

I Texts, titles, and translations

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The twenty-four books that now constitute the Hebrew (and Aramaic) Bible or Protestant Old Testament (in which they are counted as thirty-nine books) were written at various times during the last millennium BCE. Scholars debate when certain parts of the Hebrew Bible were written or compiled, but there is general agreement that the last book to be completed was Daniel in c. 165 BCE. No original manuscript of any scriptural book has survived to the present. The first section of this chapter will survey the extant textual evidence for the Hebrew Bible.

I. TEXTS

This first section will describe the witnesses that have been available and studied for centuries, while the second section will treat the evidence discovered during the twentieth century in the Judean wilderness.

A. *The traditional witnesses.* The texts of all the books in the Hebrew Bible have long been known through two witnesses: the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX); the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) has offered another ancient witness to the first five books. In addition, some other early versions that were at least in part based on Hebrew models have also been considered of value for the preservation and study of the text.

1. *The Masoretic Text (MT).* The traditional text of the Hebrew Bible is named the Masoretic Text because of the *masora*, or body of notes regarding its copying and reading, that was compiled to assist in transmitting it accurately. The MT consists of two parts: the consonantal component, which was the only element at first and which rests on much earlier manuscripts, and the vowels, accents, cantillation marks, and other notes that were added to the consonants by medieval Jewish experts called the *Masoretes*. The earliest copies of the MT or parts of it date from

the ninth and tenth centuries CE or shortly after: the Cairo Codex of the Prophets was copied in 896 CE, the Aleppo Codex (about three-quarters of the Hebrew Bible is preserved in the damaged copy) in c. 925 CE, and the Leningrad Codex (the entire Bible) in 1009 CE. In other words, the very earliest manuscripts are a full 1000 years and more distant in time from when the last book of the Bible reached completion.

The MT, which has been the Bible of Jews the world over since the Middle Ages, is a truly admirable production, the fruit of the labors of remarkable experts who went to extraordinary lengths to ensure the accuracy of the transmission of the text and to record its many special features. There are differences in readings between the copies, but these discrepancies are minor, though the Masoretes themselves preserved some variant readings through various devices. While there is no question about the impressive nature of the MT and the precision that characterized the copying of it, a different question is whether the wording of text so carefully preserved in it is the best Hebrew text attainable for these books. Experts agree that the question of the quality of the text must be examined book by book; in some cases, the MT preserves a careful, ancient form of the text (e.g., in Exodus); in others, it does not (e.g., the books of Samuel). Since it is in the original language of the books and is complete, the MT has enjoyed pride of place in the modern study and translation of the Hebrew Bible.

2. *The Septuagint (LXX)*. The books of the Hebrew Bible were translated into the Greek language by Jewish scholars in the last three centuries BCE. There is no reliable information regarding when translating work began. A work entitled, *The Letter of Aristeas*, offers a story about the project for translating the books of the Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy) in the time of King Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283–246 BCE); it claims that seventy-two bilingual Jews from Palestine traveled at royal invitation and expense to Alexandria, Egypt, for the purpose of translating the books of the Law into Greek – a task they completed in seventy-two days. The story explains the name traditionally given to the Greek translation – the Septuagint (= the [translation of] the seventy, rounding off the number seventy-two for convenience) – but the amount of history preserved in it may be slight. There are citations from a Greek translation of parts of the Bible beginning around 200 BCE; consequently, translating work of some sort began before that time. The earliest form of

the LXX is called the Old Greek, and that Old Greek translation was later to be subjected to various kinds of revisions, often to bring it into closer conformity with a Hebrew text. Greek texts of the books became widely used not only by Jews who resided in primarily Greek speaking areas but also by Christians, for whom the Greek version became the Old Testament. As a result, readings from the LXX are found in the New Testament and other early Christian texts.

