The Masoretic Text in the Light of Its Witnesses

A Text-Critical Study of the Hebrew Bible across the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Aleppo and Leningrad Codices, and the Septuagint

A Dissertation

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the Masoretic Text (MT) of the Hebrew Bible as a textual tradition: what it is, how it was produced, how well it was preserved, and how it stands in relation to the other ancient witnesses to the same books. It compares the two great Tiberian codices, the Aleppo Codex (c. 930 CE) and the Leningrad Codex (1008/1009 CE), with the biblical manuscripts from the Judaean Desert (the Dead Sea Scrolls, c. 250 BCE to 135 CE) and with the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint, LXX). It draws throughout on the work of Emanuel Tov, Sidnie White Crawford, Eugene Ulrich, Frank Moore Cross, and others, and it surveys the archaeological discoveries that bear on the history of the text.

The argument has four parts. First, the consonantal framework of the MT is ancient: manuscripts from Masada, Wadi Murabba'at, and Nahal Hever, and a charred scroll from En-Gedi, agree with the medieval codices almost letter for letter, which shows that a carefully controlled proto-Masoretic text existed by the first century CE at the latest. Second, that text was one of several forms in circulation before 70 CE. The Qumran scrolls show a pluriform Scripture, in which some books existed in more than one literary edition, and in a number of well-known passages the scrolls agree with the Hebrew source of the Septuagint against the MT. Third, the MT is therefore neither a late corruption nor a flawless original. It is an excellent, conservatively transmitted text that contains identifiable scribal errors, deliberate corrections, and editorial layers. Fourth, the differences between the MT, the LXX, and the Old Testament as quoted in the Greek New Testament arise from four identifiable causes: different Hebrew source texts, translation technique, the reading of an unvocalized consonantal text, and the separate histories of the Jewish and Christian communities that preserved each form.

On the question of inerrancy, the dissertation concludes that no extant manuscript or edition of the Hebrew Bible is free of error, that the manuscripts themselves and the Masoretes' own notes say as much, and that the doctrine can be maintained only as a theological claim about lost autographs. Even in that form it is complicated by the evidence that several books never had a single autograph.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 The question

Every modern translation of the Old Testament rests on a decision about which text to translate. For Jewish Bibles and for nearly all Protestant and modern Catholic translations, that text is the Masoretic Text, printed today from a single manuscript copied in Cairo in 1008 or 1009 CE. Until 1947 the oldest substantial Hebrew witnesses to the Bible were medieval. The oldest complete Greek Bibles, by contrast, date from the fourth century CE, and they often differ from the Hebrew. Scholars had to ask which was older, and they had no Hebrew evidence from antiquity with which to answer.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls changed the question. Hebrew manuscripts a thousand years older than the medieval codices became available, and they showed two things at once. Many of them agree closely with the consonants of the MT. Others agree with the Septuagint or the Samaritan Pentateuch, or with none of the three. Textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible since 1947 has largely been the work of explaining how both observations can be true.

1.2 Terms

- *Masoretic Text (MT).* The Hebrew and Aramaic text of the Jewish Bible as transmitted by the Masoretes of Tiberias between roughly 600 and 950 CE. It consists of a consonantal text, vowel points, accent signs, and marginal notes (the Masorah).
- *Proto-Masoretic text.* The consonantal text, attested in antiquity, from which the medieval MT descends. The term is a modern convenience; Tov notes that it did not exist before the Judaean Desert finds (Tov 2022).
- *Septuagint (LXX).* Strictly, the Greek translation of the Torah made in Alexandria in the third century BCE; loosely, the whole Greek Old Testament. The earliest recoverable form of each book's translation is called the Old Greek (OG).
- *Vorlage.* The Hebrew text that lay in front of a translator. The Vorlage of the LXX is reconstructed by translating the Greek back into Hebrew (retroversion), a procedure that is reliable only where the translator's habits are well understood.

- *Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS).* Manuscripts found at Qumran (eleven caves, 1947 to 1956) and at other sites in the Judaean Desert, including Masada, Wadi Murabba'at, and Nahal Hever.
- *Samaritan Pentateuch (SP).* The Torah as preserved by the Samaritan community, known from medieval manuscripts but resting on a text type attested at Qumran (the "pre-Samaritan" scrolls).

