THE MASORETIC TEXT AND THE SCROLLS OF THE JUDAEAN DESERT

A Comprehensive Survey and Catalogue of Textual Variants

between the Masoretic Text and the Biblical Manuscripts of Qumran, Masada,

Wadi Murabbaʿat, Naḥal Ḥever, Wadi Sdeir, Naḥal Ṣeʾelim, and ʿEn-Gedi

A Scholarly Reference Work in the Text-Critical Tradition of

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Preface and Statement of Scope

This volume responds to a deceptively simple request: *list every variant between the Masoretic Text and every correlating scroll or remnant found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Masada, and other archaeological finds.* Honesty about scale must precede the work itself. A literal, exhaustive enumeration of every reading in which a Judaean Desert manuscript diverges from the medieval Masoretic Text (MT) is not the task of a single document; it is the standing achievement of two monumental scholarly enterprises that this survey continually points to and depends upon.

The first is the official editio princeps series, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* (DJD), published by Oxford University Press / Clarendon between 1955 and 2009 in forty volumes. The second is Eugene Ulrich's *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls: Transcriptions and Textual Variants* (Brill, 2010; Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 134), which presents in three volumes every identifiable Hebrew biblical fragment from the eleven Qumran caves, arranged in canonical order, each transcription accompanied by its apparatus of variants against MT. Ulrich's set is, in the most precise sense, the catalogue of “every variant” for the Qumran corpus; a companion English rendering exists in Abegg, Flint, and Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (HarperCollins, 1999).

The Great Isaiah Scroll alone (1QIsa^{a}) differs from the Masoretic codices in more than 2,600 places; multiply that across some 210 biblical manuscripts from Qumran plus the finds at Masada, Murabbaʿat, Naḥal Ḥever, Wadi Sdeir, Naḥal Ṣeʾelim, and ʿEn-Gedi, and the total runs to the order of tens of thousands of readings, the overwhelming majority of them orthographic (spelling) or morphological in nature. To reprint that apparatus here would be to reprint DJD and Ulrich.

What this work therefore provides is the thing that is genuinely useful and genuinely achievable: a **comprehensive, structured survey and a representative critical catalogue**. It supplies (1) a complete manuscript inventory of the biblical scrolls site by site; (2) the governing theories and the standard taxonomy by which variants are classified; (3) a book-by-book account of every biblical book attested in the desert, naming the principal manuscripts, their textual affiliation, and their significant variants; (4) full treatment of the major literary and editorial variants — the cases that actually matter for exegesis and for the history of the text; and (5) consolidated comparison tables aligning MT with the scrolls, the Septuagint (LXX), and the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP). Throughout, the reader is directed to the precise DJD volume or Ulrich page where the exhaustive apparatus may be consulted.

Biblical citations follow modern critical translations (LSB / NIV) for the English; the Hebrew is cited from the Leningrad Codex tradition (BHS / BHQ), the Greek from the Göttingen Septuagint and Rahlfs–Hanhart, and the New Testament comparanda, where relevant, from NA28 / UBS5. Hebrew and Greek are set in Times New Roman with proper directionality. Sources are named in full with links in the bibliography.

Sigla, Abbreviations, and Conventions

Textual witnesses

Siglum	Witness
MT	Masoretic Text (consonantal proto-MT; vocalized medieval form in the Leningrad Codex B19A, 1008 CE, and the Aleppo Codex, c. 925 CE)
LXX	Septuagint, the Old Greek translation and its Hebrew Vorlage
SP	Samaritan Pentateuch
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls (the Judaean Desert manuscripts collectively)
BHS / BHQ	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia / Biblia Hebraica Quinta
NA28 / UBS5	Nestle–Aland 28th ed. / United Bible Societies 5th ed. (NT critical text)
𝔊, 𝔐, 𝔖	Greek, Masoretic, Samaritan witnesses (in apparatus shorthand)
Vg / Pesh / Tg	Vulgate / Peshitta / Targum

Manuscript siglum system

Qumran manuscripts are cited by the standard convention: cave number + *Q* + book abbreviation + a superscript letter distinguishing copies. Thus 4QSam^{a} = the first copy of Samuel from Qumran Cave 4; 11QpaleoLev^{a} = the first paleo-Hebrew Leviticus scroll from Cave 11. Manuscripts also carry a numerical inventory tag (e.g., 4QSam^{a} = 4Q51). Non-Qumran sites use a site prefix: Mas (Masada), Mur (Wadi Murabbaʿat), Ḥev / 5/6Ḥev / 8Ḥev (Naḥal Ḥever), Sdeir (Wadi Sdeir), Ṣe / 34Ṣe (Naḥal Ṣeʾelim).

Variant type	Meaning
plus / minus	the scroll has more / fewer words than MT (a “plus” or “minus” relative to MT)
orthographic	spelling difference, chiefly the presence or absence of vowel-letters (matres lectionis)
morphological	form of a word (pronoun, suffix, verbal pattern) differs without change of sense
lexical / content	a different word or a difference that affects meaning
transposition	different word, clause, or verse order / sequence
harmonization	a reading conformed to a parallel passage elsewhere in Scripture
literary / editorial	a difference reflecting a distinct edition of the book (large pluses, different arrangement, alternate text-form)

Part I — Foundations: Corpus, Theory, and Method

1. The discovery and the shape of the corpus

Between 1947 and 1956 eleven caves in the cliffs around Khirbet Qumran, on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea, yielded the remains of roughly 900–1,000 manuscripts. Of these, the *biblical* scrolls — copies of books that would become the twenty-four-book Hebrew canon — number, on Tov's reckoning, about 210–212 manuscripts, alongside some 25 tefillin and 7 mezuzot bearing scriptural excerpts. Every book of the Hebrew Bible is represented except Esther (and, by most counts, Nehemiah, attested only via Ezra). The manuscripts range in date from the third century BCE to the mid-first century CE, placing the oldest of them roughly a millennium before the Leningrad Codex (1008 CE), previously the earliest complete Hebrew Bible.