The Greek versions of the Bible exist in many copies. The oldest preserved ones are fragmentary papyri, some of which date from the second and first centuries BCE (found in Egypt and Palestine). For example, John Rylands' Papyrus 458 was inscribed in the second century BCE (on it, some verses from Deuteronomy 23–26, 28 survive) and Papyrus Fouad in approximately 100 BCE (containing a couple of fragments of Genesis and bits of Deuteronomy). The great codices (written with uncials), which contain Greek renderings of all books in the Hebrew Bible and more (the so-called apocryphal books and others, with the New Testament), date from the fourth and fifth centuries CE. The finest examples are Codex Vaticanus (= B; fourth century, generally regarded as the best guide to the Old Greek in almost all books), Codex Sinaiticus (= S; fourth century), and Codex Alexandrinus (=A; fifth century). There are also many minuscules of varying textual value. As will be noted later, caves 4 and 7 from Qumran contain copies of scriptural texts in Greek (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) dating from the second century BCE to about the turn of the eras.

Some extant witnesses of the Greek translation are therefore much older than the earliest manuscripts of the MT. Nevertheless, the Greek has typically played a lesser role in modern translations of the Old Testament, perhaps mostly because it does not offer the text in its original language.

The Old Greek was rendered from Hebrew sources, but it is not always possible to retrovert that Hebrew source with confidence. Nevertheless, the translators often produced quite literal renderings of their base text and thus regularly offer a clear reflection of it. If the LXX faithfully represents its Hebrew base, that base differed in many instances from the readings found in the MT. At times, that presumed Hebrew model preserves better readings; at other times, poorer ones. To give just one example, the LXX differs from the MT in Genesis 4:8.

MT: Cain said to his brother Abel. And when they were in the field ...

LXX: Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field ...

Here the LXX (with the Samaritan Pentateuch and some MT copies) has the words of Cain that are implied by but not present in the MT.

Greek copies served as the basis for other ancient translations of the Scriptures. Prominent examples are the Old Latin, the Armenian, and the Ethiopic versions.

3. *The Samaritan Pentateuch (SP)*. This name is given to the text of the Hebrew Bible used and preserved through the centuries by the Samaritan community. It contains, as the name indicates, only the first five books of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and only the consonantal text, written in the special Samaritan form of paleo-Hebrew. The SP, though the text rests on a much older foundation, survives exclusively in copies made in the Middle Ages or later. The earliest surviving copy may be Add. 1846, University Library Cambridge, which comes from early in the twelfth century CE.

The SP agrees with the MT in the vast majority of its readings. There are reported to be, however, about 6000 differences between the two – differences that from a textual standpoint frequently involve very minor matters such as spelling practices. A series of differences arises in Genesis 5, where in the SP the ages of the patriarchs are systematically lower than in either the MT or LXX – both of which have their own chronologies. Of the c. 6000 differences with the readings of the MT, the SP shares more than 1600 with the LXX. The SP is based on but expanded from a text like the MT. Among the expansions are instances in which the SP brings together into one place parallel material appearing in other places in the Pentateuch. There are also a few cases in which specifically Samaritan interests have made their way into the text. For example, an order identifying Mt. Gerizim as the chosen site for the temple is listed as the tenth commandment; the extra commandment was made possible by combining the first two into one. In such instances, it is most likely that they have been added to an older text form by Samaritan tradents.

These three witnesses, direct or indirect, to the text of the Hebrew Bible (or parts of it) have been used not only by their

respective worshiping communities but also by scholars of the text as the basis for their work of research and translation.

4. *Other translations.* Three other ancient translations that were based in their own ways on Hebrew texts also should receive mention.
 - a. *The Peshitta.* The translation of the books of the Hebrew Bible into the Syriac language took place over a period of time and was apparently the work of a number of translators. It may have been completed by the third century CE, and it did become the standard Bible for Syriac-speaking Christians. Some relatively old copies of it exist. For example, British Library Add. 14512 was copied in 459–60 CE and British Library Add. 14425 in 463–464 CE. The highly regarded Codex Ambrosianus dates from the sixth–seventh century CE. The Peshitta, a translation of the Scriptures from one Semitic language into another, shows evidence of a Jewish contribution to the work, especially in the translations of the first five books. The readings in the translation betray a high percentage of agreement with those in the MT.
 - b. *The Vulgate.* The great disparity between the manuscripts of the Old Latin versions (translated from Greek models) led Damasus, Bishop of Rome, to commission Jerome in 382–383 CE to prepare a standard Latin edition of the entire Bible on the basis of a sound Greek text. Jerome began by revising Old Latin texts of the New Testament, but in his labors with the Old Testament books, he made use of Greek models. As his work progressed, he became more concerned about the discrepancies between readings of Greek copies and those in the Hebrew texts used by his Jewish acquaintances and debate partners. Accordingly, he started to make greater use of Hebrew manuscripts in his translating work. It seems unlikely that he produced the entire Vulgate (the name given the translation at a later time), but he did make a sizable contribution to this work that eventually became the Bible of the church in the West and for a long time the basis of Roman Catholic translations into English.
 - c. *The Targums.* The word *targum* means “translation.” It is applied to a series of renderings of the books in the Hebrew Bible into the Aramaic language widely used by Jewish people in Second Temple times. Little is known about the early history of the Targums (e.g., whether they were at first only