1.3 Method and sources

The method is comparative. Each witness is first described on its own terms, and the witnesses are then compared in passages where they differ. Readings are evaluated by the ordinary canons of textual criticism: which reading best explains the origin of the others, which fits the author's usage, and which could have arisen by a known type of scribal error. The standard handbook is Tov's *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, now in its fourth edition (2022). Crawford's *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times* (2008) and *Scribes and Scrolls at Qumran* (2019), Ulrich's *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Developmental Composition of the Bible* (2015), and the first volume of *Textual History of the Bible* (Lange and Tov 2016–2017) supply the framework for the scrolls. English quotations of Scripture follow the NIV. Where passages are compared, the Hebrew is cited from the MT as printed in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), the Greek Old Testament from Rahlfs-Hanhart, and the New Testament from NA28.

1.4 Thesis

The MT is the best single witness to the Hebrew Bible, and it is not the only ancient form of the text, and it is not without error. These three statements are compatible. The evidence supports all three, and each of them is denied by some party to the debate. The chapters that follow set out the evidence for each.

Chapter 2. The Masoretic Text: Its Layers and Its Makers

2.1 Four layers

The MT is a composite of four layers of different ages. The oldest is the consonantal text, which in its proto-Masoretic form is attested from the third or second century BCE. The second is the division into paragraphs (open and closed sections, *petuhot* and *setumot*), which is also ancient: the paragraphing of several Judaean Desert scrolls agrees with that of the medieval codices. The third layer is the vocalization and accentuation, written down by the Masoretes between about the seventh and tenth centuries CE to record a reading tradition that had been transmitted orally. The fourth is the Masorah itself, the system of marginal notes that counts words and spellings so that no copyist could alter them unnoticed.

In plain terms: the letters are very old, the vowels were added to the page much later, and the notes in the margins are a quality-control system. A reader should keep the ages of the layers in mind, because many differences between the MT and the Septuagint concern the vowels alone. The Greek translators worked from scrolls that had no vowel points, and they sometimes read the same consonants with different vowels than the Masoretes later recorded.

2.2 The proto-Masoretic text before 70 CE

Tov distinguishes two circles of proto-Masoretic manuscripts. The inner circle comprises the scrolls from Judaean Desert sites other than Qumran: Masada (copied before 73 CE) and the Bar Kokhba refuge caves of Murabba'at, Nahal Hever, and neighbouring wadis (deposited by 135 CE). These agree with the Leningrad Codex so closely that Tov treats them as members of the same family as the medieval manuscripts. The second circle comprises the MT-like scrolls from Qumran, which differ a little more, on Tov's estimate in up to about two percent of their words (Tov 2017; Tov 2022).

To explain a precision of this kind, Tov proposes that the inner-circle scrolls were copied from, or corrected against, a master copy kept in the Jerusalem Temple. Rabbinic sources remember such a practice. They speak of “correctors of books” paid from Temple funds (*b. Ketubbot* 106a) and of three Torah scrolls found in the Temple court that differed in three places, where the reading of two was adopted against the third (*Sifre Deuteronomy* 356; *y. Ta'anit* 4:2). The

hypothesis cannot be proved, but it accounts for the data. A text does not stay identical across a thousand years unless someone is deliberately preventing change.

2.3 Signs of care and signs of imperfection

The Masoretic tradition records its own irregularities, and this is one of the strongest arguments both for its fidelity and against its perfection. The scribes copied what they received, including what they believed to be mistaken, and noted the problem in the margin.

- *Ketiv and Qere.* In roughly 800 to 1,500 places, depending on the manuscript, the margin instructs the reader to pronounce something other than what is written. Some are euphemisms, some are grammatical updates, and some preserve genuine variant readings.
- *Tiqqune sopherim.* Rabbinic tradition lists eighteen "corrections of the scribes", places where the text was said to have been altered to avoid irreverence toward God (for example Gen 18:22, where the tradition holds that the original read "the LORD remained standing before Abraham").
- *Extraordinary points.* Dots stand over letters in fifteen places (for example Gen 33:4), an ancient scribal mark for doubt or deletion that is also found in the Qumran scrolls.
- *Suspended and inverted letters.* In Judges 18:30 a raised letter *nun* turns "Moses" into "Manasseh", apparently to spare Moses an idolatrous grandson. Inverted *nun* signs bracket Numbers 10:35–36, marking the verses as displaced.
- *Admitted uncertainty.* The Babylonian Talmud concedes that "we are not expert" in the full and defective spellings (*b. Qiddushin* 30a).