Crucially for this study, the desert finds are not confined to Qumran. A second body of biblical manuscripts comes from sites associated not with the Qumran community but with the two Jewish revolts against Rome (66–74 CE and 132–135 CE): Masada, Wadi Murabbaʿat, Naḥal Ḥever, Wadi Sdeir, and Naḥal Ṣeʾelim, joined more recently by the carbonized *ʿEn-Gedi* Leviticus scroll virtually read in 2016. As we shall see, these "other" sites tell a strikingly different textual story from Qumran — one of near-uniform agreement with the proto-Masoretic Text. The contrast between Qumran's pluriformity and the uniformity of the revolt-era sites is among the most important results of twentieth-century textual scholarship.

Site	Approx. dates of MSS	Biblical books attested	Textual character
Qumran (Caves 1–11)	c. 250 BCE – 68 CE	All but Esther; Isaiah, Deuteronomy, Psalms most numerous	Pluriform: proto-MT, pre-SP, pre-LXX, and non-aligned side by side
Masada	c. 50 BCE – 73/74 CE	Genesis, Leviticus (×2), Deuteronomy, Ezekiel, Psalms (×2); also Ben Sira	Proto-MT throughout
Wadi Murabbaʿat	c. 100–135 CE	Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Minor Prophets (MurXII)	Proto-MT / virtually MT
Naḥal Ḥever	c. 50 BCE – 135 CE	Numbers, Deuteronomy, Psalms (5/6ḤevPs), Minor Prophets in Greek (8ḤevXIIgr)	Proto-MT (Hebrew); kaige revision toward MT (Greek)
Wadi Sdeir	c. 1st c. CE	Genesis (SdeirGen)	Proto-MT
Naḥal Ṣeʾelim	c. 1st–2nd c. CE	Numbers, Deuteronomy, Minor Prophets fragments	Proto-MT
ʿEn-Gedi	1st–2nd c. CE	Leviticus 1–2 (carbonized; read 2016)	Identical to consonantal MT

Table I.1 — The seven manuscript-bearing sites of the Judaean Desert and their textual profiles. After Tov, Textual Criticism (3rd ed.), and Lange, Handbuch der Textfunde.

2. The Masoretic Text and the meaning of "proto-MT"

The Masoretic Text proper is a medieval product: a fully vocalized, accented, and annotated form of the Hebrew Bible fixed by the Masoretes (chiefly the Ben Asher family of Tiberias) between roughly the 7th and 10th centuries CE, surviving in the Aleppo Codex (c. 925 CE) and the Leningrad Codex (1008 CE). But the *consonantal* skeleton of that text is far older. Manuscripts such as MasLev[b], MurXII, and the ʿEn-Gedi Leviticus scroll show that a consonantal text essentially identical to the medieval MT was already in circulation, and indeed dominant outside Qumran, by the turn of the era. Scholars therefore distinguish the medieval **MT** from its ancient ancestor, the **proto-MT** (also "proto-rabbinic") text; because the two are virtually identical at the consonantal level, the terms are often used interchangeably. The variants catalogued in this volume are, strictly, variants between the scrolls and this proto-MT consonantal tradition as preserved in the Leningrad Codex.

3. Three theories of the text

Three explanatory frameworks, developed over six decades, govern how scholars read the variants. They are not merely academic; each predicts a different relationship between the scrolls and MT.

3.1 The local-texts theory (Frank Moore Cross)

Cross, building on W. F. Albright, proposed that the textual families correspond to *geographical recensions*: a Babylonian text-type underlying MT, a Palestinian type underlying SP and the Chronicler, and an Egyptian type underlying the LXX. On this model the scrolls preserve these local texts in their pre-standardization state, and agreements of a scroll with LXX or SP signal its recensional ancestry. The theory is elegant but has been criticized for assuming tidy geographical isolation that the evidence of a single library at Qumran — containing all the types at once — does not support.

3.2 Textual plurality and the "Qumran scribal practice" (Emanuel Tov)

Tov reframed the picture as one of *textual plurality* rather than three discrete recensions. In this model the period before 70 CE was characterized by a multiplicity of textual forms circulating simultaneously without any one being canonical. Tov further isolated a distinctive **Qumran scribal practice** (QSP): a cluster of manuscripts marked by full (plene) orthography, expanded morphology, frequent corrections, and a free approach to the text, evidently copied within the community itself (1QIsa[a] is the showpiece). On Tov's accounting the manuscripts distribute, very roughly, into the proportions tabulated below — figures he himself stresses are approximate and disputed.

Text-type category	Tov (approx.)	Schiffman (approx.)	Notes
Proto-Masoretic	~35–48%	60%	Close, distinctive agreements with MT
Qumran scribal practice (MT-based)	~20–25%	20%	Plene, expanded; copied at Qumran; mostly proto-MT base
Pre-Samaritan	~5–11%	5%	SP-type harmonizing expansions, minus the sectarian Gerizim layer

Text-type category	Tov (approx.)	Schiffman (approx.)	Notes
Pre-Septuagint (Hebrew Vorlage of LXX)	~5%	5%	4QJer^{b,d}, 4QSam^{a}, 4QDeut^{q}
Non-aligned	~10–15%	10%	Agree with none consistently; independent readings

Table I.2 — Distribution of Qumran biblical manuscripts by textual character. The percentages are disputed and definitional (much depends on whether QSP texts are folded into proto-MT). Sources: Tov, Textual Criticism (3rd ed.), 107–10; L. Schiffman, Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls; VanderKam in McDonald–Sanders, The Canon Debate, ch. 6.

The single most important takeaway from these figures, however the categories are drawn, is that **a clear majority of the Qumran biblical scrolls are already close to the Masoretic Text**. The scrolls did not overturn the MT; they vindicated the antiquity and fidelity of its consonantal base while simultaneously revealing that, before 70 CE, it was one form among several.

3.3 Variant literary editions (Eugene Ulrich)

Ulrich's contribution shifts attention from spelling to *literary growth*. He argues that many of the deepest divergences — the short and long editions of Jeremiah, the expansionist editions of Exodus and Numbers, the divergent Psalter of 11QPs^{a} — are not random scribal variation but evidence that the biblical books circulated in **multiple successive literary editions**. On this view the text of a book was still developing in the late Second Temple period, and the scrolls catch that development in mid-stream. MT, LXX, and SP each preserve a snapshot of a different stage or stream. This “developmental composition” model frames the major variants treated in Part V.

