date 1400 years after the closing of the Hebrew canon, obviously their accuracy was questioned. Apparently, texts of the Talmudic era were first discovered in 1947–1956 among the **Dead Sea Scrolls**. It was this discovery which gave us manuscripts as much as 1000 years older than those in our possession up until that time. Because of their great importance, we are going to cover the Dead Sea Scrolls as a separate topic.
7. The Samaritan Pentateuch:
- a. As mentioned before, the Samaritans were the Jews of the northern kingdom who split from the southern Jews around the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. There developed a great deal of animosity between the Samaritans and the traditional Jews (recall the stories of the good Samaritan or the Samaritan woman, both found in the gospels).
  - b. It appears as though these Samaritans made a few changes to the Old Testament Scriptures to suit their particular location.
  - c. The oldest Samaritan codex that we have dates back to about 1100 A.D.<sup>21</sup>
  - d. There are about 6000 variants between the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Masoretic text of the books of Moses. Although most of these are trivial, there are 1900 places where the Samaritan text is in agreement with the LXX rather than with the Masoretic text.
  - e. There are different forms of Hebrew writing. The writing found in our manuscripts of the Samaritan Pentateuch is an older form of Hebrew script than found in the Masoretic text, dating back prior to 200 B.C.
  - f. Although originally hailed as being superior to the MT, the Samaritan text was dismissed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as worthless, because of the few changes made to the text to favor northern Israel. We recognize it today as being an important source when it comes to determining the original text.
  - g. Generally speaking, when the Samaritan text and the Septuagint are in agreement with one another, then that is a superior reading to the MT.

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### Topic Three: The Dead Sea Scrolls

1. At the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, many liberal scholars postulated that there would be great discrepancies between the Masoretic text and the Old Testament manuscripts found with the Dead Sea Scrolls. If you have studied **Documentary Hypothesis** (also known as *Higher Criticism*), you will note that one of their axioms is that various groups when they edited and wove various sources into what we accept as the Hebrew text, they had an agenda—that is, certain doctrines and theological positions which they would incorporate into the text. Many scholars expected that, over the period of a thousand years, that others would have done the same.
2. Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we had only one tiny scrap of Hebrew text known as the Nash Papyrus, that dated back to the beginning of the Christian era. The Nash Papyrus contained only the text of Deut. 6:4–9 along with a portion of the Ten Commandments, which was dated between 150 B.C. and

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<sup>21</sup> See Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*; Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville; ©1999, p. 85 for more information.

100 A.D. Now, even though the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls would be similar to delving into any religious person's library, there were several Old Testament manuscripts:

3. The initial discovery: A Bedouin shepherd boy named Muhammad was searching for a lost goat near the northwest portion of the Dead Sea (he was about 8 miles south of Jericho). In his search, he chunked a rock into a cave and heard the unexpected sound of broken pottery. When he investigated the cave, he found several large, carefully-sealed pottery jars inside which contained leather scrolls that had been wrapped in linen cloth. The dry climate and the carefully sealed jars preserved the leather scrolls in excellent condition. It was estimated that these scrolls had been placed in the cave around 68 A.D. (immediately prior to the fall of Jerusalem).
4. Unrolling the scrolls: many of these manuscripts would crumble into dust if touched. They had to be carefully re-humidified and then painstakingly unrolled.
5. From Cave I:
  - a. The St. Mark's Monastery Isaiah Scroll (also known as *Isaiah A* or *IQIs<sup>a</sup>*) is the oldest known copy of any entire book of the Old Testament. There are numerous corrections in the margin or above the line. It has been dated approximately 100 B.C.<sup>22</sup> and is the oldest complete book that we have from Scripture. This is not best manuscript, however. It had been obviously used extensively, as some letters and words were rewritten, meaning that they had faded with use. It was apparent that this was a poorly written manuscript to begin with, as several words were erased or crossed out, and other inserted or written over the old text. The corrections of a word or letter appear to have been done in the same hand as the original manuscript; however, longer corrections were apparently done by someone else. Though there are several instances where this text is in closer agreement with the Septuagint than it is with the Masoretic text, there are more instances where it favors the MT. Of all the texts found in the Qumran caves, this is the longest manuscript and the most complete.
  - b. The Hebrew University Isaiah (also known as *Isaiah B* or *IQIs<sup>b</sup>*) is not complete, and was in much worse shape, but it agrees more closely with the Masoretic text than does Isaiah A.
  - c. There are also fragments of Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Judges, Samuel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Psalms and Daniel.
  - d. There was a commentary on the book of Habakkuk, which is important as it contains the complete text of the first two chapters of that book, along with an interpretation thereof. There are also fragments of commentaries on the Psalms, Micah and Zephaniah.
6. From Cave II:
  - a. Excavated in 1952, cave II yielded fragments of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Job, Psalms and Ruth.
  - b. In all, there were fragments from 100 manuscripts.
  - c. Unfortunately, the cave had been previously discovered and ransacked by Bedouins.
7. From Cave IV:
  - a. There were in this cave at one time, 100 copies of the Old Testament books, with the exception of Esther. What remains are fragments of these books.
  - b. One fragment of Samuel (4QSam<sup>b</sup>) is, at this time, the oldest fragment of any Biblical manuscript, dating back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.
  - c. The Bedouins had also previously found and pilfered this cave as well. Some fragments were purchased from them.
  - d. Of the thousands of fragments found and purchased, portions of over 400 books have been identified.
8. From Cave V: some very deteriorated fragments of some Old Testament books.
9. Cave VI: mostly papyrus fragments, including Daniel and Kings.
10. Cave VII: there are no Old Testament manuscripts from this cave; however, there are some disputed manuscripts which some claim to be fragments of New Testament manuscripts dating back to 50–60 A.D. If this is true, these would be the oldest New Testament manuscripts.
11. Cave XI: all or portions of 36 psalms between Psalm 93–150, a portion of Leviticus and an Aramaic Targum (or, paraphrase) of Job. Also discovered here is the apocryphal Psalm 151, previously found only in the Greek Septuagint.

<sup>22</sup> Obviously, dating these books and fragments is a whole other topic indeed. May I suggest Norman Geisler and William Nix; *A General Introduction to the Bible*; Chicago; Moody Press, ©1968, pp. 250–260. Their book is a must for any Christian library.

12. Brotzman's book contains some excellent charts. The one below gives us a quick reference to which books were discovered in which caves:

<b>Which Portions of Old Testament Books Were Found in Which Caves</b>				
	<b>#1</b>	<b>#4</b>	<b>#11</b>	<b>The Others</b>
Genesis	1	12		3
Exodus	1	12		3
Leviticus	1	4	1	2
Numbers	1	2		3
Deuteronomy	2	18		5
Joshua		2		
Judges	1	2		
Samuel	1	3		
Kings		1		2
Isaiah	2	15		1
Jeremiah		3		1
Ezekiel	1	1	1	1
The Twelve		7		1
Psalms	3	17	3	4
Job		3		1
Proverbs		2		
Ruth		2		2
Song of Solomon		3		1
Ecclesiastes		2		
Lamentations		1		3
Daniel	2	5		1
Ezra-Nehemiah		1		
Chronicles		1		

Taken from Brotzman, Ellis R.; *Old Testament Textual Criticism A Practical Introduction*; ©1994; ©Baker Books; Grand Rapids, MI; p. 93.

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13. Josh McDowell has another chart<sup>23</sup> which gives us the number of manuscripts or pieces of manuscripts that were found. His numbers are obviously different from the chart above; however, his book is more recent and certainly more of these scraps have been identified.

<b>Qumran Manuscripts of Books of the Old Testament</b>		
<b>The Canonical Division</b>	<b>Old Testament Book (According to the Order of the Hebrew Bible)</b>	<b>Number of Qumran Manuscripts (?=possible fragment)</b>
<b>Pentateuch (The Torah)</b>	Genesis	18+3?
	Exodus	18
	Leviticus	17
	Numbers	12
	Deuteronomy	31+3?

<sup>23</sup> Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*; Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville; ©1999, p. 80.

Qumran Manuscripts of Books of the Old Testament			
The Canonical Division	Old Testament Book (According to the Order of the Hebrew Bible)	Number of Qumran Manuscripts (?=possible fragment)	
The Prophets (The Nevi'im)	The Former Prophets	Joshua	2
		Judges	3
		Samuel	4
		Kings	3
	The Latter Prophets	Isaiah	22
		Jeremiah	6
		Ezekiel	7
	The Twelve (the Minor Prophets)	10+1?	
The Writings (The Kethuvim)		Psalms	39+2?
		Proverbs	2
		Job	4
	The Five Scrolls	Song of Songs	4
		Ruth	4
		Lamentations	4
		Ecclesiastes	3
		Esther	0
		Daniel	8+1?
		Ezra-Nehemiah	1
		Chronicles	1

Obviously, they favored the books of Genesis, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Daniel and the Psalms.

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14. In total, there were 40,000 fragments of manuscripts discovered, which were identified as some 500 books. Obviously, we discovered a great deal more about the time period between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D. from these writings.
15. Now, we cannot simply say, these are older texts, and therefore they are better. Recall our difficulties with Isaiah A and Isaiah B—the former agrees more with the LXX than it does with the MT, and the latter tends to agree more with the MT. At Qumran, we had a gathering of people who brought with them what mattered most, their manuscripts. A private person would not have necessarily owned the most accurate manuscript nor would the care given to copying been as great and as formalized. Some of the texts that they brought would have had a considerable number of errors from careless copyists, and these errors had simply been perpetuated throughout the years.
16. Related to the Dead Sea Scrolls are the Murabba'at Discoveries, which are caves southeast of Bethlehem. In these caves, excavations having begun in 1952, we have unearthed most of the scroll of the Minor Prophets (from the latter half of Joel through to Haggai), which is very close to the Masoretic text. Letters which were found there could be precisely dated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., which tells us that the manuscripts are that age or older.
17. The Geniza of Cairo: There are also hundreds of Biblical manuscripts which have been recently discovered in **genizas** (rooms in synagogues where old and defective manuscripts of various types were placed). An Abraham Firkovitch was an expert at ransacking old synagogues and their genizas, although he was generally very secretive of the source of his material. Paul Kahle believes that many of the manuscripts which Firkovitch has discovered have come from the geniza of the Cairo Synagogue, which synagogue had been established in 882 A.D. in a building which had previously been a Christian church. The geniza of this

synagogue had been forgotten and walled up for a time. The synagogue, realizing the value of these manuscripts, ceased burying them, and sold quite a number of manuscript fragments to the Cambridge University Library in 1896. An amazing number of fragments came out of this geniza—200,000 in total (some of these were simply contracts which bore the name of God).

18. Geisler and Nix: *Before 1947, the Hebrew text was based on three partial and one complete manuscript dating from about A.D. 1000. Now, thousands of fragments are available, as well as complete books, containing large sections of the LORD from one millennium before the time of the Masoretic manuscripts.*<sup>24</sup>
19. There are two extremely important results of the Dead Sea Scroll finds:
  - a. We can place great confidence in the accuracy of the Masoretic text from the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.; even if we had never discovered these thousands of fragments, we would still have possessed an Old Testament which was 97–99% accurate.
  - b. These additional discoveries, although they confirm the accuracy of the Masoretic text, also allow us to more carefully determine much of the questionable text in certain passages.
20. Gleason Archer: *In conclusion, we should accord to the Masoretes the highest praise for their meticulous care in preserving so sedulously the consonantal text of the Sopherim which had been entrusted to them. They, together with the Sopherim themselves, gave the most diligent attention to accurate preservation of the Hebrew Scriptures that has ever been devoted to any ancient literature, secular or religious, in the history of human civilization. So conscientious were they in their stewardship of the holy text that they did not even venture to make the most obvious corrections, so far as the consonants were concerned, but left their Vorlage exactly as it had been handed down to them. Because of their faithfulness, we have today a form of the Hebrew text which in all essentials duplicates the recension which was considered authoritative in the days of Christ and the apostles, if not a century earlier. And this in turn, judging from Qumran evidence, goes back to an authoritative revision of the Old Testament text which was drawn up on the basis of the most reliable manuscripts available for collation from previous centuries. These bring us very close in all essentials to the original autographs themselves, and furnish us with an authentic record of God's revelation. As W. F. Albright has said, "We may rest assured that the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible, though not infallible, has been preserved with an accuracy perhaps unparalleled in any other Near Eastern literature."*<sup>25</sup>
21. Related to the Dead Sea Scrolls and the other Old Testament manuscripts, we should mention manuscript families:
  - a. On several occasions, the Jews were removed from the Land of Promise. On several occasions, Jews moved from one place to another. As they moved, either of their own free will or because of force, they would take with them their Sacred Scriptures. Each collection of manuscripts in a different physical location which was propagated essentially established another family of manuscripts.