oral and later reduced to writing), but some have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls – a fact demonstrating that written forms of the Targums existed in pre-Christian times. There are several different Targums for the books of the law (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Targum Neophyti, the Fragment Targum, and Targum Onqelos), one for the Prophets (Targum Jonathan), and later translations of most of the Writings (except the ones with Aramaic sections in them [Ezra, Daniel]). While written Targums are attested at an early time, the Targums listed here are later in date. The Targums are valuable textually in that they were made from Hebrew texts, but they are also important for the history of interpreting the text because at times they expand on or otherwise alter their models in exegetical ways.

- B. *Modern discoveries.* The twentieth century was a time of great archaeological discoveries that have significantly augmented the quantity and quality of the material available for study of the scriptural text and the history of transmitting it.
1. *The Dead Sea (Qumran) Scrolls.* Among the approximately 900 manuscripts identified by editors of the scrolls, approximately 230 qualify as copies of one or more scriptural books. The historical period in which the scrolls were transcribed begins in the third century BCE and continues to the first century CE, with most of them having been copied in the first century BCE or the first century CE. That is, they come from a time many centuries before the earliest manuscript copy of the MT and even of the LXX. It is likely that the Qumran copies reflect the situation with respect to the text of scriptural books not only at the small site of Qumran but also throughout the land of Israel because some of the scrolls – certainly the earliest ones – were brought to Qumran from elsewhere.
 - a. *Numbers of copies.* Only one of the many scrolls can be called complete: 1QIsa^a contains the entire book of Isaiah. All the others are fragmentary to one degree or another. Apart from one, every book in the Hebrew Bible is represented by at least one fragment among the Dead Sea Scrolls; the missing one is the book of Esther. Almost all the copies are inscribed in various styles of the square (or Assyrian) script, but twelve manuscripts were copied in paleo-Hebrew and at least five in Greek. The following list gives the numbers of identified Hebrew copies for each book of the Bible. The numbers in the list may not be exact because there are at times problems in determining whether a fragment belongs to a particular manuscript,

but they should be close to accurate. The totals represented as “19–20” or “8–9” copies for a book indicate uncertainty about whether some fragments come from one or two copies; the numbers in parentheses express the actual number of scrolls involved in cases where more than one book was copied on a single scroll (they are counted once for each book; thus the larger totals for some books).

| | | | |
|-------------|---------|----------------|-----|
| Genesis | 19–20 | Minor Prophets | 8–9 |
| Exodus | 17 (15) | Psalms | 36 |
| Leviticus | 13 (12) | Job | 4 |
| Numbers | 7 (5) | Proverbs | 2 |
| Deuteronomy | 30 | Ruth | 4 |
| Joshua | 2 | Song | 4 |
| Judges | 3 | Ecclesiastes | 2 |
| 1–2 Samuel | 4 | Lamentations | 4 |
| 1–2 Kings | 3 | Daniel | 8 |
| Isaiah | 21 | Ezra | 1 |
| Jeremiah | 6 | 1–2 Chronicles | 1 |
| Ezekiel | 6 | Nehemiah | 1 |

The total for these figures, using the larger numbers in the uncertain cases, is 207; using the smaller numbers in those instances, it is 200.

- b. *Other manuscripts.* The numbers are impressive, yet the ones listed are not the only witnesses to the scriptural texts found in the Qumran caves. As mentioned earlier, there are at least five copies of Greek translations: one for Exodus, two for Leviticus, one for Numbers, and one for Deuteronomy. Other small fragments may come from still more copies, though not enough text has survived to identify them. In addition, there are three manuscripts that have been identified as Targums – Aramaic translations of Hebrew Scriptures: one of Leviticus and two of Job, one of them extensively preserved.