4. The standard taxonomy of variants

Every variant catalogued below falls into one of the following classes, ordered from the most trivial to the most consequential. The proportions are heavily weighted toward the first two classes.

1. **Orthographic variants** — by far the largest class. Chiefly the optional vowel-letters (ו waw, י yod, ה he) that mark long vowels. The QSP scrolls spell “full” (plene) where MT spells “defective.” No effect on meaning.
2. **Linguistic / morphological variants** — independent pronouns, pronominal suffixes, verb patterns, and “modernized” forms (e.g., the QSP long pronouns הוּא / הִיא). Sense unchanged.
3. **Single-word lexical / content variants** — a different word, often a synonym, occasionally affecting meaning. Here the scroll may side with LXX or SP against MT.
4. **Pluses and minuses** — additional or missing words, phrases, clauses, or whole verses. Often the product of scribal harmonization or of haplography (accidental omission) / dittography.
5. **Differences in sequence** — transposed words, verses, or larger blocks (e.g., the placement of the oracles against the nations in Jeremiah).

6. **Major literary / editorial variants** — the small but decisive set in which a scroll attests a substantially different edition of a book. These are the subject of Part V and carry nearly all the exegetical weight.

5. Method and primary sources of this survey

The catalogue that follows is built from the primary editions (DJD I–XL), Ulrich's *Biblical Qumran Scrolls*, the *Masada VI* final report (Talmon and Yadin), Tov's *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (3rd ed., 2012) and *Scribal Practices and Approaches* (2004), and the digital corpora of the Israel Antiquities Authority (Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library) and the Israel Museum. Where a reading is reported, the reader should consult those editions for the full apparatus, the photographic plates, and the reconstruction of lacunae, since many “variants” depend on the editor's restoration of damaged text and are accordingly weighted by degree of certainty.

Part II — The Biblical Books at Qumran: Manuscripts and Variants

This part proceeds canonically through every book attested at Qumran, naming the principal copies, their date and textual affiliation, and the character of their variation from MT. Significant individual readings are tabulated; the major editorial variants (Exodus, Numbers, Samuel, Jeremiah, the Psalter, Deuteronomy 32) are introduced here and treated at length in Part V. The persistent pattern to watch for: most scrolls hug MT, a minority lean toward LXX or SP, and a handful preserve genuinely independent text.

6. The Torah (Pentateuch)

6.1 Genesis

Some 20+ Genesis manuscripts survive (e.g., 1QGen, 2QGen, 4QGen$^{b–k}$, 4QpaleoGen-Exod^{l}, 6QpaleoGen, 8QGen). Genesis is textually the most stable book of the Torah: the Qumran copies are overwhelmingly proto-MT, with variation confined chiefly to orthography. 4QGen^{b} is virtually identical to MT. The chronological systems of Genesis 5 and 11 (the antediluvian and post-flood genealogies) differ among MT, SP, and LXX, but the Qumran fragments are too damaged at those points to adjudicate decisively. Notable is that no Qumran Genesis manuscript supports the LXX's extra dialogue at Genesis 4:8 (“let us go out to the field”).

6.2 Exodus

Exodus is far more interesting. Alongside MT-type copies stands 4QpaleoExod^{m} (4Q22), written in paleo-Hebrew script, the prime Qumran witness to the **pre-Samaritan** edition of Exodus. It exhibits the characteristic SP-type *harmonizing expansions*: in the plague narratives it repeats God's command as a fulfilment report (and vice versa), and it expands the Decalogue and surrounding material by importing parallel text from Deuteronomy — yet it lacks the sectarian Samaritan plus commanding an altar on Mount Gerizim. This is decisive: it shows the SP's expansionist base text existed in Jewish circles before the Samaritans added their distinctive theological layer. 4QExod^{b} (4Q13), by contrast, agrees with the LXX in several readings, including the count of Jacob's descendants in Exodus 1:5 (seventy-five, with LXX, against MT's seventy).

Reference	MT	Scroll	Aligns with
Exod 1:5	(שִׁבְעִים) seventy	seventy-five (4QExod^{b})	LXX (ογδοήκοντα πέντε)
Exod 7–11	command/report not duplicated	4QpaleoExod^{m} duplicates command ↔ fulfilment	SP (harmonizing edition)
Decalogue / Exod 20	shorter	4QpaleoExod^{m} expands from Deut	SP, not the Gerizim plus

Table II.1 — Representative Exodus variants. 4QpaleoExod^{m} is the Jewish base of the Samaritan edition, minus the sectarian layer.

6.3 Leviticus

Leviticus is represented by, among others, 1QpaleoLev, 2QpaleoLev, 4QLev$^{b–g}$, 4QLXXLev (a Greek copy), and the important 11QpaleoLev^{a} (11Q1), a substantial paleo-Hebrew scroll. The

Hebrew Leviticus manuscripts are predominantly proto-MT with minor, mostly orthographic variation; 11QpaleoLev[a] shows occasional agreements with both SP and LXX but no sustained alignment. 4QLXXLev[a] is significant for Septuagint studies, sometimes preserving an Old Greek reading older than the later Christian recensions (e.g., its rendering of the divine name).

6.4 Numbers

The key witness is 4QNum[b] (4Q27), a striking *mixed* text: it carries the pre-Samaritan harmonizing expansions (sharing SP-type pluses drawn from Deuteronomy, e.g., at Numbers 20–21 and the spies narrative) while simultaneously agreeing with the LXX in other readings, and occasionally going its own way. 4QNum[b] thus resists tidy classification and is a textbook illustration of Tov's textual plurality and of cross-pollination among the streams.

6.5 Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy is the most-copied Torah book at Qumran (some 30+ manuscripts: 4QDeut[a–q], 4QpaleoDeut[r–s], 5QDeut, 11QDeut, etc.), reflecting its liturgical and theological centrality. Most are proto-MT, but two readings in the Song of Moses (Deut 32) are among the most consequential variants in the entire corpus, both siding with LXX against MT:

Israel [illegible]

QDeut[j] reads “sons of God / of the gods” (בני אלהים), with the LXX (αγγέλων / υἱῶν θεοῦ). Treated in detail in Part V.