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## Topic Four: Old Testament Translations

As the Jews moved around, and as various peoples moved into their land, their language changed. In the Near East, Jews began to speak Aramaic; in Hellenistic centers (e.g., Alexandria, Egypt), they spoke Greek. Therefore, they needed the Old Testament in the language that they spoke.

1. Allow me first a few preliminary comments concerning the value of ancient translations (or **versions**, as they are called):
  - a. Obviously, if a person who reads the NASB and translates from the top of their head a verse or two in a letter into Spanish, then this would be a relatively worthless translation to compare our translations with. However, had such a person done this circa 200 B.C., then their off-the-cuff translation would become very important. The Septuagint was translated from Hebrew manuscripts which were around

<sup>24</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix; *A General Introduction to the Bible*; Chicago; Moody Press, ©1968, p. 260.

<sup>25</sup> Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*; Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville; ©1999, pp. 81–82. Josh took this from Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*; Chicago, Moody Press; 1964, 1974; p. 65.



- 2500 years old—that is an extremely important version with regards to determining the correct original text.
- b. The age of a version is important. Again, using the Septuagint as an illustration: the translation of the Septuagint (circa 200 B.C.) is of greater importance to us than a translation made in 1600 A.D.
  - c. The source material for a translation is important. Generally speaking, the older the source material, the more important is the translation.
  - d. The care and consistency taken in the translation is important. St. Jerome took great care in rendering the Old Testament into Latin; however, he spent little time on a couple books from the apocrypha, as he did not view their translation as important. Therefore, his work on the Old Testament is much more important to us than his work on the apocrypha.
  - e. If the source material was another translation, then the translation in question is questionable. For instance, the Old Latin is an older translation than St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate. However, Jerome made his translation from the best Hebrew manuscripts that he could find, whereas the Greek Septuagint was used as the basis for the Old Latin translation. Therefore, the later Latin Vulgate is of greater importance to us.
  - f. Finally, the transmission of the text is important. Great care was given to the transmission of the Masoretic text. When we find the copying of a version adhering to those kinds of rules, then that manuscript, even if it is 500 years removed from the original is important to us. However, a poorly copied manuscript, even if it is only 50 years removed, is of much less value to us.
  - g. Surprisingly enough, the number of obvious errors does not invalidate the worth of a manuscript. The Vaticanus manuscript (a copy of the Septuagint) is thought to be very valuable to textual criticism, even though what we have is a very poorly copied version with numerous errors in the spelling of proper nouns. Great light is shed upon various portions of Samuel because Samuel is one of the most poorly preserved of the Old Testament books.
  - h. Just as many English versions of Scripture were heavily influenced by the KJV, translations of the Old Testament made after the time of our Lord were heavily influenced by the LXX. Therefore, let's say the Vulgate and the Septuagint both diverge from the Masoretic text, we cannot automatically assume that the two ancient witnesses are superior to the MT.
  - i. As we examine the versions below, bear in mind age, care of translation, source text and the care of transmission.
2. The benefits of an ancient translation are as follows:
    - a. Generally, the translators work from older manuscripts than we have access to.
    - b. The translators often have a better idea of the corresponding meanings of words, as the languages are not so far separated in time. Therefore, the LXX or the Vulgate often provide us with extremely important information concerning the meaning of certain words or phrases.
    - c. Just as we can familiarize ourselves with the strengths and weaknesses of various ancient Hebrew manuscripts, we can do the same with various ancient translations. Therefore, we know, for instance, that there is great word-for-word accuracy in the Pentateuch in the LXX, and much less accuracy in the book of Isaiah.
    - d. We recognize that there are specific types of problems with the transmission of the Hebrew text (e.g., the confounding of certain letters). A translation in Greek or Latin often makes it possible for us to recognize precisely the mistake that was made. When we can categorically identify a particular mistake, we are much more confident of the correct reading of any given passage.
  3. The most important translation of the Old Testament is known as the Septuagint, which means *Seventy* and is often abbreviated as *LXX*.
    - a. It is estimated that by the Christian era, there were a million Jews in Alexandria, Egypt.<sup>26</sup> There had been Jewish settlements in Egypt which date back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Alexander the Great also encouraged Jews to move to Alexandria, offering them (according to Josephus) equal standing with the Greeks. Ptolemy I Soter (367–285 B.C.) conquered Jerusalem and took thousands of additional Jews with him as captives (his successor, Ptolemy II Philadelphus remitted them).
    - b. Between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries B.C., an uneven Greek translation of Scripture was made in Alexandria, Egypt.

<sup>26</sup> Contrast this to the total population of Alexandria, Egypt was 570,000 in 1927.

- c. A Jewish priest, Aristobulus, lived at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. He wrote that the translation of the Law into Greek was completed during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–247 B.C.). He also mentions Demetrius as suggesting this endeavor, and Demetrius died at the beginning of Ptolemy Philadelphus' reign. Therefore we have determined that the work of this translation must have begun under the reign of Ptolemy I Soter (367–285 B.C.), his immediate predecessor.<sup>27</sup> Also, portions of the history from Scripture had already been translated and that the entire Law was done under Philadelphus. We apparently do not have this letter but we have references to this letter by Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius.<sup>28</sup>
- d. In the letter mentioned above, Aristobulus speaks of the Law being translated. We don't know if this reference was to the *Torah* only or to the entire Old Testament (including the Apocrypha). Just as we often have translations made of the New Testament today first, followed by a complete Bible a few years later; one theory would be that the Torah was translated first, and then the remainder of Scripture. The problem with this theory is that the Torah is the most literally translated portion of the LXX. If there was a separate translation made of the Torah, then we would have expected the same scholars who worked on the Torah to work on the remainder of the Old Testament. In any case, Brenton assures us that the entire translation, or at least a significant portion, was completed under Ptolemy II Philadelphus.<sup>29</sup>
- e. We also have a letter from Aristeeus to his brother Philocartes, dated circa 130–100 B.C.<sup>30</sup> In the letter we find that a librarian at Alexandria, Demetrius Phalereus, persuaded Ptolemy II Philadelphus to authorize a translation of the Torah into Greek so that the Alexandrian Jews could read it. Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 B.C.) was the second ruler of Ptolemaic Egypt, one of the pieces into which of Alexander's great kingdom had been divided into following his death. Philadelphus then appealed to the High Priest at Jerusalem, who then sent 72 elders to Alexandria with a copy of the Law. According to this letter, 6 translators were taken from each of the 12 tribes of Israel and they completed the translation in just 72 days. They then read this translation before the Jewish community to great applause, and then presented the translation to the king. First of all, given the way that translations have been received throughout the years, we know that a lot of this recollection is just so much crap. This account is by tradition and probably a great portion of it is false. We know this to be false simply because part of the tradition is that these 70 (or 72) translators were placed in groups in separate rooms and that they produced identical translations of the Pentateuch, although they worked independently.<sup>31</sup> In any case, the Septuagint derives its name from this tradition; and no doubt that portions of the tradition are true.
- f. From the information I have gathered, it appears as though just the Law had been translated initially, and that the other books were translated later; however, no later than 117 B.C., according to Gooding, as the grandson of Sira makes reference to them in the prologue.<sup>32</sup> Gooding says that the apocrypha was completed by the Christian era.
- g. There were actually several types of Greek being spoken then. As Alexander the Great went and conquered the lands around him, his Greek would certainly have been mixed with the language of those

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<sup>27</sup> Durant disagrees, saying that the translation began under Ptolemy II. *The Story of Civilization; 2. The Life of Greece*, by Will Durant; MJF Books, ©1963; p. 594. Brenton, in his introduction, tells us that it is certain that the translation was begun prior to 285 B.C. *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*; Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton; Hendrickson Publishers; ©1992; p. ii.

<sup>28</sup> Again, we have a problem with the time frame. Gooding says that Aristobulus was dependent upon Aristeeus and that Aristobulus also had other factors which affected the information that he presented. See *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p. 1258.

<sup>29</sup> *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*; Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton; Hendrickson Publishers; ©1992; p. ii.

<sup>30</sup> D. W. Gooding places the letter during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285–246 B.C.) in *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p. 1258. Although Gooding is unequivocal about his time frame, he gives no compelling reason for it. He does, however, say that some of the *facts* found in this letter are *exaggerated and even legendary*, which to me suggests a letter a generation or two removed from the incident.

<sup>31</sup> I have left out other details of the tradition, including that Ptolemy II Philadelphus purchased the freedom of over 100,000 Jewish captives and took his translators from that group. The problem with that is the Greek of the LXX is clearly Alexandrian Greek.

<sup>32</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*; ed. J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p. 1258.

that he conquered. In general, the Septuagint was made in an Alexandrian dialect. However, that oversimplifies the situation. The various books were translated at different times with as much as several generations intervening between their translation. Whereas the Torah is fairly consistent (although there are times when one would think 2 or more translators were involved), the rest of Scripture is not. Gooding suggests that there are several instances where at least two different translators worked on the same book, translating different portions simultaneously; and other books were subjected to even more simultaneous renderings by men of different methods and vocabulary. When the translators did not know the meaning of a Hebrew word, they often transliterated it. Therefore, according to Gooding, we find fairly good koine Greek in Isaiah, a portion of Joshua, and I Maccabees; we find *indifferent* Greek in the Chronicles, Psalms, Sirach, Judith, the Minor Prophets, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and parts of Kings; to very literal and even unintelligible versions in Judges, Ruth, Song of Solomon, Lamentations and other parts of Kings.<sup>33</sup>

- h. Gooding goes on to say that the Septuagint was inconsistent; when certain anthropomorphisms were distasteful to the Alexandrian Jews, they paraphrased; there was little consistency in certain technical religious terms (which one would expect, as Greek did not have exact translations for certain religious terms and there were several translators working simultaneously); and there were portions of Exodus which were abbreviated, left out, and in which mistakes were made because the translators were apparently bored with the technical details. The quality of Greek is not the same as the quality of the translation itself. The Torah is translated well (with the exceptions already mentioned), but Isaiah is poorly done; Esther, Job, Proverbs and I Esdras are heavily paraphrased. The original book of Job was much shorter in the LXX and was later filled in by Theodotion. The Proverbs have bonus verses in the Greek and some of the principals in Proverbs are changed to suit Greek philosophy. The book of Daniel was so poorly done and inundated with paraphrase, that it was replaced early on, possibly by Theodotion (although Gooding says the method and the time frame don't fit Theodotion exactly). The original translation of Daniel is found in only two manuscripts of the LXX and in the Syriac. The book of Jeremiah has a number of Hebrew words which were translated into similar sounding Greek words which have a very dissimilar meaning. There are some books (Gooding does not say which) that are extremely literal and contain a great many transliterations. On the other hand, many of the apocryphal books barely resemble the original Hebrew due to excessive paraphrasing.<sup>34</sup>
- i. Just as many modern translations often undergo small changes and updating (e.g., the NASB), there were also changes made in the Septuagint. Paul Kahle suggests that there were actually competing versions of the LXX. According to the REB's introduction, Lucian, Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion were men of the early Christian era who produced various Greek versions of the Old Testament text.<sup>35</sup> It was not clear from my reading the details of this; however, it is reasonable to assume that for many years, when the Hebrew Scriptures were read aloud, that a simultaneous Greek rendering of same would be made. The typical reading was possibly put into print, and that could have been the competing version. In any case, there appears to have been issued an official, standardized version of the Torah (although this did not completely replace the older versions); and there does not appear to be a similar official version of the other books. Kahle gives several reasons for competing versions of the LXX (which could even be a misnomer, for that reason): (1) the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament which are at variance with the LXX and with the Hebrew; (2) the Ur-Theodotion version is quoted twice in the New Testament (Theodotion revises this version but did not originate it); (3) The existence of the Ur-Lucian version (so named because Lucian revised it); and (4) the many different LXX versions that we have of some books like the Judges. On the other hand, the variants found in the differing LXX manuscripts could indicate nothing more than a simple updating, which would have naturally taken place. In any case, in the early Christian era, we saw a proliferation of Greek renderings

<sup>33</sup> Quoted and paraphrased from *The New Bible Dictionary*; ed. J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p. 1259.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted and paraphrased from *The New Bible Dictionary*; ed. J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p. 1259. I don't exactly follow what Gooding means about the Syriac version.