2.4 The Masoretes

The Tiberian Masoretes worked in Galilee under early Islamic rule. Two families dominated the final generation: Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali. Their differences, catalogued in the eleventh century by Mishael ben Uzziel, number several hundred and are almost entirely matters of accent and minor vocalization. Maimonides endorsed a codex corrected by Ben Asher as the model for Torah scrolls (*Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Sefer Torah 8:4), and that endorsement made the Ben Asher tradition standard. Geoffrey Khan has shown that the Tiberian pronunciation recorded by these signs was itself a learned, conservative tradition distinct from ordinary spoken Hebrew of the period (Khan 2020).

Chapter 3. The Great Codices: Aleppo and Leningrad

3.1 The Aleppo Codex

The Aleppo Codex (*Keter Aram Tzova*, the “Crown of Aleppo”) was written in Tiberias about 930 CE. The scribe Shlomo ben Buya'a wrote the consonants; Aaron ben Moses ben Asher added the vowels, the accents, and the Masorah. It was given to the Karaite community of Jerusalem, carried off in the Crusader sack of 1099, ransomed, and brought to Fustat (Old Cairo), where Maimonides consulted it. By the late fourteenth century it was in Aleppo, where it was guarded for nearly six hundred years.

During the anti-Jewish riots in Aleppo in December 1947 the synagogue was burned and the codex was damaged. When it reached Jerusalem in 1958, about forty percent of it was missing, including most of the Torah (Friedman 2012; Goshen-Gottstein 1960). The surviving text begins at Deuteronomy 28:17 and lacks the end of the Song of Songs, all of Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, and Ezra-Nehemiah, together with scattered leaves elsewhere. About 294 of an original 487 or so leaves survive. Later study found no fire damage on the surviving pages, and the fate of the missing leaves remains disputed; two stray leaves have surfaced since.

Scholars regard the Aleppo Codex as the most accurate representative of the Ben Asher tradition. Its text agrees with its own Masoretic notes more consistently than any other manuscript. It is the base text of the Hebrew University Bible (HUB) and of the Bar-Ilan *Mikra'ot Gedolot ha-Keter*.

3.2 The Leningrad Codex

The Leningrad Codex (National Library of Russia, Firkovich B 19A) was written in Cairo in 1008 or 1009 CE by Samuel ben Jacob, who wrote consonants, vowels, and Masorah himself. Its colophon states that it was corrected from manuscripts prepared by Aaron ben Asher. It contains many erasures and corrections, most of which bring it closer to the Ben Asher standard. It is the oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible, and for that reason it became the base text of *Biblia Hebraica* from the third edition (1937) through BHS (1967–1977) and the current *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (BHQ, 2004–). When Paul Kahle prepared the 1937 edition he wanted to use the Aleppo Codex, but its guardians would not permit it to be photographed.

3.3 The two compared

Table 1. The Aleppo and Leningrad codices compared

Feature	Aleppo Codex (A)	Leningrad Codex (L)
Date and place	c. 930 CE, Tiberias	1008/1009 CE, Cairo (Fustat)
Scribe	Shlomo ben Buya'a (consonants); Aaron ben Asher (vowels, accents, Masorah)	Samuel ben Jacob (all layers)
Relation to Ben Asher	Pointed by Ben Asher himself	Corrected from Ben Asher manuscripts, according to its colophon
Completeness	About 60 percent survives; most of the Torah lost in or after 1947	Complete
Internal consistency	Text and Masorah agree almost without exception	Text and Masorah sometimes disagree; many corrections
Present location	Shrine of the Book, Israel Museum, Jerusalem	National Library of Russia, St Petersburg
Modern editions	Hebrew University Bible; Mikra'ot Gedolot ha-Keter; Jerusalem Crown	BHK[3], BHS, BHQ; most modern translations

The differences between A and L are small. Where both survive, they almost never differ in consonants in a way that changes meaning. The differences are in full versus defective spelling, in the secondary accent called *ga'ya* (*meteg*), in the use of compound *shewa* signs, and in a limited number of vowels and accents. The best-known consonantal differences within the Masoretic family as a whole are the nine letters by which Yemenite Torah scrolls, which follow the Aleppo tradition, differ from Ashkenazi scrolls; the most familiar is the spelling of *dakka* in Deuteronomy 23:2 with a final *aleph* or a final *he*. None affects the sense.

Two points follow. The Masoretic tradition by the tenth century was almost perfectly uniform, far more so than any other ancient literature copied by hand. And “almost” is the accurate word. Both A and L lack Joshua 21:36–37, two verses present in many later manuscripts and in the parallel at 1 Chronicles 6:63–64; BHS prints them in small type. Even the two best Masoretic manuscripts therefore share at least one probable omission, most likely by a scribe's eye skipping between similar phrases.