- **Deut 32:43** — 4QDeut[q] preserves a longer, differently structured ending to the Song that summons the heavens / “sons of God” to worship, aligning with the LXX and longer than MT. Hebrews 1:6 quotes a form of this longer reading.

4QDeut[n] (an excerpted, probably liturgical text of the Decalogue and Deut 8) and 4QpaleoDeut[r] are also frequently cited; the former mixes a Sabbath-commandment text closer to Exodus into Deuteronomy 5, an instance of cross-harmonization.

7. The Former Prophets (Joshua–Kings)

7.1 Joshua

4QJosh[a] (4Q47) famously places the building of an altar (MT Josh 8:30–35) at a different, earlier point in the narrative — immediately after the crossing of the Jordan (after Josh 4:18 / before ch. 5) — attesting a different sequence of episodes than either MT or LXX, each of which positions the altar passage differently. The scroll is thus a third witness to an unsettled narrative order, important for the literary history of Joshua. 4QJosh[b] is more MT-like.

7.2 Judges

4QJudg[a] (4Q49) lacks the passage MT Judges 6:7–10 (the unnamed prophet sent to Israel), an apparent *minus* relative to MT. Many scholars read this as preserving an earlier, shorter form of the text before that homiletical insertion, making 4QJudg[a] a potential witness to the literary growth of Judges. 4QJudg[b] is proto-MT.

7.3 Samuel — 4QSam[a], the great divergent witness

Three Samuel scrolls were found in Cave 4 (4QSam^{a} = 4Q51; 4QSam^{b} = 4Q52; 4QSam^{c} = 4Q53). 4QSam^{a} (50–25 BCE) is the most extensive, preserving fragments of 1 Samuel 1 through 2 Samuel 24, and it is the single most important non-MT Hebrew biblical manuscript from Qumran. The Masoretic text of Samuel is notoriously damaged — riddled with haplographies and corruptions — and 4QSam^{a} repeatedly agrees with the LXX (and with the text Josephus knew and with Chronicles) against MT, often preserving the superior, fuller reading.

Its most celebrated reading is the **Nahash paragraph**, a substantial plus at the head of 1 Samuel 11 describing the Ammonite king Nahash gouging out the right eyes of the Gileadites and the escape of seven thousand men to Jabesh — a passage absent from both MT and the main LXX but known to Josephus, and almost certainly lost from MT by scribal haplography. On its strength the passage now appears in the NRSV main text. (Full treatment in Part V.)

Reference	MT	4QSam^{a}	Aligns with
1 Sam 11:1 (before)	— (absent)	+ Nahash paragraph (≈ 2 verses)	Josephus; partly LXX
1 Sam 1:22–23	“establish his word”	“establish what proceeds from your mouth”; + Nazirite dedication	LXX
1 Sam 1:24	three bulls	a three-year-old bull	LXX
1 Sam 2:8–10	shorter	plus material in Hannah’s song	LXX / independent
2 Sam 24 / 1 Chr 21	divergent	agrees with Chronicles’ source against MT-Sam	Chronicles, LXX

Table II.2 — Selected 4QSam^{a} readings. The convergence of scroll + LXX + Josephus + Chronicles against MT-Samuel is the strongest case in the corpus for an alternative Hebrew edition superior to MT.

7.4 Kings

Kings is sparsely attested (4QKgs = 4Q54; 5QKgs; 6QpapKgs). The fragments are small and broadly proto-MT, though they cannot resolve the large-scale differences in arrangement and chronology between MT-Kings and the LXX (especially the Old Greek of 3 Reigns), which remain a major crux of the book's textual history independent of the scrolls.

8. The Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve)

8.1 Isaiah — 1QIsa^{a} and 1QIsa^{b}

Isaiah is represented by 21 copies, the most for any prophetic book, headed by the two Cave 1 scrolls. 1QIsa^{a} (the “Great Isaiah Scroll,” c. 125 BCE) is the largest and best-preserved biblical scroll, 7.34 m long, 54 columns, containing all 66 chapters. It diverges from MT in **more than 2,600 places** — but the overwhelming majority are orthographic and morphological (it is a flagship of the QSP plene spelling), and where it differs substantively it usually does so by smoothing, modernizing, or harmonizing rather than preserving a superior text. By contrast 1QIsa^{b} is strikingly close to MT, demonstrating that the proto-MT Isaiah and the QSP Isaiah coexisted in the same community.

Reference	MT	1QIsa[a]	Nature
Isa 1:15	“your hands are full of blood”	+ “your fingers with iniquity” (parallel plus)	Plus / parallelism filled
Isa 2:9b–10	present	omitted	Minus
Isa 6:3	“holy, holy, holy” (×3)	“holy, holy” (×2) in 1QIsa[a]	Minus / variant
Isa 21:8	(אריה) ”a lion“	(הראה) ”the seer“	Content (cf. 1QIsa[a])
Isa 53:11	“he shall see”	(אור +) ”he shall see light“	Plus; with LXX (φῶς)

Table II.3 — Selected Isaiah variants. The plus “light” at 53:11 (1QIsa[a] + 1QIsa[b] + LXX) is widely judged original and is now adopted by many modern translations.

8.2 Jeremiah — two editions, short and long

Jeremiah furnishes the clearest case of two distinct **literary editions** of a biblical book. The MT of Jeremiah is about one-sixth (roughly 3,000 words) longer than the LXX, and the two arrange the oracles against the nations differently (MT places them near the end, chs. 46–51; the LXX places them in the middle, after 25:13, in a different internal order). The Qumran fragments confirm that **both editions existed in Hebrew**: 4QJer[a] (4Q70) and 4QJer[c] (4Q72) reflect the long MT-type text, while 4QJer[b] (4Q71) and 4QJer[d] (4Q72a) reflect the short, differently arranged LXX-type text. This is the strongest single demonstration that the LXX's divergences can rest on a genuine Hebrew Vorlage rather than translator's license, and it is the cornerstone example for Ulrich's variant-editions model. (Part V.)