<sup>35</sup> *The Complete Parallel Bible*; NRSV, REB, NAB, NJB; Oxford University Press; ©1993; p. xxiii. I will have to research Lucian further. I only found him mentioned in the Introduction to the REB. The others are known for their own Greek versions, which, strictly speaking, may not necessarily be considered equivalent to the Septuagint.

of the Hebrew Old Testament. The non-Septuagint quotes of the New Testament can simply be explained as coming from Aramaic translations, other Greek versions (rather than competing LXX versions) and as quick, off-the-cuff translations done by the Apostle in question (or, simply quoted from memory).

- j. I should take a moment and mention the apocrypha. Not every book of the Apocrypha would have been translated as some of them hadn't been written yet. My version of the LXX does not contain the apocrypha, so I do not know what has been left out. For instance, the book Bel and the Dragon is thought to date back to 100 B.C.<sup>36</sup>; and the translation of the Septuagint was thought to have been completed by that time. Again, this would be cleared up if the LXX was known to have been translated a portion at a time.
- k. Geisler and Nix: *For the most part this Alexandrian translation reflects an almost literal book-for-book, chapter-by-chapter translation of the Hebrew Scriptures as they are found in the Masoretic text, with the common stylistic and idiomatic differences.*<sup>37</sup>
- l. Although we occasionally run across profound differences between the Greek and Hebrew text, these differences rarely affect the interpretation of Old Testament doctrine. Our brethren from the first 3 centuries of the Christian era used the Septuagint almost exclusively.
- m. Just like the Massoretic texts, there are several Septuagint manuscripts and fragments; therefore, there is some disagreement from text to text. Interestingly enough, the manuscripts which we possess had actually been preserved by Christians rather than by Jews, who apparently lost interest in the Septuagint.
- n. The translation of the Septuagint would be like divvying out portions of the Hebrew Scriptures to the translators of the NASB, the KJV, the NLT, the TEV, as well as to Phillips and Rotherham, and then assembling the final product as the Septuagint. Some portions are slavishly literal (e.g., the Law of Moses) while others are heavily paraphrased (the Writings).
- o. We find the greatest differences in Joshua, 1Samuel, 1Kings, Proverbs, Esther and Jeremiah. In general, the Pentateuch (the Torah) is rendered very literally and the writings (the Kethuvim) are much more free-form. In Brenton's opinion, the Pentateuch is the most carefully rendered, and Isaiah is the least. On the one hand, there is no reason to think that they intentionally misrepresented Old Testament Scripture; on the other hand, there are those of that era who acknowledged the imperfections of the Septuagint. Jesus ben Sirach was the grandson of one of the translators. In a prologue,<sup>38</sup> he wrote: *For the same things expressed in Hebrew have not an equal force when translated into another language. Not only so, but even the Law and the prophecies and the rest of the books differ not a little as to the things said in them.*<sup>39</sup>
- p. One problem in translating these Scriptures was that there were theologically-specific words in the Hebrew. They may not have begun that way, but they became theologically-specific words. The translators of the Septuagint did not always have words that exactly corresponded to these Hebrew words, as these types of doctrines were not a part of their religions or theologies.
- q. Another problem is that there were very likely 70 or 72 translators. We would reasonably assume that their work was split up, which would account for the Scriptures to be unevenly rendered. Some translators would be intent upon a word-for-word rendering, while others would prefer to convey the gist of any given passage (as we have today).
- r. A third problem in the translation of the Septuagint is the manuscripts from which it was taken. Despite the fact that the translation of the Septuagint was made nearly 2500 years ago and therefore from older manuscripts that we have today, the age of the manuscript does not insure the accuracy of the manuscript. It is simply one measure. Probably some of the manuscripts from which they worked were outstanding; and others were okay, given their age.

<sup>36</sup> *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 209.

<sup>37</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix; *A General Introduction to the Bible*; Chicago; Moody Press, ©1968, p. 253.

<sup>38</sup> It is not clear whether this is a prologue to the Septuagint or to a later Greek translation made by Jesus ben Sirach.

<sup>39</sup> *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*; Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton; Hendrickson Publishers; ©1992; p. iii.

- s. Interestingly enough, there are places where the Samaritan and Septuagint versions agree with one another but not with the Masoretic text. There are also places where the MT and the LXX agree, but not the Samaritan. Although reasons for the latter case are understood, reasons for the former are not.
  - t. Interestingly enough, the order of the Septuagint was different than that of the Jewish text, which was separated into the Torah, the Neviim and the Kethuvim. The book order in the Septuagint is the same order which we use today.
  - u. This translation was designed more for the common people to read and possibly to be read in the synagogues; the Septuagint was not designed for serious, exegetical study. Again, given the large group of translators and lack of cohesion, some did make an attempt to provide a very literal translation, capable of in-depth, scholarly studies. Other translators just wanted to produce something which was easy to read (it would be read in the synagogues) which convey the same general meaning.
  - v. Certain terms and phrases from the Septuagint were adopted by the evangelists and writers of the New Testament.
  - w. Although there are a few who believe in the divine inspiration of the Septuagint (their feelings are probably similar to some who believe that the KJV is the only worthwhile English translation), it is clear that the New Testament authorities did not. Sometimes, the Apostles quoted directly from the Septuagint and sometimes they did not. When they did not, there are times when their rendering was closer to the Hebrew text than the Septuagint.<sup>40</sup>
  - x. However, given its obvious shortcomings, the final product was a scholarly if uneven work which provides one of the greatest witnesses to the accuracy of the Masoretic text. Given that there were a thousand years that transpired between the translation of the Septuagint and the creation of the Masorete manuscripts which we use today, we would expect some differences.
  - y. Most of the 250 citations of the Old Testament made in the New come from the LXX. Luke, the New Testament author who spoke the Greek language, used the LXX more often than any other writer in Acts and Luke; Matthew, who probably spoke Aramaic primarily, used the LXX the least often (and the book of Matthew contains a lot of Old Testament quotations).
  - z. One of the greatest benefits to the ancient world of the Septuagint, besides having Scripture in the Greek language, was that it was easy to translate into other languages from the Greek. For this reason, the Greek Septuagint was taken everywhere by Christian missionaries and stood next to the Greek New Testament as one whole. The Bible was subsequently translated into many ancient languages, including Coptic, Ethiopian, Gothic, Armenian, Arabic, Georgian, Slavonic and Old Latin.
  - aa. Even today, the Greek Septuagint remains the official Old Testament version of the Bible for the Greek Orthodox Church.
  - bb. There are over 300 versions of the Septuagint.<sup>41</sup>
4. Other Greek renderings or **versions** of the Old Testament: Because the New Testament Christians adopted the Septuagint as their own and because of the animosity of the Jews toward the Christians, the Jews decided that they needed their own translation. Often, theological arguments between the two factions had the Christians reaching for support in the Septuagint (which support they would get). This would irritate the Jewish unbelievers, who would occasionally refer back to the Hebrew to substantiate their own arguments. So, for the Jews, although they began as strong supporters of the LXX, they later changed their minds, during the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Christians, whose translation was called into question on the basis of the Hebrew, also began to rethink their support of the Septuagint. Given these facts, plus the uneven nature of the Septuagint and that its Greek had changed over two centuries, Christians and Jews were inclined toward putting together additional Greek translations of the Old Testament. Therefore, there were several additional Greek translations of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek, which include:
- a. Aquila's version (circa 126–150 A.D.): Aquila was a relative of the Emperor Hadrian who became a Christian and then later converted back to Judaism. He produced a slavishly literal Greek translation which became the official Greek Old Testament to the non-Christian Jews, as his purpose was to produce an accurate Greek version of Scripture to replace the inaccurate Septuagint. Apparently, he wanted to fix those passages which Christians were wont to quote and to associate with Jesus Christ.

<sup>40</sup> It is not uncommon for an ancient bi or tri-lingual author to give a quick, rough translation off the top of his head when a quote is needed.

<sup>41</sup> *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 5, p. 344.

However, his translation was an attempt to translate each and every word from the Hebrew into the Greek, which did not always result in a readable rendering. Unfortunately for textual criticism, this version survives only in fragments and isolated quotations. It would be worthwhile to note that the Septuagint was not produced for *Christians* per se, as it was translated approximately two centuries before our Lord. Its adoption by Christians was a matter of necessity—they spoke Greek and this was the only available Greek Old Testament at that time.

- b. Theodotion’s Revision (circa 150–185 B.C.): Theodotion, an Ebionite, assembled what appears to be a revision of an existing Greek translation, although it is not clear whether that version was the LXX, Aquila’s Greek translation or some other Greek translation (it is clear that Theodotion was not an expert in Hebrew). Given the time of Aquila’s translation and given that those who wrote the New Testament did not always quote from the Septuagint, there appears to be another extant Greek translation during that time, and it was upon this version that Theodotion probably based his own work. His exact theological leanings are disputed, although it appears as though he was a Christian with strong Jewish leanings. Some individual books of his were adopted by Christians as preferred over the LXX.
- c. Symmachus’ revision (circa 185–200 A.D.). Symmachus, also an Ebionite, had theological leanings which are in dispute (Brenton called him *a kind of semi-Christian*<sup>42</sup>). His Greek version was more idiomatic and less literal than either Aquila or Theodotion’s versions; however, it was still accurate and scholarly. However, his approach seems to have modern-day parallels in the translations of today. Interestingly enough, although his version was not valued as highly as were the other works of his day, Jerome relied somewhat on his work to translate the Vulgate.
- d. In the previous century, there were those who viewed the KJV as almost inspired (this is not unlike those who view Mary as sinless). Apparently, there were some believers in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries who felt similarly about the Septuagint. They saw this as an inspired version of Scripture (I suspect that this is the origin of some of the goofy stories which have come down to us concerning the translating of the Septuagint). So, there is this resistance of some to abandon the Septuagint. However, apparently there was enough debate and disagreement to allow for these other three versions to become commonly used by both Jews and Christians alike.
- e. Origen’s Hexapla (circa 240–250 A.D.). Now this is a guy who I can relate to.
  - i. Because of the many Greek versions extant in his day, Origen attempted to assemble a Greek text which was faithful to the original Hebrew, and yet took into consideration the work that had already been done. In this regard, Origen might be thought of as the father of textual criticism. His work was more of a **recension** than an independent literary work.
  - ii. Origen had a particular set of markings which he used. If there was an addition of text in the Septuagint, he marked that with an obelus. When it came to words that the Septuagint omitted, he marked those words with an asterisk. Therefore, a casual reader, knowing these facts, could instantly see the differences between the Septuagint and the Hebrew text.
  - iii. Origen might also be thought of as the father of the parallel Bibles. His work was completed in six columns (hence the name *Hexapla*), which are given below:

Origen’s Hexapla (6 Column Parallel Bible)					
The Old Testament					
The original Hebrew text	Greek transliteration of the Hebrew text	Aquila’s Literal Translation	Symmachus’ idiomatic translation	Origen’s revision of the LXX	Theodotion’s Greek Revision

- iv. Origen also published a Tetrapla, which was like the above without the first two columns. Unfortunately, Origen’s complete works have not survived. However, Eusebius and Pamphilus published his fifth column and a portion of that still exists, with parts of Genesis through Judges in a 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century manuscript called Codex Sarravianus (G). His method of translation, it appears, is that he took the best from the Greek renderings that he had—those which mostly closely

<sup>42</sup> *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*; Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton; Hendrickson Publishers; ©1992; p. v.

approximated the Hebrew text. Its faithfulness to Origen's original text is somewhat in question. Unfortunately, this is the only major portion of any of the other Greek Bibles which were produced in the early Christian times. There is, however, a Syriac translation of Origen's Greek translation, in a 7<sup>th</sup> century manuscript, of which we apparently have some copies.