Besides these scriptural copies, there are other kinds of works that are also valuable for a study of the text and its history. The caves at Qumran have yielded a series of commentaries on prophetic works. The writers of these works, called *Pesharim*, cite a passage from a scriptural book (occasionally books) and then explain its meaning. Having completed the

commentary on that passage, they then move on to the next or another one found farther along in the book. These citations, and the many biblical citations in other scrolls (e.g., the Damascus Document), considerably augment the fund of information about the scriptural text in the Dead Sea Scrolls. There are also *tefillin* (phylacteries) and *mezuzot*, that is, collections of scriptural texts placed in a small container and attached to one's arm (and head; see, for example, Exod 13:9) or doorway (Deut 6:9). Since it is not always possible to distinguish the two types if only fragments are extant, the numbers may not be exact. But twenty-eight *tefillin* were found at Qumran (twenty-one in cave 4) and three at other sites; there are nine *mezuzot* from Qumran and one from Murabba'at.

2. *Texts from other Judean desert sites.* Several additional sites in the Judean desert have yielded copies of scriptural books. Not nearly as many were found in them as at Qumran, but their contributions are noteworthy nevertheless.

Masada (7). The finds at this famous site are securely dated in that they cannot be later than 73 CE, the date when the fortress was taken by the Romans.

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Genesis | 1 |
| Leviticus | 2 |
| Deuteronomy | 1 |
| Ezekiel | 1 |
| Psalms | 2 |

Murabba'at (7 [6])

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Genesis | 2 |
| Exodus | 1 (on the same manuscript as one of the Genesis copies) |
| Numbers | 1 |
| Deuteronomy | 1 |
| Isaiah | 1 |
| Minor Prophets | 1 (a relatively well-preserved scroll) |

Nahal Hever (3)

| | |
|----------------|----------------------------------|
| Numbers | 1 |
| Minor Prophets | 1 (Greek, extensively preserved) |
| Psalms | 1 |

Nahal Hever/Se'elim (2)

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Numbers | 1 |
| Deuteronomy | 1 |

| | |
|-----------|-----|
| Se'elim | (1) |
| Numbers | I |
| Sdeir (1) | |
| Genesis | I |

There are also copies of Joshua (1) and Judges (1) from an unknown location.

3. *Nature of the texts.* The texts, despite the limits caused by their fragmentary state of preservation, have made significant contributions to knowledge about the scriptural texts and their history.
 - a. *General comments.* The sum total of the scriptural manuscript evidence from Qumran permits some broad generalizations. First, they furnish the oldest original-language evidence for the many passages they represent, centuries older than any other evidence apart from some Greek papyri. The scrolls and scroll fragments from Qumran were copied in the period between the third century BCE and the first century CE. They are therefore several hundreds of years older than the most ancient Greek codices (fourth century CE), and they are, in many cases, a full millennium older than the first copies of the MT. In an age when all texts had to be hand copied, the earlier the evidence, the less opportunity there was for scribal lapses and other common copying errors to occur. There is no guarantee that older is better, but the ancient copies offer unique comparative evidence, allowing one to test whether the more recent (e.g., the MT) and the older copies are the same, almost the same, or quite different in their readings.

Second, it is worth emphasizing that the copies from the Judean wilderness provide evidence that scriptural texts were transcribed with care and precision by Jewish copyists. The differences between the Judean desert texts and, say, the MT are frequently slight, often ones that do not affect the meaning of the text (e.g., spelling changes, omission or addition of a conjunction, etc.). Statements in the Rabbinic literature describe the meticulous procedures used in copying scriptural texts; great care also was taken at an earlier time, as the Judean desert texts reveal. This should not, however, be taken to mean that the scribes were copying only one form of text; it does mean that whatever scriptural manuscript they were copying, they did the work with care.

- b. *The textual picture.* The Qumran texts permit one to see that at the time (third century BCE–first century CE), there was a degree of fluidity in the wording of scriptural texts; there was not one completely uniform, accepted wording of a scriptural book such as Genesis, Isaiah, and so on. This is not to say that there was free variation in the wording of texts. Rather, within certain limits (in most cases), there were noticeable differences from manuscript to manuscript. Some examples will illustrate differing measures of variation (not including spelling practices).