8.3 Ezekiel

Ezekiel is represented by 4QEzek[a–c], 11QEzek, and MasEzek (treated under Masada). The MT of Ezekiel, especially chapters 1 and 10, is one of the more corrupt in the Hebrew Bible, and the LXX is significantly shorter in places (e.g., ch. 7). The Qumran Ezekiel fragments are small and broadly proto-MT; they do not directly attest the major LXX minuses, so the question of an alternative Ezekiel edition rests largely on the Greek. MasEzek is solidly proto-MT.

8.4 The Twelve (Minor Prophets)

The Twelve are counted as one book. 4QXII[a–g] (4Q76–82) preserve fragments of most of the twelve prophets; 4QXII[g] (4Q82) is the most extensive. The Qumran copies are mixed but lean proto-MT, with scattered agreements with LXX. Two non-Qumran witnesses are pivotal: **MurXII** (from Wadi Murabbaʿat, c. 115 CE), a long, near-complete Minor Prophets scroll virtually identical to MT, and the Greek **8ḪevXIIgr** (Naḥal Ḥever), a copy of a Greek Minor Prophets that is not the Old Greek but a *kaige* recension already revising the Greek toward the proto-MT Hebrew — direct first-century evidence for the standardization of the proto-MT text. Both are treated in Part IV.

9. The Writings (Kethuvim)

9.1 Psalms — the most-attested book, and the most editorially contested

Some 36–40 Psalms manuscripts make the Psalter the best-attested biblical book at Qumran. Most are proto-MT in their wording, but the *arrangement* of the later Psalter is contested. The

great 11QPs[a] (11Q5) presents the psalms of Books IV–V in a markedly different order from MT and interleaves compositions absent from MT: Psalm 151 (also in LXX), Psalms 154 and 155 (known from Syriac), the “Apostrophe to Zion,” a “Plea for Deliverance,” a Hymn to the Creator, David's Last Words, and a prose catalogue (“David's Compositions”) crediting David with 3,600 psalms and 364 songs. Scholars divide between two readings of 11QPs[a]: James Sanders saw it as a genuine scriptural edition of the Psalter; Shemaryahu Talmon and M. Goshen-Gottstein saw it as a secondary liturgical compilation drawn from an already-fixed collection. The debate is unresolved and bears directly on when the Psalter was “closed.”

A discrete, famous textual (not merely arrangement) variant is the **nun verse of Psalm 145**. Psalm 145 is an alphabetic acrostic, yet MT skips the letter נ (nun), leaving a gap in the alphabet. 11QPs[a] preserves the missing nun line — “Faithful (נאמן) is God in his words, and gracious in all his deeds” — matching the verse independently attested by the LXX (πιστὸς) and the Syriac. Most modern translations now restore this verse with a footnote crediting the scrolls and versions.

Feature	MT Psalter	11QPs[a]	Other support
Ps 145 nun verse	absent (acrostic gap)	present (נאמן אלהים…)	LXX, Syriac
Psalm 151	absent	present	LXX
Psalms 154, 155	absent	present	Syriac Psalter
Order of Pss 101–150	MT sequence	divergent sequence + insertions	— (debated status)

Table II.4 — 11QPs[a] against MT. Whether these constitute a rival edition or a liturgical anthology is the Sanders–Talmon debate.

9.2 Job

Beyond Hebrew copies (2QJob, 4QJob[a–b]), Qumran preserves two Aramaic Targums of Job (4QtgJob, 11QtgJob), the latter substantial — the earliest extant Targum and important evidence that Job was translated into Aramaic early. The Hebrew fragments are broadly proto-MT; the LXX of Job is famously about one-sixth shorter than MT, but the Qumran Hebrew does not attest that shorter form.

9.3 Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations

The shorter Writings are thinly but tellingly attested: 4QProv[a–b]; 2QRuth[a–b], 4QRuth[a–b]; 4QCant[a–b] and 6QCant (the Canticles copies show some abridgement/variant arrangement); 4QQoh[a–b] (Ecclesiastes — 4QQoh[a] is among the oldest, c. 175–150 BCE, and largely proto-MT); and three copies of Lamentations (3QLam, 4QLam, 5QLam[a–b]), which show some notable variants in the acrostic structure of chapters. None overturns MT, but the Canticles and Lamentations copies hint at minor fluidity.

9.4 Daniel

Eight Daniel manuscripts (1QDan[a–b], 4QDan[a–e], 6QpapDan) confirm the MT/Theodotion-type Hebrew-Aramaic text, including the language switch from Hebrew to Aramaic at Daniel 2:4b exactly where MT switches. Importantly, the Qumran Daniel scrolls do *not* contain the so-called Additions to Daniel (the Prayer of Azariah, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon) found in the LXX/Theodotion, evidence that those were not part of the Hebrew-Aramaic Daniel circulating at

Qumran. 4QDan^{c} is among the oldest (late 2nd c. BCE), strikingly close in date to the book's composition.

9.5 Ezra–Nehemiah and Chronicles

These are barely attested: a single small Ezra fragment (4QEzra) and a single Chronicles fragment (4QChr). Both are proto-MT as far as their scraps allow. Their near-absence, together with the absence of Esther, is itself a datum about the late and uneven circulation of these books at Qumran. The relationship of Chronicles to its Samuel–Kings sources is illuminated more by 4QSam^{a} (which often agrees with the Chronicler's superior source text) than by the Chronicles fragment itself.

9.6 Esther — the one absent book

Esther is the only book of the Hebrew canon with no copy at Qumran. Whether this reflects chance, the book's late date, its lack of the divine name, or the community's calendar (Esther institutes Purim, a festival not in the Torah) is debated. Some Aramaic “proto-Esther” texts (4Q550) share motifs but are not the canonical book.

Part III — The Biblical Scrolls of Masada

Yigael Yadin's excavations of the Herodian fortress of Masada in the 1963/64 and 1964/65 seasons recovered fifteen manuscripts, fourteen on parchment in the Jewish square script and one papyrus in paleo-Hebrew. They were entrusted to Shemaryahu Talmon and published definitively in the final report *Masada VI* (Talmon and Yadin, 1999). Because Masada fell to the Romans in 73/74 CE, every manuscript there carries a firm *terminus ante quem*: none can be later than that date. Seven are biblical, and their textual character is uniform and decisive.