- v. Obviously, if his work existed in its complete state today, it would be invaluable for textual critics.
  - vi. Origen also developed an elaborate system of diacritical markings to indicate deviations of other Greek versions from the original Hebrew text. Unfortunately, when copies of his work were made, additional text would be included without the diacritical marking to indicate that it was probably not a part of original Scripture. There were also textual errors. The end result was the circulation of a corrupt Greek text rather than an improved version of the LXX.
  - vii. Origen assembled the *Tetrapla*, which consisted of the final four columns. Of the Hexapla. He added three additional Greek translations (unknown to us) as well to his Hexapla. Where he added all three, his work was known as Enneapla; when he added two additional Greek versions, his work was called Octapla.
  - viii. Apart from bits and pieces of this work, there is a Syriac version of Origen's work, which preserves the marks of the Greek text, as well as the references to the other translations. This version is in the British Museum.
  - f. Hesychius, an Egyptian bishop, and Lucian, both of the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century, produced their own revisions of the Greek text of the Old Testament, which **versions** were used in the Eastern Churches. Ironically enough, the Eastern Church today uses the Septuagint as inspired Scripture (apparently, they use the Greek in much the same way as the Catholic Church used the Latin). Brenton writes *the Septuagint has been and is still so thoroughly received as authentic Scripture, that any effort to introduce amongst them versions which accurately represent the Hebrew (as has been attempted in modern times) has been wholly fruitless.*<sup>43</sup>
  - g. To sum up: the Septuagint is a fantastic aide to textual criticism; however, a copy of Origen's work would be invaluable.
5. The Latin Vulgate:
- a. When Alexander the Great conquered the extensive area that he did, Koine Greek became the language of that land.
  - b. As Rome began to conquer the west and the near east, Latin also became the language of the common people.
  - c. Most people were trilingual. They spoke Greek, which became the literary language; they spoke their native dialect (see Acts 2); and they spoke Latin, the language of their conquerors.
  - d. Greek remained the literary language for some time, particularly with the upper classes; however, Latin became the spoken language of the people—particularly at the market and in the military. As Rome grew in size and influence, so did the use of Latin until it finally became the dominant written language. Greek remained the literary language in the west and in Rome only until about the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.
  - e. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Latin translations of Scripture began to appear. In fact, a translation from the Septuagint Greek into Latin, translated prior to 200 A.D., began to circulate. This was called the *Old Latin*. Portions of this version is only preserved in a few citations here and there. The loss of the Old Testament is not a serious matter, as it was a translation of a translation (much of the New Testament was preserved, however). There were several versions circulated because many copies were made, formally and informally. Others, like Tertullian, who knew Greek and Latin, would, in his writings, make an on-the-spot Latin translation of a passage from the Greek. As Latin became the official language of the Church and as availability of writing materials increased, there was circulated a plethora of Latin manuscripts, even apart from the two chief versions, the African and European.
  - f. St. Jerome, born Sophronius Eusebius Hieronymus (circa 340–420) was born to Christian parents, and went to Rome at age 12 to continue his studies, concentrating on Greek, Latin and pagan authors. He became a believer at age 19 and later in life, employed a Jewish rabbi to teach him Hebrew (374–379).
  - g. Because there came to be at least two or three Latin texts circulating, Damasus, the bishop of Rome (366–384) commissioned Jerome to revise the Old Latin in 382. His work on the New Testament was

<sup>43</sup> *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*; Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton; Hendrickson Publishers; ©1992; p. vi. I should point out that Brenton's work goes back to 1851; I have no idea what is going on in the Eastern Church today.

apparently a revision of the Old Latin based upon the extant Greek manuscripts. When he submitted his work in 383,<sup>44</sup> he wrote a note which included the quote: *readings at variance with the early copies cannot be right.*<sup>45</sup> This quote indicates a basic concept of textual criticism.

- h. He completed his translation of the Old Testament by 405. Because this translation was made from the original Hebrew rather than from the Greek Septuagint, Jerome received a lot of criticism and opposition. The problem, as the *hoi polloi* perceived it, was that Jerome was leaning more toward Judaism because he used the Hebrew Scriptures as the basis of his translation. Many, including St. Augustine, saw the Greek Septuagint as the inspired text rather than the original Hebrew.
- i. Interestingly enough, Jerome's translation of the Old Testament was more unflinching and less open to compromise than his New Testament. My guess is that, after receiving all the criticism that he received concerning the New Testament, he decided *to hell with criticism* and did the best possible translation that he could. That he would be criticized no matter what, was a given. Therefore, why not stay true to the inspired Hebrew?
- j. Many, many non-scholars point to this version of the Bible and assert that it was at this point where the Catholics slipped in tons of Christian-specific doctrines. This ignores that fact that we have many manuscripts which pre-date Jerome's work. This ignores the fact that the early Catholic Church was relatively accurate in their doctrine. This ignores the fact that, the degeneration of the Catholic Church was a gradual one which took place over several centuries. Their addition of the Apocrypha and their doctrine that the pope can speak authoritatively and supercede Scripture is from whence we get Catholic-specific doctrines. Furthermore, the traditions of the Catholic Church have had an impact on Catholic doctrine. None of this can take from the excellent and accurate work which Jerome did; nor can anyone who has even an inkling of history ever point to Jerome and claim that he somehow altered the Bible to conform to some set of Christian doctrines which were not there to begin with. That sort of opinion cannot even be called *sloppy scholarship*, as there is absolutely no scholarship involved.
- k. Although St. Augustine accepted Jerome's version of the New Testament, he vehemently criticized Jerome's translation of the Old Testament.
- l. The end result was that Jerome's Old Testament translation was not formally recognized as the official translation of the Church until the Council of Trent (1546–1563), over a millennium later. Prior to this time, it was the unofficial text of the Church, often presented in parallel columns with other Latin versions.
- m. Jerome cared little for the Apocrypha and only reluctantly made a hasty translation of portions of it—*Judith, Tobit, the rest of Esther, and the additions to Daniel—before his death.*<sup>46</sup> The Old Latin version of the Apocrypha was added into the Vulgate version in the Middle Ages, over Jerome's dead body.
- n. To sum up, how do we view the Latin Vulgate with regards to textual criticism?
  - i. The New Testament was a revision of the Old Latin text, and therefore relatively unimportant.
  - ii. The apocrypha was the Old Latin version, later appended to the Old and New Testaments, therefore making it unreliable as it was a translation of a translation.
  - iii. The Latin Vulgate Old Testament is of greater importance to us than that of the New Testament or apocrypha translations.
- o. There is a basic problem. Unlike the Hebrew masorettes, those who copied the Latin manuscripts were not so exacting. There appears to be some Latin versions which mix the Old Latin and the Vulgate. So, in the 8000+ Latin manuscripts that we have, we have a tremendous amount of cross-contamination and variance.

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<sup>44</sup> He made another revision of the New Testament later. Apparently, he was pressured to make some revisions which brought his work more in line with the Old Latin rather than with the original Greek New Testament. He was apparently open to making revisions in the gospels, as his benefactor was near death at the completion of the New Testament. In any case, that is a topic for a different study.

<sup>45</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix; *A General Introduction to the Bible*; Chicago; Moody Press, ©1968, p. 336; taken from Jerome, *The Four Gospels*, "Preface," as cited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (editors), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, VI, p. 488.

<sup>46</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix; *A General Introduction to the Bible*; Chicago; Moody Press, ©1968, p. 336.



- p. The Catholic Church has since released several different official versions of the Latin Vulgate. The 1604 Sixto-Clementine version, for instance, varies from the previous Sixtine version (1590) in 4900 places. The official Latin Vulgate was completed as recently as 1954. So even despite Jerome's excellent scholarship, getting an actual copy of it is not an easy matter. Therefore, the greatest practical problem to a scholar today is being able to lay hold of a good, accurate version of Jerome's original translation of the Old Testament, given the plethora of differing manuscripts and the many revisions and reissues by the Catholic Church.
6. Other Old Testament translations, recensions, **versions** and paraphrases:
- a. Aramaic was the Semitic language generally spoken in the Near East between 700 B.C. and 700 A.D. It is likely that Jesus spoke in an Aramaic dialect and *the books of Ezra (Esther?) and Daniel were written partly in the western dialect of Aramaic.*<sup>47</sup> A *targum* is the paraphrase of Scripture into a more common language. The original intention of a targum was to provide a translation of the Hebrew into a commonly-known language. It appears as though the targums were first oral and eventually written down. Although some English translations of the Bible refer to the *Aramaic Targum*, we do not have simply one *Aramaic Targum* in the same sense as we have one Latin Vulgate.
    - i. From the time of the exile, Aramaic began to spread as the spoken language of the Hebrews.
    - ii. The gospels have three quotations of our Lord speaking in Aramaic. Mark 5:41 7:34 15:34 (|| Matt. 27:46). Also, when Jesus addressed God in the garden of Gethsemane, he used the word `Abbâ`, which is Aramaic for *father*. (Paul similarly uses `Abbâ` in Rom. 8:15 and Gal. 4:6).
    - iii. *Maranatha (our Lord come)* is Aramaic (I Cor. 16:22). When Paul hears Jesus speaking to him in the Hebrew tongue, this would be Aramaic (Acts 26:14). When Paul spoke to the mob in Jerusalem, it was in Aramaic (Acts 22:2). And, of course, there are several proper names throughout the New Testament which are Aramaic names.
    - iv. The first Aramaic paraphrase probably dates back to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah and is testified to in Neh. 8:1–8. Although Ezra apparently read the Law from the original Hebrew, very few spoke Hebrew at that time, and a group of linguistic scholars read the Hebrew and then someone else translated it for the people right then and there. The translators did not read from a scroll, so that there was no confusing the translation given with the original sacred text. One verse from the Pentateuch was done at a time; and three verses from the Prophets was done at a time. This is why the *Aramaic Targum* is referred to as an oral paraphrase. This oral tradition was later committed to writing. We do not have any copies of this very ancient text.
    - v. An official text of the Palestinian Aramaic Targum appeared in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., although it is very likely that there existed an *Aramaic Targum* which pre-dates the Christian era. The official **Targums** included the Law and the Prophets and the Writings were a part of the unofficial Targums of a later date.
    - vi. We have discovered a pre-Christian Targum of Job, written in Palestinian Aramaic from Qumran Cave XI.
    - vii. A Targum of the Pentateuch was discovered in Cave IV.
    - viii. The unofficial **Targums** gave way to the official text from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.
    - ix. This text was superseded by the Babylonian Aramaic Targum of the Law and Prophets, which was produced in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. McDowell places the inception of this targum at 60 B.C.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps the difference in age is simply our oldest manuscript vs. the original authoring of this targum. This particular Targum has been traditionally ascribed to Onkelos, which Geisler and Nix suggest was confounded with Aquila, who is a scholar who put together a slavishly literal Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.<sup>49</sup> If this were the case, then that would also explain the discrepancy of the ages. In any case, when a reference is made to the Aramaic Targum in the Law, this is apparently equivalent to the Targum of Onkelos.
    - x. There is also a Targum of the Prophets produced (probably) in Babylonia and ascribed to Jonathan ben Uzziel. This is from the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and tends to be rather free in its paraphrase.

<sup>47</sup> *The World Book Encyclopedia*; ©1983 by World Book, Inc.; Vol. A, p. 552.

<sup>48</sup> Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*; ©1972 by Campus Crusade for Christ; p. 62.

<sup>49</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix; *A General Introduction to the Bible*; Chicago; Moody Press, ©1968, p. 305.

- McDowell places the age of this book as 30 B.C.<sup>50</sup> I don't know if the disagreement here boils down to the inception of the book (30 B.C.) and our most recent manuscript (4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.).
- xi. So, what we have is a tradition of maintaining the original Hebrew text, yet producing a text which could be read by the common man as well.
  - xii. Whereas these **targums** are not significant when dealing with the determination of the actual original text, they are very helpful in the interpretation of this text and of individual words. In other words, they come into play when translating, but generally not in textual criticism.
  - xiii. Obviously, where the Targums and some other combination of ancient texts are in agreement, then that is a significant reading and possibly superior to the MT.
  - xiv. There is an interesting origin to these targums. During the public readings of the Hebrew text in the synagogues, as time went on and we approached the birth of our Lord, fewer and fewer Jews were able to understand the Hebrew language. They spoke Aramaic. Therefore, often, after a reading, a methurgeman ( a *translator*) would then stand up and give a paraphrase of what was just read, which actually provides a very interesting parallel to the New Testament church.<sup>51</sup> As previously mentioned, the methurgeman originally did not read from a scroll but translated on the spot at certain intervals as the Hebrew text was read aloud.
- b. The Syriac Version is called the *Christian Aramaic*. The Jews in Palestine spoke Aramaic as their common language, and the Jews in Syria spoke a similar dialect, one which is apparently derivative of Aramaic. The church was firmly established in Syria and, as it began to expand by missionaries, it required a Bible in their dialect. The result was the Syriac Bible.
- i. The Syriac Bible was a translation of both the Old and New Testaments. The text of the Old Testament appears to date back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D.
  - ii. Surprisingly enough, we do not know the original translators or the date of the translation; in fact, even as far back as Theodore of Mopsuestia, who died in 428, these origins were unknown. This does not mean that we have no clue. There are strong linguistic similarities between the Palestinian Aramaic Targum and the Syriac rendering of the Torah, so we know that they are closely related. Syriac is simply eastern Aramaic and is therefore called the *Christian Aramaic*. We do know that there were several translators or groups of translators, as the Aramaic is an uneven translation, much like the Septuagint. According to B. J. Roberts, the book of Psalms is a very free translation which belies considerable influence of the Septuagint; Proverbs and Ezekiel resemble the Targums; portions of Job are unintelligible, partially due to textual corruption and partially due to the influence of other translations. The Song of Solomon is a literal translation and the book of Ruth is a paraphrase. The Chronicles is very paraphrastic and contains elements of Midrash influence. I would assume that the translation arose almost organically from side-by-side Hebrew or Greek readings accompanied by one who translated into Aramaic.<sup>52</sup>
  - iii. R. Gunner goes into detail concerning the possible origins and I refer you to *The New Bible Dictionary* for more information.<sup>53</sup>
  - iv. There is the assumption that there was a revision made which (1) caused the Syriac version to be more in tune with the Septuagint (with mixed results) and/or (2) gave them an updated, official version.
  - v. In 617–618, Paul of Mesopotamia assembled the Syro-Hexaplaric text, which is a Syriac version of Origen's Hexapla. It is unclear as to whether all, a portion or any of this text still exists.