Minor variation. Many differences in readings between manuscripts are the result of scribal lapses and addition/omission of small items such as the word *and* (one small letter in Hebrew). Examples of such largely insignificant variant readings include

| | | |
|---------|--------------------|------------------|
| Isa 6:3 | MT: | Holy, holy, holy |
| | 1QIsa ^a | Holy, holy |

For whatever reason, the Qumran copy has only two instances of *holy*. The omission from the familiar formula (if it was in fact omitted) is supported by no other ancient copy of Isaiah.

| | | |
|---------------------|-------|---|
| Gen 1:9 | MT/SP | Let the waters be gathered into one place (= <i>mqwm</i>) |
| 4QGen ^{h1} | LXX | Let the waters be gathered into one gathering (= <i>mqwh</i>) |

In this instance, two Hebrew words looking almost alike were confused.

Though it involves a larger stretch of text, the following example actually shows evidence of a simple scribal error that led to the omission of an entire paragraph:

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|----|---|
| 1 Sam 10:27–11:1 | MT | They despised him [Saul] and brought him no present. But he held his peace. Nahash the Ammonite went up . . . |
| 4QSam ^a (IX frg. a 5–9) | | They despised him and brought him no present. <i><blank></i> Now Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had been grievously oppressing the Gadites and the Reubenites. He would gouge out the right eye of each of them and would not grant Israel a deliverer. No one was |

left of the Israelites across the Jordan whose right eye Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had not gouged out. But there were seven thousand men who had escaped from the Ammonites and had entered Jabesh-gilead.

About a month later, Nahash the Ammonite went up ...

The Hebrew expressions for “But he held his peace” (10:27 MT [wyhy kmḥryš]) and “About a month later” (11:1 in 4QSam^a LXX [wyhy kmw ḥdš]) are nearly identical. Their resemblance caused a scribe to omit the intervening material; the defective text is found in MT and all versions other than the Qumran copy and the first century CE historian Josephus’s paraphrase of this section (*Antiquities of the Jews* 6.68–71). The Samuel manuscript itself is defective in omitting the first of the two look-alike phrases, but it reveals part of the mechanism that caused the omission.

Psalm 145 MT [One verse is missing from this acrostic psalm: although each verse begins with a word starting with the successive letters of the alphabet, there is none for the letter *nun*, which should have appeared between vv. 13 and 14 and obviously was dropped from the text by scribal error.]

11QPs^a LXX Faithful is the Lord in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.

The Hebrew word for *faithful* begins with *nun* and thus supplies the missing verse.

Larger variation. More important for historical purposes are textual variations that belong to a pattern. It is possible that in the Qumran period, scribes, while copying precisely, still felt some freedom to take a more active role with regard to a scriptural text than simply transcribing it. One well-documented pattern in a series of scrolls is to blend or combine wording from parallel passages. For example, the Ten Commandments are preserved in two places – Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. In the latter, the reason for the Sabbath commandment is different from in the former:

Deut 5:15 MT Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you

out from there with a mighty hand and an
 outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your
 God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

Near the end of the passage, one of the Qumran copies (4QDeut^a) has an addition: "... to keep the Sabbath day and to hallow it. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them and rested the seventh day; so the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (IV 4–7).

The addition is taken from Exod 20:11, part of the parallel version, where the motivation for the Sabbath rest is to imitate the pattern that God established in the first week. Combining material from parallel passages is a characteristic not only of some scriptural copies from Qumran but also of the SP, although in Deut 5:15, the SP does not add the material from Exod 20:11.

Broader variations. There are a few cases where sizable and systematic variations separate the witnesses, including those from Qumran. Some examples include entire books.

Jeremiah: The versions of the book of Jeremiah found in the MT and the LXX are of much different lengths. The MT Jeremiah is estimated to be some 13 percent longer than the LXX text. Among the fragmentary Hebrew copies of Jeremiah found at Qumran, two are similar to the longer readings of the MT and two align closely with the shorter readings of the LXX. The shorter version is generally regarded as textually superior; evidence from Hebrew manuscripts shows that the LXX translator(s) did not arbitrarily subtract text from their Hebrew model but rather rendered a Hebrew text that was much shorter than the traditional one, resulting in MT Jeremiah.