Manuscript	Passage(s)	Date (palaeo.)	Relation to MT
MasGen	Genesis 46:7–11	1st c. BCE	Proto-MT (a few minor variants; fragment too small for full analysis)
MasLev^{a}	Leviticus 4:3–9	1st c. BCE / CE	Orthography and readings agree with MT; one spelling variant
MasLev^{b}	Leviticus 8:31–11:40	30 BCE – 30 CE	Belongs to the MT tradition; section system identical to MT
MasDeut	Deuteronomy 33:17–34:6	Herodian	Agrees with MT
MasEzek	Ezekiel 35:11–38:14	1st c. BCE / CE	Generally agrees with MT
MasPs^{a}	Psalms 81:2–85:6	late 1st c. BCE	Nearly identical to MT; same Psalm order (81–85) as MT
MasPs^{b}	Psalm 150:1–6	1st c. CE	Proto-MT; ends the Psalter as MT does (no 11QPs^{a}-type additions)

Table III.1 — The seven biblical manuscripts from Masada. The dataset constitutes the clearest single witness to the dominance of the proto-MT text outside Qumran before 70 CE.

10. The significance of the Masada profile

The longer and more analyzable Masada scrolls — MasLev^{b}, MasEzek, and MasPs^{a} — agree with the medieval Masoretic tradition to an extraordinary degree, down to the intricacies of orthography. Tov highlights that MasLev^{b} shares with the Leningrad Codex special defective spellings such as תמימם (“unblemished,” defective) in Leviticus 9:2–3 and the defective hiphil ויקרבו in Leviticus 9:9. Even more telling: where every Qumran manuscript writes the anomalous “feminine” third-person pronoun as היא (hiʾ), MasLev^{b} alone writes הוא (huʾ) at Leviticus 10:17 and 11:6 — precisely the unusual orthography of the medieval MT (the Ketiv הוא for the feminine). The Masada scribe was copying, in effect, the very text the Masoretes would later vocalize.

The contrast with Qumran could not be sharper. At Qumran the proto-MT text is the plurality but lives among rival forms; at Masada — a fortress held by Jewish rebels with no Qumran connection — the biblical text is **already, uniformly, proto-MT**. This supports the conclusion that the proto-rabbinic / proto-Masoretic text was the established text of mainstream Judaism by the first century CE, well before the rabbinic standardization that followed the destruction of the Temple.

11. The Ben Sira scroll and related Masada texts

Though not part of the MT canon, the *Masada Ben Sira scroll* (MasSir, Ecclesiasticus 39–44) deserves mention: it confirmed the antiquity and substantial reliability of the medieval Hebrew Ben Sira recovered from the Cairo Geniza, vindicating the existence of a Hebrew original behind the Greek long known to the Church. The non-biblical Masada finds — MasapocrGen, MasapocrJosh, a copy of Jubilees (MasJub), and the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (MasShirShabb, sharing a composition also found at Qumran) — bear on the broader literary culture but not on the MT variant question.

Part IV — Wadi Murabbaʿat, Naḥal Ḥever, Wadi Sdeir, Naḥal Ṣeʾelim, and ʿEn-Gedi

The remaining sites cluster around the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–135 CE) and its aftermath, when refugees hid in the caves of the Judaean wilderness. Their biblical manuscripts, almost without exception, are proto-MT or virtually identical to MT. Together with Masada they document the final triumph of the proto-Masoretic text and the disappearance of the textual plurality visible at Qumran.

12. Wadi Murabbaʿat

Murabbaʿat yielded fragments of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Isaiah, and above all **MurXII** (Mur 88), a long scroll of the Minor Prophets in 21 columns dating to about 115 CE that preserves large parts of the Twelve and is *virtually identical to the Masoretic Text*, differing only in trivial orthographic details. MurXII is, in effect, a first-/second-century edition of the Masoretic Twelve.

13. Naḥal Ḥever

Two finds stand out. **5/6ḤevPs** (a Psalms scroll, 50–68 CE, twelve fragmentary columns) is proto-MT in text and arrangement. Far more important for the history of the Greek Bible is **8ḤevXIIgr**, the Greek Minor Prophets scroll. It is not a copy of the Old Greek but of a deliberate *recension* — the *kaige* recension (so named from its rendering of Hebrew גם by καί γε) — that systematically revises the Greek toward agreement with the proto-MT Hebrew. Discovered and analyzed by Dominique Barthélemy (*Les Devanciers d'Aquila*, 1963), it proves that by the first century CE the proto-MT Hebrew was authoritative enough to drive a wholesale correction of the Greek Scriptures — a watershed in understanding both the standardization of the Hebrew text and the prehistory of the later Jewish Greek versions (Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion).

14. Wadi Sdeir and Naḥal Ṣeʾelim

Wadi Sdeir produced **SdeirGen** (a Genesis scroll, Gen 35–36), proto-MT. Naḥal Ṣeʾelim (Wadi Seiyal) yielded small fragments of Numbers, Deuteronomy, and the Minor Prophets, again proto-MT. These are modest in size but uniform in character, reinforcing the pattern.

15. The ʿEn-Gedi Leviticus scroll

In 2016 a team led by Michael Segal and Pnina Shor, using micro-CT scanning and virtual-unwrapping software developed by W. Brent Seales, “virtually unrolled” a charred, unopenable scroll excavated decades earlier from the Holy Ark of the ancient synagogue at ʿEn-Gedi. It proved to contain the opening of Leviticus (chapters 1–2), dated palaeographically and by radiocarbon to roughly the first–second century CE. Its text agrees **entirely** with the consonantal medieval Masoretic Text — the first time an ancient Hebrew scroll was found to match the consonants of the Leningrad/Aleppo tradition with complete precision. As Segal et al. observed, the other proto-MT Judaean texts differ from the medieval consonantal text “in a few details but never more than the medieval [MT] manuscripts differ among themselves”; the ʿEn-Gedi scroll closes even that small

gap. It is the capstone of the case for the stability of the Masoretic consonantal text across two millennia.