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<sup>50</sup> Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*; ©1972 by Campus Crusade for Christ; p. 62. McDowell also says that the *Targums (copies) appear in written form about A.D. 500* in *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*; Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville; ©1999, p. 86. Perhaps he meant 500 B.C.?

<sup>51</sup> This reminds me of I Cor. 14 when someone would stand up and speak in a dialect that they did not know; and then another would interpret or translate.

<sup>52</sup> Taken from *The New Bible Dictionary*; ed. J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p. 1262. Their source was B. J. Roberts, *The Old Testament Text and Versions*, 1951, pp. 221f.

<sup>53</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*; ed. J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; pp. 1261–1263.

- vi. Around the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D., it also became known as the *Peshitta*, which means *simple*. It is possible that it was given that designation because it was simple compared to the symbols used in the Syro-Hexaplaric version.<sup>54</sup>
- vii. The Syriac Bible generally follows the Masoretic text, but is not to be taken as an independent witness. Its primary importance today is as a witness to the canon of Scripture (the Apocrypha was not translated).
- viii. As a knowledge of Hebrew became weaker and weaker in the Syria region, changes to the translation of the Syriac version were made that favored the Septuagint. So, the older the version of the Syriac, the closer it was to the Septuagint.
- ix. The version which we have is not the original, but a New Testament revision made by Rabbula, the bishop of Edessa (411–435 A.D.). It appears as though this was combined with a Christian recension of the Syriac Old Testament (meaning, Rabbula did not revise the Old Testament himself?).
- x. Rabbula ordered that copies of his version be placed in every church in his diocese. One might refer to this as the *authorized version* of Scripture in Syriac. The result is that we have 250+ manuscripts of the Peshitta, which date back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>55</sup>
- xi. We apparently have no complete critical editions of the Syriac Old Testament.
- c. We do have earlier **versions** of Scripture in the Syriac.
  - i. The Syro-Hexaplaric version of Scripture was a Syrian rendering of Origen's 5<sup>th</sup> column of his Hexapla. This is a very literal rendering from the Greek and what we have of this version is 2Kings, Isaiah, the Twelve, Lamentations and the Poetical books (but not the Psalms). Because of its excessively literal style and avoidance of Syrian idioms, this helps us to ascertain the original text of the 5<sup>th</sup> column of the Hexapla.
  - ii. We apparently have *Old Syriac* versions of Scripture, although Geisler and Nix were unclear as to what books we had (apparently, this included books from both testaments).
- d. There are other translations which we have all or portions of: various Gothic, Armenian, Georgian, Arabic, Nestorian and Slavonic **versions**. These all have various reasons why they are not reasonable texts to be used to correct the Old Testament text that we work with. Generally, the problem might be that they are a translation of a translation or that they are later works which are contemporary with the Masoretic text. Why use a translation of a translation from the 9<sup>th</sup> century if we have a Hebrew text from the same time period whose accuracy is much more assured?
- 7. The **Talmud** and **Midrash**, which are, more or less, Jewish commentaries on the Law (or, *Torah*), are of little help to us because of their great legalistic approach. However, they do quote Scripture and their quotations are essentially the same as what we find in the MT (most of the Talmud is written in Aramaic; given the Targums which we have, we would not expect the quotations of Old Testament to be exact word-for-word renderings).
- 8. Despite this comparative rarity of manuscripts, the deviations between existing manuscripts have little or no effect upon the major doctrines of the Old Testament and only occasionally cause us problems with regards to the actual history which took place. The greatest problems are with the identification of certain places and people. Even these problems are infrequent and, again, do not affect the major doctrines of Scripture. Gleason Archer comments that the two copies of Isaiah which were found in Qumran Cave I *proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95% of the text. The 5% of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling.*<sup>56</sup>
- 9. What this plethora of manuscripts allows us to do is to get a better, more accurate original text; however, there are certainly some passages which remain problematic.

<sup>54</sup> This is the opinion of Merrill F. Unger, *Introductory Guide to the Old Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan, 1963; p. 168.

<sup>55</sup> According to Gunner, the oldest *dated* ms is 464 A.D. *The New Bible Dictionary*; ed. J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p. 1263.

<sup>56</sup> Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 19. I took this quote from Norman Geisler and William Nix; *A General Introduction to the Bible*; Chicago; Moody Press, ©1968, p. 261.

10. A summation of the extant Old Testament manuscripts:<sup>57</sup>
  - a. We have very few complete Old Testament manuscripts. Most of these date from the 9<sup>th</sup> century.
  - b. The self-imposed rules of the Massorites were strict and resulted in very few variants when a text was copied.
  - c. These manuscripts are reasonably close to the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament; and we have older copies of the Septuagint than we do of the Masoretic text.
  - d. We have the witness of the Samaritan Pentateuch, the various **targums** and the Latin Vulgate to further confirm the text of the Old Testament.
  - e. Finally, and most importantly, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls produced almost a complete Old Testament a millennium older than our Masoretic texts, and we have a very strong agreement between the texts. See the final point of this doctrine which illustrates this.
11. A summation of the witness of the translations/**versions** and other witnesses:
  - a. **Versions** of the Old Testament alone include the Septuagint, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Babylonian Targums. The Samaritan Pentateuch is not, strictly speaking, a version, but the actual Hebrew text. It is supposed that there were a few changes made, however, in their manuscript to suit their location in northern Israel.
  - b. **Versions** of the Old and New Testaments include the Old Syriac, the Old Latin, the Latin Vulgate, and several which I did not mention. All in all, there are 9000 manuscript copies of these **versions** extant today.<sup>58</sup>
  - c. There are also quotations of the Old Testament made by Philo the philosopher, Josephus the historian and numerous rabbis.
12. The result is that we can be certain of 95% of the text of the Old Testament, and reasonably certain of the remainder. There might be 1–3% of Old Testament Scripture that we cannot unequivocally pin it down to the exact words; however, rarely does that affect the general meaning and almost never does this affect the doctrines of Scripture. When there are serious problems with the exegesis, then I certainly deal with those problems in depth—for some, too much depth.

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## Topic Five: Textual Abnormalities, Variants, Errors, and Alterations

I had originally scattered these topics throughout, inserting them where they seemed to fit historically, but I believe that it would be better to place all of these topics together. What we will examine here is each and every possible problem, question, variant, abnormality and alteration which has occurred in the Old Testament text.

1. A *variant* is where one manuscript differs from another; or where one passage of a **version** or another ancient manuscript of the Old Testament clearly came from a passage which read differently than the Masoretic text, e.g. our example from 1Sam. 14:18 where the Hebrew text reads *ark* and the Greek text reads *ephod*. That is an example of a variant; and, in this case, a very significant one.
2. There are fewer variants in the Old Testament than in the New.
  - a. There are fewer manuscripts, which, generally speaking, would give us fewer variants.
  - b. The rules which guided the scribes and masorites in making copies of the Old Testament were rigid, uncompromising and confining. Recall that a scribe was not to copy even a single letter from memory.
  - c. We theorize that the scribes and masorites destroyed manuscripts which were old or contained errors.
3. An *abnormality* is some oddity about the text which indicates that, at one time, someone thought there might be a problem with the text or someone was leaving some obscure note concerning the text. For some of these abnormalities, the problem could have originally meant nothing and been simply the result of a

<sup>57</sup> Taken and revised from Norman Geisler and William Nix; *A General Introduction to the Bible*; Chicago; Moody Press, ©1968, p. 358.

<sup>58</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix; *A General Introduction to the Bible*; Chicago; Moody Press, ©1968, p. 359. I don't know if we are talking about complete or nearly complete versions; but I assume that we are.

damaged original manuscript or the slip of the pen of the scribe. A textual abnormality is generally not a variation in text. We find these abnormalities consistently throughout our history of manuscripts.

4. Then, there are places where we are certain that the original text was altered. In many cases, you will probably be surprised as to why the text was changed.
5. Under the **Sopherim**, there occurred a number of textual abnormalities. These were not necessarily mistakes and it is possible that they were meaningless; however, throughout the ages, marginal notes would be inserted, along with marks and dots, and even letters would be written in an unusual way. These abnormalities, most of which date back to the time of the Sopherim, would then be preserved in subsequent manuscripts, even though their original intent is often unknown. To get a better handle on this, it may be instructive to know exactly what some of these abnormalities were:
  - a. There were 37 times in the Old Testament where certain letters were written larger than normal. In 3 of those cases, the larger letter begins a book; 1 instance marks the middle letter of the Pentateuch (Lev. 11:42). A couple of letters of the very famous Deut. 6:4 are written abnormally large; it is thought that they mean *witness*. We also have large letters written in Ex. 34:7, 14 Lev. 11:30 13:33 Deut. 32:4, 6 Isa. 56:10. ISBE tells us that there are 31, according to Buxtorf's *Tiberias*.
  - b. We don't know why there are 23 places where certain Hebrew letters are written smaller than normal. Some examples: Gen. 2:4 23:2 Lev. 1:1 Job 7:5. Buxtorf says there are 32 times this occurs.
  - c. Some letters were written slightly above the line. One is the middle letter of the psalms (in Psalm 80:14). Another is a letter in the word *Manasseh* in Judges 18:30. It is thought that the letter was actually added in order to change *Moses* to *Manasseh*, as they did not want the apostate priest Jonathan of that passage to be descended from Moses. Also, Job 38:13, 15 (which ISBE says are questionable).
  - d. In Num. 25:12, we have a wâw which has been cut in half.
  - e. ISBE suggests that there are several places in Scripture where abbreviations were used: Psalm 31:7 (which is Psalm 30:7 in the LXX); Jer. 3:19 6:11 25:37. This is justified by the fact that we find abbreviations on coins and early Jewish inscriptions: e.g., the letter shin stands for the word *shânâh*, which means *year*; *yodh sin* stands for *Israel*; aleph = 1; bêyth = 2, etc. in the case of Psalm 31:7, it is suggested that *yodh* stands for *Jeh*. Some of these abbreviations are blamed for the confounding of numbers throughout Scripture (e.g., 2Sam. 10:18 24:13 1Kings 4:26 and their parallel passages; Ezra 2 and Neh. 7). There are also places in Scripture where certain letters should have been rendered as numbers, according to ISBE: Psalm 90:12 1Sam. 13:1 14:14.
  - f. A *paseq* (˘) or perpendicular divider was inserted in 48 places between two words. In some cases, it was to separate the divine name from the word that followed; in other cases, it separated two words that should not have been accidentally united (sometimes the final consonant of the first word was the same as the first consonant of the second word).
  - g. There are 15 places where dots were placed over certain letters or words. It is guessed that these (1) refer to questionable renderings of the text or (2) the scribe made an error in copying and that is indicated with the dot. Generally, in the margin, is the word *nâkâdh* (*pointed*); which could also be *nâkôdh* (*speckled*) or *nikkûdh* (*punctuation*). These passages are: Gen. 16:5 18:9 19:33 33:4 37:12 Num. 3:39 9:10 21:30 29:15 Deut. 29:28 Psalm 27:13 2Sam. 19:20 Isa. 44:9 Ezek. 41:20 46:22.<sup>59</sup> These dots are found even on the barest of synagogue rolls, which have only consonants and vowel letters (א, י, ה and ו). Some of these dots are mentioned, but apparently not explained, in the **Talmud** and in the **Midrash**. Given that the comments would have been made in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., that means that their insertion had to occur in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. or earlier.
  - h. There are 9 times when there is a mark in the manuscript which looks like an inverted nûwn. Two inverted nûn's are on both sides of vv. 35–36 in Num. 10 and apparently precede each verse in Psalm 107:23–28, 40. It is theorized that there is a portion of text whose position is questioned. It may simply be a nûwn. This matter appears to be debated as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.