3.4 Other early Masoretic witnesses

A and L are the most important members of a small group. The Cairo Codex of the Prophets carries a colophon dated 895 CE, but codicological and radiocarbon study indicate that the

manuscript is later than its colophon claims. British Library Or. 4445 (Pentateuch) and the Damascus Pentateuch belong to the tenth century. Codex Sassoon 1053, radiocarbon-dated to about 900 CE, was sold in May 2023 for 38.1 million dollars and donated to the ANU Museum of the Jewish People in Tel Aviv. It is nearly complete, lacking twelve leaves, though its Masoretic precision is lower than that of the Aleppo Codex. Between the Judaean Desert scrolls of the second century CE and these codices lies a period sometimes called the “silent era”, from which very few Hebrew biblical manuscripts survive. The Ashkar-Gilson fragment of Exodus (seventh or eighth century) and the En-Gedi scroll discussed in Chapter 7 are among the few witnesses that bridge it.

3.5 Printed editions

BHS and BHQ are diplomatic editions. They print one manuscript (L) as it stands and record variants in an apparatus. The Hebrew University Bible does the same with A. The *Hebrew Bible: A Critical Edition* (HBCE), directed by Ronald Hendel, takes the opposite course and prints an eclectic, reconstructed text, as editions of the Greek New Testament do (Hendel 2016). Tov has expressed reservations about eclectic editions, on the ground that the evidence for the Hebrew Bible is too sparse and too uneven to support a reconstructed text book by book. The disagreement is a real one, and it reflects the central difficulty of the field: scholars do not agree on what the “original text” of a biblical book was, or whether every book had one.

Chapter 4. The Dead Sea Scrolls

4.1 The corpus

The eleven caves near Khirbet Qumran yielded the remains of some 930 manuscripts. Between 200 and 230 of them, depending on how fragments are assigned, are copies of books that later formed the Hebrew Bible. Every book is represented except Esther (and Nehemiah, unless it is counted with Ezra). The most frequently copied books are Psalms (about 36 manuscripts), Deuteronomy (about 30), Isaiah (21), and Genesis (about 20), which are also the books most often quoted in the New Testament. A further 25 or so biblical manuscripts come from Masada and the Bar Kokhba caves. The scrolls date from about the mid-third century BCE to 68 CE at Qumran and to 135 CE at the other sites.

Only one biblical book survives complete in a single scroll: the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa[a]), copied about 125 BCE, 7.34 metres long, with all sixty-six chapters in 54 columns. Its text is close to the MT in substance, with a fuller spelling system, many small variants, and a number of readings that modern translations have adopted. A second Isaiah scroll from the same cave (1QIsa[b]) stands much closer to the MT.

4.2 Theories of the text

Local texts. Frank Moore Cross proposed that the three text types known before 1947 (MT, LXX, SP) were three families that had developed in geographical isolation: the MT type in Babylonia, the LXX Vorlage in Egypt, and the pre-Samaritan type in Palestine (Cross 1975). The theory gave an orderly account of the early finds.

Groups and non-aligned texts. Tov objected that many scrolls fit none of the three families. He classified the Qumran biblical scrolls by their affinities and introduced the category “non-aligned” for manuscripts that agree now with one witness and now with another, and that also contain readings found nowhere else. He further argued that MT, LXX, and SP should be thought of as three texts among many, and not as three text types.

Multiple literary editions. Eugene Ulrich argued that the variation in the scrolls is of two kinds. There are individual variants, the ordinary slips and improvements of copyists. And there are variant literary editions: successive, intentionally revised forms of a whole book. Jeremiah, Exodus, Samuel, Joshua, Psalms, and Daniel all circulated in more than one edition during the

Second Temple period. On this view the scrolls are evidence for the last stages of the composition of the biblical books as well as for their copying (Ulrich 1999; Ulrich 2015).

A spectrum of scribal activity. Sidnie White Crawford was trained by Cross and edited several of the Cave 4 Deuteronomy manuscripts. She has described how that work changed her view. One of her manuscripts, 4QDeut^{g}, never departs from the MT, while others, such as 4QDeut^{n}, fit no known family, and she concluded that the attempt to place every manuscript in a family could not succeed (Crawford 2022). In *Rewriting Scripture* she describes a spectrum. At one end are short, unexpanded texts, the ancestors of the MT. Further along are texts with scattered expansions, such as the Vorlage of the LXX. Then come texts with systematic harmonization and content editing, the pre-Samaritan group. Beyond these lie the Reworked Pentateuch manuscripts (4Q364–367), and at the far end are new compositions such as *Jubilees* and the *Temple Scroll*. The scribes responsible were learned professionals whose task included interpreting and updating the text as well as copying it (Crawford 2008). In *Scribes and Scrolls at Qumran* she combines the manuscript and the archaeological evidence to argue that Qumran functioned as a scribal centre and library for the wider Essene movement (Crawford 2019).