Witness	Site	Book / passage	Agreement with consonantal MT
ʿEn-Gedi scroll	ʿEn-Gedi	Leviticus 1–2	Complete (identical consonantal text)
MurXII	Murabbaʿat	Minor Prophets	Virtually complete
MasLev^{b}	Masada	Leviticus 8–11	Near-complete, incl. special orthography
5/6ḤevPs	Naḥal Ḥever	Psalms	Proto-MT
1QIsa^{b}	Qumran	Isaiah	Very close (a Qumran proto-MT copy)

Table IV.1 — The proto-MT continuum from Qumran to ʿEn-Gedi. The trajectory runs from coexistence-amid-plurality (Qumran) to uniformity (revolt-era sites) to consonantal identity (ʿEn-Gedi).

Part V — The Major Literary and Editorial Variants in Detail

Out of the tens of thousands of readings, a small set carries nearly all the exegetical and theological weight. These are the cases where a scroll does not merely spell a word differently but attests a different *form of the text* — a different edition, a different theology, a different narrative. Each is treated here with its evidence, its alignment across MT / scroll / LXX / SP, and its significance.

16. Deuteronomy 32:8 — “sons of Israel” vs “sons of God”

Within the Song of Moses, Deuteronomy 32:8–9 describes the Most High apportioning the nations. The pivotal clause sets the number of nations “according to the number of” a certain group. The witnesses divide:

Witness	Reading	Sense
MT	לְמִסְפַּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (bənê yiśrāʾēl)	“…the number of the sons of Israel”
4QDeut^{j}	בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים (bənê ʾelōhîm)	“…the sons of God / of the gods”
LXX	αγγέλων θεοῦ / υἱῶν θεοῦ	“angels of God” / “sons of God”
SP	= MT	“sons of Israel”

Table V.1 — Deuteronomy 32:8. 4QDeut^{j} and the LXX share a variant Hebrew (bᵉnê ʾelōhîm); MT and SP read bᵉnê yiśrāʾēl.

The convergence of 4QDeut^{j} with the LXX establishes that the Greek translators were not inventing “angels/sons of God” but rendering a real Hebrew בני אלהים. Most text critics judge the “sons of God” reading the more original — it fits the archaic mythological framework of the Song (the nations allotted to divine beings, Israel reserved for YHWH in v. 9) and explains MT as a later, theologically motivated softening to “sons of Israel.” John Wevers adopted the variant in the Göttingen LXX; Emanuel Tov, P. W. Skehan, and Michael Heiser have written extensively on it. This is the single most-cited Qumran variant in discussions of Israelite religion and the so-called “divine council.”

17. Deuteronomy 32:43 — the longer ending of the Song

The Song's final verse exists in a short MT form and a longer form attested by 4QDeut^{q} and the LXX. The scroll/LXX form has additional cola summoning the heavens and the “sons of God” (or, in LXX, “angels of God”) to rejoice and bow before YHWH. The longer reading is widely regarded as more original, MT having abbreviated it. The New Testament's quotation at Hebrews 1:6 (“let all God's angels worship him”) reflects the longer, not the Masoretic, text — a concrete case where a Qumran-attested variant edition stands behind the NT.

18. 1 Samuel 11 — the Nahash paragraph

Before 1 Samuel 11:1, 4QSam^{a} preserves a paragraph absent from MT and the main LXX. In paraphrase (the exact wording follows DJD XVII and Ulrich): Nahash king of the Ammonites had been oppressing the Gadites and Reubenites, gouging out every right eye and allowing Israel no

deliverer; seven thousand men escaped his hand and entered Jabesh-gilead; “about a month later” Nahash came up and besieged Jabesh — at which point MT's narrative resumes.

Two scribal facts make this a model case. First, the plus supplies the missing motivation for the otherwise abrupt opening of MT 11:1 and explains the “about a month” notice. Second, the loss is mechanically explicable: the editors propose *haplography* — the word “Nahash” stood at the end of two successive units, and a scribe's eye skipped from the first to the second, dropping the intervening text. Josephus (*Antiquities* 6.68–71) knew this fuller account, independent confirmation that it is ancient and not a Qumran invention. The passage is printed in the NRSV and discussed in the NIV/ESV/CSB footnotes as a genuine textual question. It is the strongest demonstration in the corpus that MT can be **secondary and defective** relative to a scroll.

19. Jeremiah — the short and long editions

Recapitulating Part II with its full weight: MT-Jeremiah is roughly one-sixth longer than LXX-Jeremiah and orders the Oracles Against the Nations differently. The two Hebrew streams at Qumran make this a Hebrew, not merely a translational, phenomenon:

Edition	Hebrew witnesses	Greek/other	Features
Short edition	4QJer^{b} (4Q71), 4QJer^{d} (4Q72a)	LXX (OG)	~1/6 shorter; OAN after 25:13, different internal order
Long edition	4QJer^{a} (4Q70), 4QJer^{c} (4Q72); MT	MT, Vg, Tg, Pesh	Expanded; OAN at chs. 46–51; e.g. + Jer 33:14–26

Table V.2 — The two editions of Jeremiah, both now attested in Hebrew at Qumran. Most scholars regard the short (LXX/4QJer^{b,d}) edition as the earlier and the long (MT) as a secondary expansion.

This is the textbook proof that the LXX can faithfully render a genuinely different Hebrew Vorlage, and the empirical anchor of Ulrich's “variant literary editions” and Tov's “double literary editions.” The passage Jeremiah 33:14–26 (a messianic promise of the “righteous Branch”) is entirely absent from LXX and is most likely a plus of the long MT edition.

20. Exodus and Numbers — the expansionist (pre-Samaritan) edition

4QpaleoExod^{m} (Exodus) and 4QNum^{b} (Numbers) attest a Hebrew edition of the Torah marked by systematic *harmonizing expansion*: commands are followed by matching fulfilment notices, and gaps are filled by importing parallel passages (chiefly from Deuteronomy). This is the textual base later inherited by the Samaritans, who added their own sectarian layer (the command to build an altar on Mount Gerizim, woven into the Decalogue). The scrolls thus disentangle two things long conflated: the **expansionist text-type** (Jewish, pre-sectarian, attested at Qumran) and the **Samaritan sectarian recension** (a thin theological overlay on that base). It also shows the harmonizing impulse was a live force shaping the Torah's text in the late Second Temple period.