<sup>59</sup> Taken from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. IV; p. 2960.

6. There are some 18 places<sup>60</sup> in Scripture where the text was thought to be changed by Ezra or a later scribe because they found the content objectionable. These passages are Gen. 18:22 Num. 11:15 12:12 (which may contain more than one change or error) 1Sam. 3:13 2Sam. 16:12 20:1 1Kings 12:16 2Chron. 10:16 Job 7:20 32:3 Psalm 106:20 Jer. 2:11 Lam. 3:20 Ezek. 8:17 Hosea 4:7 Habak. 1:12 Zech. 2:8 (12) Mal. 1:13 3:9. Bullinger calls these the ***Eighteen Emendations of the Sopherim***. ZPEB calls them *Tiqqune Sopherim*. Let me give you some examples:
- In Gen. 18:22, we have Moses standing before God. However, it is theorized that the original text had God standing before Moses (which the scribe viewed as blasphemous).
  - The text of 1Sam. 3:13 reads **Because his sons made themselves vile (or, accursed), he restrained them not**. However, it is thought that the primitive text reads *Because his sons cursed God...* The scribe simply did not want to have the phrase *curse God* in Scripture (he didn't want to write it and did not want to read it aloud in the synagogue).
  - Present rendering of Jer. 2:11: **"But My people have changed their glory."** The original reading was probably: **"But My people have changed My glory."**
  - Hosea 4:7 **"They have turned My glory into shame"** is probably the original, rather than **"I will change their glory into shame."**
  - The present rendering of many of the emendations and what was thought to be the original rendering is still debated to this day.<sup>61</sup> We will deal with each of these instances when they occur in Scripture as we exegete those specific passages.
7. *Itture Sopherim*: these are 7 places in Scripture named in the Talmud where a word not written in the text should be read (e.g., Judges 20:13 2Sam. 18:20) ; 5 instances where a word written should not be read (2Sam. 15:21 2Kings 5:18); and 5 places where the scribes omitted the word *and*. Some of these passages are: Gen. 18:5 24:55 Num. 31:2 Psalm 36:6 68:25. There were places where the letters of a word were transposed in reading (Joshua 6:13). Most of these changes were a matter of grammar or logic.
- As we examine this, you might be thinking *this stuff seems to be pretty trivial on the whole*. In a sense, you are right. These variants do not represent some large scale change from fundamental doctrine A to fundamental doctrine B. These variants are trivial when it comes to establishing the fundamental doctrines of our faith; however, this is the Word of God and scholars therefore are attempting to most accurately determine for us what the original text is.
8. Similarly, there are a number of passages which are written differently than they are read aloud. Many examples are innocuous—the difference is the spelling of an individual's name (Gen. 14:8 36:4, 14). However, there are a considerable number of places where *Adonai* was read, but *Jehovah* was written.
9. There are approximately 350 times when a word appears to be added to the text for the purpose of clarification or explanation. This word is preceded by the Aramaic word *sebir*, which means *suppose*. The collection of these clarifications is called *Sebirim*.
10. The next thing to consider are the actual scribal errors. Although many of these probably took place during the time of the **Sopherim**, they could have occurred at any time during the transmission of the Old Testament text.
- Visual errors:
    - The Hebrew text was originally written with no vowels and no spaces (the Greek was written in all capitals with no spaces). The illustration given by Geisler and Nix is *heisnowhere* could be read *he is now here* or *he is nowhere*. When the vowels are removed, then it makes the reading even more difficult (*hsnwhr*).
    - It is not unusual in the Hebrew to confused one letter for another—particularly when an old manuscript is the source that is being copied. ב, כ, ג and ד (bêyth, kaph, gimel and nun) are four letters which are very similar. Mem (מ) can look like the combination of yodh (י) or wâw (ו) and one of those letters. Mem, at the end of a word (ם), can also be confounded with o. Daleth (ד) and resh

<sup>60</sup> Actually, 7 in the *Siphri*, 10 in the *Yalkut*; 11 in the *Mechilta*; 17 in the *Tanchuma*; and the St. Petersburg Codex contains two passages not included in any other list (Mal. 1:12 3:9). ZPEB lists 16 of these; Bullinger lists 18, plus some extras; ISBE lists 16, but says there are probably two errors in Num. 12:12 and that there is a parallel passage to 2Sam. 16:12).

<sup>61</sup> For more information, see *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*; E. W. Bullinger; ©originally 1898; reprinted 1968 Baker Books; pp 1017–1022 and *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 5, p. 688.

- (n) are often confounded in Scripture. This is easily confirmed by comparing certain proper names in Kings with those found in Chronicles. A copyist can easily see one letter and copy the other.
- (1) The confounding of dalet and resh: 2Sam. 22:11 (compare Psalm 18:11) Psalm 110:3. Tradition mentions 6 other places, although I would think it would have to have occurred more often than that (see my exegesis on 1Chron. 1–8).
  - (2) The confounding of the yodh and wâw is said to have occurred 154 times, according to ISBE.
- iii. Occasionally, a scribe would omit a letter, a word or even an entire line. The noun *Gibeah* might occur twice in the same verse; the scribe writes down the first *Gibeah*, looks up to the second *Gibeah*, and begins writing there, leaving out all of the words that are between the two *Gibeah*'s. We had an example of this in 1Sam. 13:15. This is called a *homoeoteleuton* (which translates *similar ending*). When one letter is omitted, it is called a *haplography* (which means *single writing*).
  - iv. Sometimes a word is repeated; the scribe looks up, sees the word, writes it; and then looks up again, one or more words later, and writes the word a second time. This is called *dittography*.
  - v. Transposition of letters or words, which is called *metathesis*. In 2Chron. 3:4, the transposition of two letters results in the porch of Solomon's temple being 120 cubits (roughly 60 ft.) rather than 20 cubits, as is found in the Septuagint. This gives the porch measurements as 20 cubits wide and 120 cubits high, which is wack. ISBE mentions the passages Joshua 6:13 Isa. 8:12.
  - vi. Sometimes a letter in one word, finds itself in another word: ISBE's examples: Judges 10:12 1Sam. 14:50–51 Psalm 139:20 Jer. 18:23.
  - vii. There are word transpositions in 1Kings 6:17 Psalm 35:7 95:7.
  - viii. Verse transpositions: Gen. 24:29b follows v. 30a; Isa. 40:19–20 belongs with 41:6.
  - ix. Various confusions of spellings, abbreviations or insertions account for the other scribal errors. Since a Hebrew letter can also stand for a number, sometimes the numbers found in the Old Testament are confounded.
    - (1) The 40,000 stalls mentioned in 1Kings 4:26 should actually be 4000, as per 2Chron. 9:25.
    - (2) The 42 years alluded to in 2Chron. 22:2 should actually be 22 years, as we find in 2Kings 8:26.
- b. Errors of the ear: it is possible that some manuscripts were copied via dictation.
    - i. There are 15 places (according to ISBE)<sup>62</sup> where lô' (*not*) and lô (*to him*) are confounded (Psalm 100:3).
    - ii. Jehovah and Adonai would have been said alike, giving us *Adoram* in 1Kings 12:18 and *Hadoram* in 2Chron. 10:18.
  - c. Errors in writing:
    - i. A scribe may write something poorly or indistinctly, which could result in the leaving out of the age and length of rule of Saul in 1Sam. 13:1. The text could also have been unreadable in the manuscript which was copied.
    - ii. There are some errors which were a result of simple carelessness. In Gen. 36:2, the last *daughter* should read *son*. In Num. 26:8 1Chron. 3:22 6:13, we have *sons* rather than *son* (a common error). In 2Sam. 23:18–19, the first *three* should be *thirty*.
    - iii. A scribe could have intentionally changed the wording, even from good intentions.
      - (1) A scribe might change the spelling of a proper noun to a more popular spelling or to a more localized spelling.
      - (2) A scribe might smooth out rough grammar, e.g., change a masculine noun into a feminine one to agree with the verb. This is not unlike the changes made in the NKJV, which carefully follows the KJV, but updates the language.
      - (3) A scribe may change a word or two in order to correct what he sees as an error. All I have here are the New Testament illustrations of John 19:14, where *sixth hour* was changed to *third hour*; Mark 8:31, where *after three days* was changed to *on the third day*; and Rev. 1:5, where *loosed from our sins* was changed to *washed us from our sins* (the two verbs are very similar).

<sup>62</sup> *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. IV; p. 2961. All the stuff from ISBE in this section comes from that page.

- iv. Conflation changes: where there are two different extant readings, a scribe might incorporate both into one reading (I don't know if this is a New Testament anomaly only). I do recall some English translations doing this.
  - v. Interestingly enough, ISBE says that the most poorly copied manuscript was Samuel. This book is 90% action and narrative; prior to this study, I would have thought the middle chapters of Joshua (with the names of a million cities) or the first eight books of Chronicles (with the names of a million people) would be the least likely sections to be copied correctly.
  - d. Differences between what is written and what is read: there are several places where the public readings of Scripture varied slightly from the written text. Sometimes this was done to fix the grammar; however, often this was done so that the speaker did not blaspheme the name of God by what he read.
  - e. The common scribal errors are summed up below:
    - i. Haplography—failure to repeat a letter or word.
    - ii. Dittography—repeating a letter or word which only occurs once.
    - iii. False recollection—writing down the text from a similar passage or from another manuscript.
    - iv. Homoeoteleuton—omitting a passage which falls between two identical words.
    - v. Line omission—leaving out an entire line of Scripture (sometimes this is a result of homoeoteleuton).
    - vi. Confusion of similar letters.
    - vii. Insertion of marginal notes into the body of the text.<sup>63</sup>
11. There are of course differences between the **Samaritan** Pentateuch and the Masoretic text. These are as follows:
- a. The Samaritans apparently inserted additional text after Ex. 20:2–17 and Deut. 5:6–21 which emphasized the importance of Mount Gerizim (which is in northern Israel) over Jerusalem (which is in Judah, the southern kingdom).
  - b. The second most important change of the actual text is that the Samaritans apparently sought to remove all anthropomorphic expressions from the text.
  - c. According to W. J. Martin, *many of the variants are due to a misunderstanding of grammatical forms or syntactical constructions*.<sup>64</sup>
  - d. The Samaritans apparently added text from parallel passages.
  - e. Some differences depend upon a dialect difference.
  - f. We find no tradition with the Samaritans of the same sort of discipline found in the Masoretes or in the scribes of the Sopherim era. The fact that text has been altered to suit their geographical location indicates by itself that this group did not have the respect for God's Word that they should. Therefore, all variants between this and the Masoretic text should generally be weighed heavily in favor of the Masoretic text.
12. There is at least one other consideration and that is the word separation and the letters themselves.
- a. The Autographs were written without any separation between the words. Therefore, it had to be determined where one word stopped and another began.
  - b. The lettering of the Hebrew changed. Today, we can read a Hebrew verse without the divisions of words and can pick out where the words should be divided simply because the letters k, m, n, p and ts haven ending forms—that is, the letter is shaped differently to indicate that one has come to the end of a word.

Ending Forms for Hebrew Letters					
Name	kaph	mem	nun	pe	tsâdêy
English Equivalent	k	m	n	p	ts
Hebrew Letter	כ	מ	נ	פ	צ

<sup>63</sup> Taken from *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p.1254.

<sup>64</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p.1257.