In general, one may say that manuscripts belonging to the textual traditions of the MT, the LXX, and the SP are found at Qumran, but these copies do not exhaust the data. Some copies do not fall into any of these categories and chart a different course textually. All these textual options were available at the time, and indeed, all of them are found at the one site of Qumran. There is no evidence that anyone was concerned about a certain fluidity in the texts of scriptural books.

- c. *An end to fluidity.* Each of the texts found at the other sites, all of them a little later than the Qumran evidence, may fall into the pre-Masoretic category (though the books preserved at Masada are ones for which there were no variant literary

editions) and suggest that by the end of the first or beginning of the second century CE the textual plurality apparent in the Qumran scrolls had given way to a far greater uniformity. There may well have been social and political reasons for this development in that the people who happened to use and copy this type of text became the central or nearly the only element in society engaged in such activity after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE.

II. TITLES

To this point, the survey has dealt with the books of the Hebrew Bible in general and the surviving early evidence for the texts. The concern in this section is groupings of books or how ancient writers referred to groups of them or even to all of them at once. In Second Temple times, the books would have been written on individual scrolls; only in a few cases would more than one book be copied onto a single scroll. Nevertheless, groups of scroll texts were identified and are referred to in the sources.

Traditionally, the Jewish canon of Scripture is divided into three sections: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Law designates Genesis through Deuteronomy – five books; the Prophets contains Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings (= Former Prophets), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve (= Latter Prophets – eight); and the Writings include Psalms, Proverbs, Job, the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles (though not necessarily in that order – eleven). Terms similar to those for the three divisions are present in ancient sources, but their precise meaning in them – how many and which books they intend – is often not entirely transparent.

A. *The Law and the Prophets.* The Hebrew Bible at times uses the word *law* in cases where it may refer to large parts of the Law, that is, the first five books of the Bible, but it is difficult to determine the precise meaning. For example, “Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10). Clearly *law* in this passage encompasses various sorts of legal material, but whether it means, say, Leviticus, parts of Leviticus, Leviticus and more, or something else, one cannot tell. Or Psalm 1:2 says of the righteous that “their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night.” Here as well the reference is too general to determine the identity of the law envisioned.

There are also passages that refer in a comprehensive way to the prophets, commonly in the phrase “all his servants the prophets” (see 2 Kings 17:13, 23; Jer 7:25; and many others). In these cases, however, the meaning is clearly the prophets themselves and not anything they might have written.

Of more importance in this context is the fairly widespread use of the phrase “the law and the prophets” in summarizing contexts. Juxtaposition of the two terms entails that written material is under consideration for both and that *prophets* does not mean the people who uttered prophecies. In some cases, the name *Moses* replaces *law*, but the meaning appears to be the same. The Rule of the Community, a text that describes the duties of members of the group responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls, stipulates that they are “to do what is good and right before him, as he commanded through Moses and all his servants the prophets” (1QS 1.2–3; see also 8.15–16 and CD 7.15–18). Judas the Maccabee encouraged his troops “from the law and the prophets” before a battle (2 Macc 15:9), and Jesus told his audience: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill” (Matt 5:17; see Luke 16:16). Paul said that he worshiped “the God of our ancestors, believing everything laid down according to the law or written in the prophets” (Acts 24:14), and when appealing to Jews in Rome, he tried “to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets” (Acts 28:23). *Law and Prophets* was the common designation for the Scriptures until early Christian times.

- B. *Three entities*. In a few passages, the twofold “law and prophets” is expanded to include additional literature. An especially instructive set of examples occurs in the Prologue to the Greek translation of the Wisdom of Ben Sira, a prologue written by the author’s grandson, who also happened to be the translator. Three times the grandson makes reference to the ancestral literature of his people in which wisdom and instruction are to be found: “Many great teachings have been given to us through the Law and the Prophets and the others that followed them.” In the very next sentence he mentions “those who read the scriptures,” apparently alluding comprehensively to the same writings. Continuing the idea of reading the Scriptures, he reports: “So my grandfather Jesus, who had devoted himself especially to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other books of our ancestors.” Later, dealing with the difficulties involved in

translating Hebrew, he notes about his grandfather's book: "Not only this book, but even the Law itself, the Prophecies, and the rest of the books differ not a little when read in the original."