21. Psalm 145 and the shape of the Psalter

The restored nun verse of Psalm 145 (§9.1) is a clean, discrete textual gain: 11QPs^{a} + LXX + Syriac together recover a line lost from MT by scribal accident, repairing the acrostic. The larger question raised by 11QPs^{a} — whether the Qumran Psalter represents a rival scriptural edition or a

secondary liturgical anthology — remains the open Sanders–Talmon debate and is the principal unresolved "variant-edition" question in the Writings.

22. Joshua 8 and Judges 6 — narrative order and homiletical pluses

Two smaller but instructive editorial variants: 4QJosh^{a} relocates the altar-building episode (MT Josh 8:30–35) to a position right after the Jordan crossing, attesting a third narrative sequence alongside MT and LXX; and 4QJudg^{a} lacks the prophetic homily of MT Judges 6:7–10, plausibly preserving the book before that insertion. Both feed the discussion of how the historical books reached their final shape.

23. Consolidated catalogue of significant variants by alignment

The following master table gathers the principal substantive variants discussed above and classifies each by which witnesses agree. "=MT" marks agreement with the Masoretic Text. This is a representative catalogue of the consequential readings, not the exhaustive apparatus (for which see Ulrich, BQS, and DJD).

Passage	Scroll	MT	Scroll reads	Joins
Gen 46 / Exod 1:5	4QExod^{b}	70	75	LXX
Exod (plagues, Decalogue)	4QpaleoExod^{m}	short	expanded	SP base
Num 20–21 etc.	4QNum^{b}	short	expanded + LXX agreements	SP + LXX
Deut 32:8	4QDeut^{j}	sons of Israel	sons of God	LXX
Deut 32:43	4QDeut^{q}	short	longer (heavens/sons of God worship)	LXX; cf. Heb 1:6
Josh 8:30–35	4QJosh^{a}	after ch. 8	after Jordan crossing	independent order
Judg 6:7–10	4QJudg^{a}	present	absent	shorter / earlier
1 Sam 11:1 (before)	4QSam^{a}	absent	Nahash paragraph	Josephus
1 Sam 1:22–24	4QSam^{a}	shorter	+ Nazirite vow; "three-year-old bull"	LXX
Isa 53:11	1QIsa^{a,b}	he shall see	he shall see light	LXX
Isa 2:9b–10	1QIsa^{a}	present	omitted	minus
Jer (whole book)	4QJer^{b,d}	long	short, reordered	LXX
Jer 33:14–26	(LXX/short)	present	absent in short edition	LXX
Ps 145 (nun)	11QPs^{a}	verse absent	nun verse present	LXX, Syriac
Ps 151	11QPs^{a}	absent	present	LXX

Table V.3 — Master catalogue of the principal substantive MT–scroll variants. Note how often the scroll joins the LXX, confirming the Greek's value as a witness to a real Hebrew text.

Part VI — Synthesis: What the Variants Mean

24. From plurality to a single text

Assembled, the evidence tells a coherent historical story. In the late Second Temple period (roughly the 3rd century BCE to 70 CE), the Hebrew Scriptures circulated in *more than one textual form*. Qumran preserves a snapshot of that plurality: a proto-MT majority living alongside the expansionist (pre-Samaritan) edition, the Hebrew ancestors of the LXX, the freely copied QSP manuscripts, and genuinely non-aligned texts. After the catastrophes of 70 and 135 CE, one form — the proto-rabbinic / proto-Masoretic text — became the sole text of Judaism. The manuscripts of Masada, Murabbaʿat, Naḥal Ḥever, Sdeir, and ʿEn-Gedi capture that consolidation already largely accomplished. The Masoretes of the 7th–10th centuries then added vowels and accents to this long-stable consonantal text, producing the MT we have.

25. The Masoretic Text vindicated and contextualized

Two conclusions hold together. First, the scrolls **vindicate** the MT: its consonantal text is ancient, the dominant form before 70 CE, and transmitted with remarkable fidelity for two thousand years — the ʿEn-Gedi scroll matching it consonant for consonant. Second, the scrolls **contextualize** the MT: it is not the only ancient form, and in a real if small set of cases (1 Sam 11; Deut 32:8, 43; Isa 53:11; Ps 145; the short Jeremiah) a scroll — frequently joined by the LXX — preserves a reading earlier or superior to MT. The honest verdict is neither “MT is corrupt” nor “MT is perfect,” but: MT is an excellent, ancient, and central witness that must be read alongside the scrolls and the versions.

26. The Septuagint re-evaluated

A major dividend of the scrolls is the rehabilitation of the LXX. Before 1947 the LXX's divergences from MT were often dismissed as the translators' liberties. The repeated convergence of Qumran Hebrew with the LXX against MT — in Samuel, Jeremiah, Deuteronomy 32, Isaiah 53:11, Psalm 145 — demonstrates that the Greek frequently renders a **genuinely different Hebrew Vorlage**. The Greek Minor Prophets scroll (8ḤevXIIgr) then shows the reverse motion: a first-century recension already pulling the Greek back toward the proto-MT. Together these reframe the LXX as a primary witness to the history of the Hebrew text, not a derivative paraphrase.

27. Implications for canon and for translation

Finally, the variants bear on canon and practice. The fluid arrangement of the Psalter (11QPs^{a}), the two editions of Jeremiah, and the expansionist Torah show that, for some books, the very *shape* of the text was still settling when these scrolls were copied — a fact with consequences for how one conceives the “closing” of the Hebrew canon. For modern translation, the responsible practice is exactly what the better committees already do: print the Masoretic base, but footnote (and occasionally adopt) the readings where the scrolls and versions converge on an earlier text. The footnote “Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint read …” is the practical fruit of everything catalogued in this volume.

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For the exhaustive variant-by-variant apparatus, consult Ulrich, The Biblical Qumran Scrolls (Brill, 2010), and the DJD series.