## Hebrew Ending Form

ך

ם

ל

ן

י

- c. As you can see in the chart, it is very easy to distinguish the final form of these letters, and therefore, it is a very simple matter to determine where the end of a word is.
- d. However, this is a more recent form of the Hebrew alphabet. The older Hebrew alphabet, in which most or all of the Old Testament was written, does not have these ending forms.
- e. This does not affect many verses; however, in exegeting a passage, we must always be aware that it is possible that the words should have been separated elsewhere.
- f. On the other hand, this is less of a problem than you might expect. For example, look at the word *Hebrew*; we could possibly separate it into *He brew*. However, in one case, the sentence would make sense and in the other, it would not.
- g. My point is that, when it comes to the examination of the text and determining its meaning, there are many factors at work, some of which we are not even aware.
- h. Passages where word separation was possibly a problem: 2Sam. 1:18 Psalm 40:8–9 73:4 Jer. 15:10 22:14 Amos 6:12
13. It makes me grimace to say this, but there are places in the Old Testament where the text was probably altered as a acquiescence to the religious emphasis of that day. The Jews, at times, did not like to pronounce the proper name of God (*Jehovah*, *Yahweh*, *Y<sup>e</sup>howah*), so there appear to be time periods where this was changed in the text. We find *Y<sup>e</sup>howah* used 242 times in Psalms 1–41, whereas *Elohim* is used only a handful of times. However, this is reversed in Psalms 42–83, where *Elohim* is found 200 times and *Y<sup>e</sup>howah* is found only 44 times. ISBE suggests that we compare Psalm 14 with Psalm 53; Psalm 40:14–18 with Psalm 70; and Psalm 50:7 with Ex. 20:2. In Psalms 90–150, *Y<sup>e</sup>howah* is used again, with *Elohim* being found only in Psalm 108 and 144:9. With this in mind, also compare 2Kings 22:19 with 2Chron. 34:27.
- a. *Baal* is a curious word in the Hebrew, standing at once for the owner of a farm as well as for the heathen god of that era. There was a period of time when *Baal* was compounded with other words to refer to Jehovah (Judges 6:32 8:35); later, there appears to be an objection to doing this (Hosea 2:16, 18). What appears to be the case is that *Baal* was changed to *bôsheth* (which means *shame*). See Jer. 3:24 Hosea 9:10. Therefore, there are several compound which use *bôsheth* what which should use *Baal* instead (*Ishbosheth* in 2Sam. 2–4; *Mephibosheth* in 2Sam. 4:4; *Eliada* in 2Sam. 5:16; and *Jerrubesheth* in 2Sam. 11:21). Later, this objection was lifted, and instead we have *Eshbaal* (1Chron. 8:33 9:39); *Merribbaal* (1Chron. 8:34); *Beeliada* (1Chron. 14:7; compare 3:8).
- b. There have been occasions when *bless* was substituted for *curse* when such a reference was made to God—1Kings 21:10 (1Kings 20:10 in LXX) Job 1:5 2:5, 9; essentially, this occurred anywhere the word *Lord* would follow the word *curse* (or, *blaspheme*). Sometimes the word *enemies of* was inserted (2Sam. 12:14). Compare also 1Sam. 25:22 with the Greek; and 2Sam. 7:12, 14 24:1 with the parallel passages in Chronicles.
14. The variants between the masorite text and the Samaritan Pentateuch:
- a. There are 6000 variants between these two texts.
- b. These variants are mostly a matter of spelling.
- c. In 1900 of these variants, the Samaritan Pentateuch is in agreement with the Septuagint (e.g., the ages of the patriarchs).
- d. The most significant variants are the self-serving ones where the Samaritans try to set up Mount Gerizim and Shechem as God's holy places, rather than Mount Zion and Jerusalem.
15. Now, you may wonder, *how could I get a definitive list of all the variants?* Quite frankly, you won't. However, probably the best reference tool in this regard is Rotherham's *Emphasized Bible*. He makes more references to variants between the various manuscripts and targums and translations than any other translation which I have come across. On the negative side, Rotherham made his translation 1902, long before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. For a less complete list, but which includes the DSS, I suggest

**Given all that we have covered up until now, what you should be fully cognizant of is how precisely the MT has been combed through for every possible error and possible alteration.**

the **NRSV**. There are many infuriating instances where the text of the Dead Sea Scrolls should be mentioned, but are not—however, it is the most complete listing that I am aware of.

16. When all is said and done, Geisler and Nix give us an illustration which apparently came from R. Laird Harris, which goes as follows: as an example, there are 166 words in Isa. 53, and there are only 17 letters which are in question, based upon the two copies of Isaiah found in Cave I. 10 of these letters simply represent a different spelling, which has no effect upon the meaning. 4 letters are minor stylistic changes, such as a difference of conjunctions. The final three letters in question make up the word *light*, which had been added to v. 11, but does not seriously affect the meaning of the verse.<sup>65</sup>
17. We have mentioned the two Isaiah manuscripts from the caves of Qumran and compared them to the Septuagint and Masoretic text. Just how much variation are there between these manuscripts? Gleason Archer answers this: *Even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscripts previously known (A.D. 980), they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling. Even those Dead Sea fragments of Deuteronomy and Samuel which point to a different manuscript family from that which underlies our received Hebrew text do not indicate any differences in doctrine or teaching. They do not affect the message of revelation in the slightest.*<sup>66</sup>
18. **Conclusion:** Given all that we have covered up until now, what you should be fully cognizant of is how precisely the MT has been combed through for every possible error and possible alteration. Obviously, there are a few problem passages and there have been some alterations—however, we are speaking only of a very small portion of Scripture. The fact that the Old Testament has been so carefully examined should give us great confidence in the received text.

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## Topic Six: How Does the Old Testament Compare to Other Ancient Documents?

A very Reasonable question at this point would be, *how does the Old Testament compare to other ancient manuscripts?* After all, historians often tend not to want to use the Old Testament with respect to historical accounts, as some feel that it is riddled with religious whimsy and altered by those with doctrinal agendas.

1. First of all, it should be noted that not every historian feels that the Old Testament is not a worthwhile historical document due to its religious and supernatural content. The great historian Will Durant wrote: *The discoveries here summarized have restored considerable credit to those chapters of Genesis that record the early traditions of the Jews. In its outlines, and barring supernatural incidents, the story of the Jews as unfolded in the Old Testament has stood the test of criticism and archeology; every year adds corroboration from the documents, monuments, or excavations...We must accept the Biblical account provisionally until it is disproved.*<sup>67</sup>
- 2.

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<sup>65</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix; *A General Introduction to the Bible*; Chicago; Moody Press, ©1968, p. 262. The illustration apparently came from R. Laird Harris, "How reliable Is the Old Testament Text?" from *Can I Trust My Bible?* A symposium, p. 124. What is unfortunately unclear is whether these differences are in the consonantal text or whether most of the differences are with the vowels (which were inserted circa 800–90 A.D.). ZPEB suggests that most of the variants of the Old Testament text are the vowels. See *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 5, p. 685.

<sup>66</sup> Josh McDowell, *A Ready Defense*; Here's Life Publishers; ©1990; p. 49; taken from Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of the Old Testament*; Chicago: Moody Press, 1964; p. 25.

<sup>67</sup> *The Story of Civilization; 1. Our Oriental Heritage*, by Will Durant; MJF Books, ©1963; p. 300.

Often, we hear of the Bible and other historical documents being at odds with one another. Actually, Scripture is in agreement with a great deal of secular history; however, we need to see two things: (1) do we have better manuscript evidence for other ancient histories? (2) How does the Bible stack up to other pieces of ancient literature by way of manuscript accuracy? This chart was taken from Josh McDowell.<sup>68</sup>

### How Does the Bible Compare with Other Ancient Literature?

Author	When Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	Number of Copies
Cæsar	100–44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1000 years	10
Livy	59 B.C.–17 A.D.			20
Plato ( <i>Tetralogies</i> )	427–347 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200 years	7
Tacitus ( <i>Annals</i> )	100 A.D.	1100 A.D.	1000 years	20
Other minor works of Tacitus	100 A.D.	1000 A.D.	900 years	1
Pliny the Young ( <i>History</i> )	61–113 A.D.	850 A.D.	750 years	7
Thucydides ( <i>History</i> )	460–400 B.C.	900 A.D.	1300 years	8
Suetonius ( <i>De Vita Caesarum</i> )	75–160 A.D.	950 A.D.	800 years	8
Herodotus ( <i>History</i> )	480–425 B.C.	900 A.D.	1300 years	8
Horace			900 years	
Sophocles	496–406 B.C.	1000 A.D.	1400 years	193
Lucretius	circa 50 B.C.		1100 years	2
Catullus	54 B.C.	1550 A.D.	1600 years	3
Euripides	480–406 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1500 years	9
Demosthenes	383–322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1300 years	200*
Aristotle	384–322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1400 years	49†
Aristophanes	450–385 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200 years	10
Homer ( <i>Iliad</i> )	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500 years	643
Old Testament	3000–400 B.C.	100 B.C.	300 years	1000‡
New Testament	40–100 A.D.	125 A.D.	25 years	over 24,000

\* All from one copy.

† Of any one work.

‡ Primarily fragments.

<sup>68</sup> Josh McDowell, *A Ready Defense*; Here's Life Publishers; ©1990; p. 45. I added in the Old Testament.

## How Does the Bible Compare with Other Ancient Literature?

Author	When Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	Number of Copies
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It is important to note that most historians accept the face value veracity of most of these ancient works, despite the fact that there are only a few remaining copies and that these copies were made generally a millennium after the original. Also note that, in terms of ancient literature, there is nothing which compares to Scripture.

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### Topic Seven: Why Did God Allow the Text of His Word to Become Corrupt?

Obviously, determining the correct text is a lot of work. Why didn't God just preserve the text of His Word? Why can't be simply say, "If the King James Version was good enough for the Apostle Paul, then it is good enough for us."

1. God has set up a program where we do not go from 0 to 100 in an instant. Although we are saved instantly and possess eternal life forever, our life on this earth does not go from sinful behavior to perfect behavior (although the change can be remarkable).
2. Therefore, we should not be shocked that some daily growth is involved, which involves the study of God's Word.
3. We were not given the command to grow on our own; we are connected to a local church, which is a part of the Church, which is the body of Christ. Our growth is connected directly to the function of that local church.
4. Within the local church, there are men with various gifts which aide our spiritual growth. The most important gift is that of the pastor-teacher, who has spent many years studying God's Word so that he can present it accurately.
5. However, besides this pastor-teacher, there are thousands of men with various spiritual gifts upon whose shoulders he stands. He is dependent upon experts in Greek and Hebrew; upon theologians; and upon textual critics.
6. A pastor can, if he so chooses, present the Word correctly and completely to his congregation. However, he must depend upon those who have gone before him, just as his congregation must depend upon him. Our body functions like a body, insofar as there is this inter-connectivity, apart from which, no part of the body functions well without the rest of the body.
7. Just as there are a variety of spiritual gifts during the inception of the Church which are no longer functioning today; today there are an even greater variety of spiritual gifts which were not a part of the early Church.
8. Even though it was more likely that a completely correct text of any New Testament book would be available to the Apostles, such a thing was not true of the Old Testament, and they depended upon, primarily, the Septuagint. This does not mean that the Septuagint was faultless.
9. Finally, and most importantly, the Bible has always been a careful blend of God's Word and man's writing. The Bible is the written word, just as Jesus Christ is the Living Word, also a careful amalgamation of the divine and the human. Therefore, there is no reason to suppose that the human aspect of Scripture should ever completely disappear—at least, not in this dispensation.
10. With the help of hundreds and thousands of men, all functioning within the parameters of their specific spiritual gifts, we can ascertain nearly perfectly the true text of the Old Testament.
11. No major doctrine is affected by a disputed reading in the Greek New Testament or in the Hebrew Old Testament.

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### Topic Eight: The Rules for Textual Criticism

Even though the background is different for the Old and New Testaments, the general rules for textual criticism are fairly similar.<sup>69</sup> Textual Criticism can be broken down into two categories: **external** and **internal evidence**. Internal evidence may be further subdivided into two categories: **transcriptional** and **intrinsic evidence**. Each of the following points could be preceded by the words *generally speaking*. The rules of textual criticism, divided into their three classifications, are:<sup>70</sup>

1. **External evidence** simply weighs the importance of the manuscripts themselves.
  - a. The older the text, the more accurate the manuscript.
  - b. The reading which is found throughout the widest geographical area is preferred.
  - c. A text in the original language will take precedence over a translation.
2. The **internal evidence** relates to what is found within the manuscripts themselves. The first type of **internal evidence** is known as **transcriptional**, which relates to the transmission of the manuscripts by scribes and translators. The rules of **transcriptional evidence** are:
  - a. The more difficult text (for the scribe) is preferred. It is more likely that a scribe would, if he were going to change the text, change from a more difficult to understand passage to an easier to understand rendering. I should point out that these rules are not necessarily absolute, nor is there necessarily a hierarchy that we can depend upon, as to when one rule overrules another rule. In this example, a scribe could accidentally insert some letters or words which do not fit (by looking up at the wrong text and writing in what follows), and the result would be text that is more difficult to understand. A manuscript could become difficult to read, and a scribe could copy as best as he can, and still confound a couple of letters, the result being a more difficult text. My point is, each rule impacts the importance of the other rules; and each rule must not be seen as absolute, but tempered by good judgment.
  - b. The shorter reading is preferred with the exceptions of (1) the accidental omission of words or lines; (2) words which were deleted on the basis of grammatical, liturgical or doctrinal grounds.
  - c. Different readings from parallel passages are preferred from similar readings of the same passages. A scribe is more likely to change a reading to match a parallel passage than he would be to change a reading so that it is disharmonious with a parallel passage.
  - d. Poor grammar and less refined writing is to be preferred over a smooth reading, as a scribe is more likely to change poor grammar into good grammar (even unintentionally).
  - e. The reading which best explains the variants is the preferred reading.
3. There is a third type of evidence concerning which we should be cognizant: **intrinsic evidence**, which relates to the original author.
  - a. When dealing with alternative writings, the passage which most closely matches the style of the author is to be preferred.
  - b. The reading which most closely matches the immediate context is to be preferred.
  - c. The reading which is in agreement with the author's teachings elsewhere or with the canon of Scripture elsewhere is to be preferred.
  - d. The reading which is most in line with the author's background is to be preferred.
4. Gleason L. Archer does not break these into groups, but rather gives us seven short easy rules to follow:<sup>71</sup>
  - a. The older reading is to be preferred.
  - b. The more difficult reading is to be preferred.
  - c. The shorter reading is to be preferred.
  - d. The reading which best explains the variants is to be preferred.
  - e. The reading with the widest geographical support is to be preferred.
  - f. The reading which most conforms to the style and diction of the author is to be preferred.
  - g. The reading which reflects no doctrinal bias is to be preferred. For a more modern illustration: if you open up a Jehovah Witness Bible and a translation conforms to their doctrine, yet that translation is

<sup>69</sup> One primary difference is that with the New Testament, we will examine *text types*.