A passage in the New Testament that is similarly meant as a comprehensive expression appears in Luke 24:44, part of Jesus's words to his disciples when he appeared to them after the resurrection: "Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.'" Again, it is helpful to notice that in the next verse the evangelist writes: "Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures." (24:45). *The Scriptures* thus consist of the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms. The third category is debated: it may mean just the Psalms, or it could mean the books of Scripture not included in the law of Moses and the prophets because Psalms is often listed as the first book of the Writings in copies of the MT.

C. *The Scriptures*. As the examples from the Prologue to Ben Sira and Luke demonstrate, the three categories of books listed could be termed comprehensively *the scriptures*. The term is met in Greek sources, but as nearly as one can tell, there is no corresponding word in Hebrew or Aramaic texts from the time of the Second Temple. 1 Maccabees, a work composed in Hebrew, but of which only a Greek translation is available, does mention "the holy books" in 12:9, but nothing in the context clarifies which ones are meant – only that they provide encouragement.

Both the plural *the scriptures* and the singular *the scripture* are attested; the problem often is that the writers who employ these terms do not list the books they encompass. Although both Philo and Josephus use "the scriptures" and "scripture," the New Testament is a richer repository of such references as its writers attempt to show that the Scriptures found fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth. In Luke 24, cited earlier, the author describes what Jesus did for the travelers to Emmaus: "Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (24:27; cf. v. 32).

III. TRANSLATIONS

Translators of the Hebrew Bible into modern languages are faced with a truly daunting task. Theoretically, they should take the full range of

the textual evidence cited earlier into account in establishing the text to be rendered, but in practice the ideal may rarely be achieved – for quite understandable reasons. There have been many translations of the Bible into English in the last decades, and they often include in a preface a short explanation of the textual principles that guided the translators. By reading them, one can see that the textual base tends to be quite narrow, usually with few exceptions allowed.

- A. *The Jewish Publication Society (JPS) Translation.* The JPS issued an English translation of the Bible in 1917, but a largely new one was later published in three stages: the Torah (1962), the Prophets (1978), and the Writings (1982). The three parts with revisions were brought together into one volume in 1985. It is certainly understandable that in a Jewish translation the basic principle would be “to follow faithfully the traditional Hebrew text” (*JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*, xxiii) – that is, the MT, although the Preface to the 1985 edition notes five circumstances in which at least a footnote to the translation was felt to be necessary: (1) where the translators did not understand a word or expression; (2) where a different rendering of the MT was possible; (3) where an old rendering was so well known that it would probably be missed: the traditional translation was placed in a note introduced by the word *Others* (generally meaning it was in the 1917 translation); (4) where the understanding of a passage could be enhanced by another elsewhere in the Bible; and (5) where important variants are found in ancient manuscripts or versions of the Bible (xxiii–xxiv). The Introduction mentions special problems encountered in the many difficult passages in the Prophets. Where a reading in an ancient version or a proposed emendation clarifies the text, it is mentioned in a footnote (xxv). In the Writings, uncertain passages are indicated in the notes, but no emendations are offered (xxvi).

In the Preface to the 1999 Hebrew-English edition, the writers focus more on the Leningrad Codex because it is the Hebrew text printed in this edition. They use the Michigan-Claremont-Westminster electronic form of it – an extraordinarily accurate copy. Since the translation of 1985, with some revisions, is the text printed facing the Hebrew, the translation principles remain the same for this edition. The ancient versions play a decidedly modest role in the JPS translation.

- B. *The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).* The widely used NRSV (1989) is the latest embodiment of the translative tradition

that goes back, via the Revised Standard Version (1952) and the American Standard Version (1901 [related to the British Revised Version of 1881–5]), to the King James Version and beyond. Bruce Metzger, chair of the NRSV Committee, sketched the principles at work in the translation in a preface called “To the reader.”

For the Old Testament, the NRSV Committee has made use of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. This is an edition of the Hebrew and Aramaic text as current early in the Christian era and fixed by Jewish scholars (the Masoretes) of the sixth to ninth centuries. The vowel signs, which were added by the Masoretes, are accepted in the main, but where a more probable and convincing reading can be obtained by assuming different vowels, a change has been made. No notes are given in such cases because the vowel points are less ancient and reliable than the consonants. When an alternative reading given by the Masoretes is translated in a footnote, this is identified by the words “Another reading is.”

Departures from the consonantal text of the best manuscripts have been made only where it seems clear that errors in copying occurred before the text was standardized. Most of the corrections adopted are based on the ancient versions (translations into Greek, Aramaic, Syriac, and Latin), which were made prior to the time of the work of the Masoretes and which therefore may reflect earlier forms of the Hebrew text. In such instances, a footnote specifies the version or versions from which the correction has been derived and also gives a translation of the Masoretic Text (*The Harper Collins Study Bible*, xxvi).

Metzger explains later that in cases in which no version seemed to provide a satisfactory solution for a problematic text, conjectures were allowed, and these are indicated in footnotes with the letters “Cn” (= correction). To such notes, a translation of the MT is added (xxvii).

The NRSV, then, allows for more use of the versions in correcting the MT, but the MT remains the base text, and the version of the MT used is the Leningrad Codex (the basis for *BHS*), as in the JPS.

- C. *The New American Bible*. As the title page announces, this Catholic translation, unlike earlier Catholic versions, was based on the original-language texts of the Bible, that is, not on the Vulgate. It appears from the Preface that the translators used the received text. A separate booklet containing textual notes was published for those who can control the original languages of the Bible. It explains cases in which the editors thought that a different reading than the

traditional one was indicated by the early evidence. The Qumran manuscripts were consulted and used for correction.

- D. *The New International Version (NIV)*. Perhaps the most popular of the modern English translations, the NIV also bases its Old Testament section on the latest editions of the *Biblia Hebraica*, that is, the Leningrad Codex. The NIV identifies in footnotes any deviation from the consonantal text of the MT. Naturally, the translators consulted the ancient editions, including the Dead Sea Scrolls material. "Readings from these versions are occasionally followed where the Masoretic Text seemed doubtful and where accepted principles of textual criticism showed that one or more of these textual witnesses appeared to provide the correct reading. Such instances are footnoted" (Preface).
- E. *The Revised English Bible (REB)*. In the Preface to the predecessor to the REB, the New English Bible, the MT comes in for some heavy criticism and loses its place of priority: "The earliest surviving form of the Hebrew text is perhaps that found in the Samaritan Pentateuch." The MT, however, "is full of errors of every kind due to defective archetypes and successive copyists' errors, confusion of letters, omissions and insertions, displacements of words and even whole sentences or paragraphs; and copyists' unhappy attempts to rectify mistakes have only increased the confusion." As a result, the translators had plenty of opportunities to use the versions and conjectural emendation. But the Preface to the REB sounds far more pro-MT: it recognizes that the versions must be used ("in particular places their evidence may preserve the correct reading" [xvi]), but none of them is superior to the MT, which remained largely unaltered after the second century CE.

These examples show that translators, whether Jewish or Christian, follow generally the same rules – ones that are also at work in other translations such as *The New Jerusalem Bible*. The MT (as found in the Leningrad Codex) is the text, and departures from it occur only when there are problems in its readings. Judgments about what constitutes problems will vary, but the ancient versions serve as handmaidens to the MT, not as full witnesses to the text. It is a practical procedure if not always the best one, but what should one do when a case such as Jeremiah arises? There are two quite different forms of the book, and both are attested in Hebrew copies; many experts agree that the shorter form, found in the LXX and supported in part by two manuscripts from Qumran, is the more original form of the text. Obviously, the shorter

form should appear in translations of Jeremiah, but it never does. Should both be presented to the reader? The weight of tradition exercises its force in decisions about the text to be translated, and at times, it clearly prevails over the evidence.

For practical purposes, it makes sense to select an existing text and to use that as the basis for translation, unless a reading is obviously wrong and a better one is available in another source or in a conjecture. Another procedure that is theoretically preferable would be to consult the full evidence, using recognized principles of textual criticism, and to establish an eclectic text – hypothetically, the “original” text – from that fund of readings. The workload would be enormous, but if divided among enough translators, it could be done. A disadvantage of this approach is that there would be disagreements about the best text in numerous instances and that any eclectic text is in a sense artificial, one that may never have existed.

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