<sup>70</sup> These are taken from Norman Geisler and William Nix; *A General Introduction to the Bible*; Chicago; Moody Press, ©1968, pp. 368–369.

<sup>71</sup> Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*; Chicago, Moody Press; 1964; pp. 51–52. I took these from Norman Geisler and William Nix; *A General Introduction to the Bible*; Chicago; Moody Press, ©1968, pp. 368–369. McDowell gives us these same seven rules and credits E. Wurthwein.

significantly different to other Bible translation, their rendering is suspect. Therefore, when we find readings in the Samaritan Pentateuch which show preference of locations in the northern kingdom over those in the southern kingdom, that indicates doctrinal bias, and such readings are inferior.

5. Quite obviously, if you open up any set of 3 or more translations and read a chapter, you will still find disagreements. Geisler and Nix explain that textual criticism is an *art* as well as a *science*.
  - a. For instance, a mis-copied letter, which could be the error of the scribe or a poor original manuscript, could result in bad grammar or in a passage which is more difficult to understand. In a case like this, good grammar and the simple reading are to be preferred.
  - b. The most common problem which would arise is that there are two rules, even from the same category, which yield a different result. This is where the science of textual criticism becomes the art of textual criticism.
  - c. Geisler and Nix offer up two suggestions rules for weighing the evidence:
    - i. External evidence is more important than internal evidence, chiefly because it is more objective.
    - ii. Any decision to prefer one reading over another must take into account all types of evidence and they must be weighed carefully against one another.

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### Topic Nine: Three Illustrations of Textual Criticism<sup>72</sup>

1. Zech. 12:10:
  - a. The RSV follows the Theodotion version (circa 120 A.D.), rendering this passage: [“When they look on him whom they have pierced.”](#)
  - b. The KJV and the ASV render this: [“They shall look upon me \[Jehovah is speaking\] whom they have pierced.”](#) They followed the masoretic text.
  - c. The masoretic text is a much more recent manuscript, and is therefore preferred.
  - d. However, the masoretic text is in the original Hebrew, and therefore it is to be preferred (the Theodotion [version](#) is Greek).
  - e. The reading of the KJV and the ASV is preferred for the following reasons:
    - i. The MT is in the original language, and therefore preferred.
    - ii. For the Jew, when Jehovah says, [“They will look upon Me, whom they have pierced”](#), this is more difficult for them to explain. That also makes this reading the preferred reading.
    - iii. At the time of the translation of the Theodotion [version](#), we would certainly have some of those who would doctrinally oppose Jesus being made equal to God—this would certainly explain the reason for the alteration found in the Theodotion text.
    - iv. This could also reflect a belief in the Trinity, and the translator was distinguishing between God the Father (*Jehovah* of this passage) and God the Son. The mistake is not realizing that Jehovah of the Old Testament could refer to any member of the Trinity.
    - v. Finally, with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (which occurred long after the KJV and ASV were assembled), the older reading turned out to be *me* rather than *him*.
2. Ex. 1:5:
  - a. The Masoretic text reads that 70 men and women moved to Egypt whereas the New Testament (Acts 7:14) and the Septuagint tell us that 75 moved to Egypt. This has caused many to come up with ingenious ways to harmonize the Old and New Testaments.
  - b. We have since discovered at Qumran a fragment of a scroll containing Exodus which reads *seventy-five souls*.
  - c. We still have the problem of Gen. 46:27, which reads 70. The full explanation and harmonization of these passages is beyond realm of this particular study. Our purpose was simply to determine the disputed text of Ex. 1:5.
3. Deut. 32:8:

<sup>72</sup> These illustrations were taken from Norman Geisler and William Nix; *A General Introduction to the Bible*; Chicago; Moody Press, ©1968, pp. 373–374.

- a. The MT, KJV and ASV read: “The Most High gave to the nations their inheritance...He set the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel.”
  - b. The RSV, which follows the Septuagint here, reads: “According to the number of the sons [or angles] of God.’
  - c. A fragment found in Qumran, long after these three translations were made, supports the RSV and the LXX.
  - d. Now look back at our rules for textual criticism:
    - i. The LXX text is the most difficult to explain.
    - ii. It is in harmony with other portions of Scripture (Gen. 6:4 Job 1:6 2:1 38:7).
    - iii. Because of the discovery of the manuscripts of Qumran, the RSV reading is now supported by the oldest manuscripts and it explains the origin of the LXX variant (which, of course, turns out to be the accurate reading).
4. Obviously, this illustrations are relatively simple, all having been confirmed by the Dead Sea Scrolls. However, note:
- a. Clearing up the text did not necessarily make the exegesis of the text easier (Ex. 1:5 and Deut. 32:8).
  - b. Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, determining the better reading was very difficult, causing some of the greatest theological scholars to differ.
  - c. Obviously, there are going to be a number of passages whose disputed readings will not be as easy to clear up.
  - d. However, it is important to remember that rarely will an important doctrine ever rest upon a shaky reading.

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Glossary	
<b>Codex</b>	These were bound books of single leaves (called <i>quires</i> ) which began to be used instead of rolls in the Christian era. It is even possible that some New Testament books were codices. By the mid-third century, the codex form of a book was taking the place of the ancient scrolls.
<b>Dead Sea Scrolls</b>	Early in 1947, a Bedouin goat herder was looking in some caves for some lost animals in Qumran, which is a mile or so west of the northwest corner of the Dead Sea, approximately 7½ miles south of Jericho. He discovered some jars that contained leather scrolls wrapped in linen. Eventually, between the years 1947 and 1956, a total of 200 scrolls were taken from this and nearly a dozen other nearby caves. Some of the books which were uncovered can be reasonably dated even as far back as 100 B.C. In fact, the book of Isaiah, dated 100 B.C., is only 600 years older than the final original manuscript of Isaiah (see Isa. 8:16). These scrolls only survive because they were in such a dry climate at an almost constant temperature for so long. I do not doubt that their preservation and discovery was a handiwork of God, as we have now entered an age when digitalized photographs of these manuscripts can last easily through the Tribulation and Millennium.

Glossary	
<b>Documentary Hypothesis</b>	Documentary Hypothesis (which is a part of <i>Higher Criticism</i> , as opposed to textual criticism, which is known as <i>Lower Criticism</i> ) examines the actual writing and source of our Old Testament documents. However, certain groups of these have developed specific postulates hand-in-hand with their theories. They have decided that the people who have traditionally been assigned as authors to the Old Testament text are not actually the authors. Instead, the Old Testament has its origins in several texts which were originally written by those with a specific viewpoint, and then wove together by others with specific viewpoints. The end result is that some books, like Leviticus, were originally written by two main sources, the <i>Elohists</i> (who used the name <i>Elohim</i> a lot) and the <i>Jehovists</i> (who uses the name <i>Jehovah</i> a lot). Then a priest came along with the intention of giving credence to the priesthood, and wove these manuscripts together with a priestly emphasis. Although their purposes are purported to be scholarly, the real intention is to destroy faith in God's Word.
<b>External Evidence</b>	With external evidence, we are concerned more with the date and origin of the manuscripts being examined. This is not unlike determining the importance of a book by examining its cover and introductory pages.
<b>Gemara</b>	<i>Gemara</i> means <i>to complete, to accomplish, to learn</i> . This was essentially a commentary on the <b>Mishnah</b> written in Aramaic. The Palestinian Gemara dates to 200 A.D. and the more authoritative Babylonian Gemara dates back to 500 A.D. The <b>Mishnah</b> combined with the Gemara make up the <b>Talmud</b> .
<b>Geniza</b>	<i>Geniza</i> comes from the word <i>ganaz</i> , which means <i>to hide</i> . This was a room within a synagogue where worthless documents and old manuscripts were placed. It was a tradition that if a document with the name of <i>God</i> was on it, it must be properly disposed of when the manuscript became old. Such documents were often first placed in the geniza, and later buried in consecrated ground, often with a revered man.
<b>Internal Evidence</b>	For internal evidence, one actually opens the book and reads it. The two categories of internal evidence are <i>transcriptional</i> (which depends upon the scribes and the transmission of the manuscripts) and <i>intrinsic evidence</i> (which depends upon the style and background of the author).
<b>Intrinsic Evidence</b>	Determining the best reading of any given passage by examining the author's habits, vocabulary, doctrine, and background is called <i>intrinsic evidence</i> .
<b>Midrash</b>	The Midrash (which means <i>textual study, textual interpretation</i> ) was a doctrinal and homiletical exposition of the Old Testament. These were actually a group of works which included explanations, procedures, proverbs and parables. They were assembled into one document between 100 B.C. and 300 A.D. Given the time frame during which this was written, I would assume the language was Aramaic.
<b>Mishnah</b>	Mishna means <i>repetition, explanation, teaching</i> and is known to the Jews as the <i>Second Law</i> , the first being the Law of Moses. It was completed about 200 A.D. and was a compilation of all of the oral laws which dated back (supposedly) to the time of Moses and was written in Hebrew. The Mishnah combined with the <b>Gemara</b> make up the <b>Talmud</b> .
<b>Recension</b>	This is a revision of an existing literary work. In a recension, one looks to update and correct previous errors rather than to produce an entirely new version. For instance, the NRSV or the NASB are recensions, while God's Word™ is a new version.



## Glossary

<b>Talmud</b>	Some religious Jews did not feel that the Torah really covered in the proper detail the actual things that a person could or could not do under various situations, so they expanded on the Law considerably, defining sometimes in minute detail what was lawful and what was not. The example I recall was, if it were a Sabbath day and a cart drove by and splashed your clothing with mud, you could not remove and wash that clothing. That would be working on the Sabbath. What was allow was you could allow the mud to dry, grab it once with your fist, squeeze and then let go. The Talmud was a collection of the opinions and decisions of various Jewish scholars and groups between 300 B.C. and 500 A.D. The Talmud eventually consisted of two parts: (1) the <b>Mishnah</b> , written in Hebrew, and which was the assemblage of all the oral laws from the time of Moses up until 200 A.D., at which point it was committed to writing; and (2) the <b>Gemara</b> , which was a commentary on the Mishnah, written in Aramaic. There were actually two <b>Gemara</b> 's: the Palestinian <b>Gemara</b> , which was collected and put in writing around 200 A.D. and the more authoritative Babylonian <b>Gemara</b> , which was assembled around 500 A.D. As a result, we have essentially two Talmud's—the Babylonian Talmud and the Palestinian Talmud.
<b>Targums</b>	An oral paraphrase or interpretation of the Old Testament Hebrew into another language. These were eventually written down, and are important insofar as we learn from them the meanings of various Hebrew words. The word <i>targum</i> means <i>copy</i> .
<b>Transcriptional Evidence</b>	When determining the correct reading from a group of variants, one must examine how scribal error or alteration relates to the variants. Determining which reading is preferable based upon the errors, omissions and/or alterations of scribes is called <i>transcriptional evidence</i> .
<b>Version</b>	Old or New Testament translation; in this study, we primarily deal with ancient versions.

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