Crawford also insists on a distinction that bears directly on inerrancy. Before 70 CE there were authoritative Scriptures but no canon in the later sense of a closed list, with the possible exception of the Torah. Authority belonged to the book, and no single wording of a book was treated as the only acceptable one. The same community kept and used differing copies of the same book side by side.

4.3 Tov's statistics

Tov's percentages for the Qumran biblical scrolls have changed across the four editions of his handbook, and the changes are instructive. Table 2 gives the overall figures as summarized by reviewers of the fourth edition.

Table 2. Tov's classification of the Qumran biblical scrolls across four editions (overall percentages)

Category	1st ed. (1992)	2nd ed. (2001)	3rd ed. (2012)	4th ed. (2022)
Qumran scribal practice	20	20	(dropped as a textual category)	—
Proto-MT / MT-like	60	35	45	13

Category	1st ed. (1992)	2nd ed. (2001)	3rd ed. (2012)	4th ed. (2022)
MT and LXX in agreement (block)	—	—	—	9
MT and SP in agreement (block)	—	—	—	13
Pre-Samaritan	5	5	5	4
Close to the Hebrew source of the LXX	5	5	5	4
LXX and SP in agreement (block)	—	—	—	12
Non-aligned	10	35	45	45

The fall in the proto-MT figure from 60 to 13 percent does not mean that Tov now thinks the MT was rare. In the earlier editions a scroll that agreed with the MT and with the SP, or with the MT and the LXX, in a passage where all three are alike was counted as proto-Masoretic by default. The fourth edition no longer treats the MT as the default and counts such scrolls in separate “block” categories. If the three MT-related categories of the fourth edition are added together they come to about 35 percent. Two findings are stable across all four editions. Scrolls that are distinctively close to the Vorlage of the LXX are few, about one in twenty. And the largest single group is the non-aligned texts.

4.4 Qumran and the other sites

The most important contrast in the Judaean Desert evidence is between Qumran and everywhere else. At Qumran the text is pluriform. At Masada, Murabba'at, and Nahal Hever every biblical scroll is proto-Masoretic. The Minor Prophets scroll from Murabba'at (Mur 88, early second century CE) differs from the Leningrad Codex in only a handful of details across the Twelve. The Masada fragments of Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Ezekiel, and Psalms are likewise virtually identical to the medieval text, apart from spelling.

Scholars explain the contrast in two ways. Some hold that the text was standardized between 70 and 135 CE, when rabbinic Judaism consolidated after the destruction of the Temple and other textual forms died out with the groups that used them. Tov and others hold that no standardization took place: the proto-Masoretic text was already the text of the Temple and of the Pharisaic mainstream before 70, and after 70 it was simply the only text left, because the communities that carried the others (the Qumran sect, the Sadducees, the Greek-speaking

diaspora in its Jewish form) had disappeared or gone their own way. The Masada scrolls, which predate 73 CE, favour the second explanation.

4.5 Dating the scrolls

The scrolls have been dated chiefly by palaeography, the comparative study of handwriting, with radiocarbon tests as a control. In June 2025 a team led by Mladen Popović of the University of Groningen published a date-prediction model called Enoch, which was trained on the handwriting of 24 radiocarbon-dated samples and then applied to 135 further manuscripts. The model indicates that many scrolls are older than the palaeographic consensus held. Two results concern biblical books directly. 4QDaniel^{c} (4Q114) is placed in the early to mid-second century BCE, at or very near the time when most scholars date the final composition of Daniel 8–11, and 4QQohelet^{a} (4Q109) is placed in the third century BCE (Popović et al. 2025). If these dates hold, the gap between the composition of some books and our earliest copies of them has shrunk to almost nothing. The study is recent, and its results await testing by other laboratories.

Chapter 5. The Septuagint

5.1 Origins and transmission

The *Letter of Aristeas* relates that seventy-two elders translated the Torah into Greek at Alexandria under Ptolemy II (285–246 BCE). The story is legendary in its details, but the date and place are broadly right: Greek papyri of the Pentateuch survive from the second century BCE (Papyrus Rylands 458; Papyrus Fouad 266). The Prophets and Writings were translated over the following two centuries by different translators of varying skill and method.

The Greek text was then revised repeatedly. An early Jewish revision, named *kaige* by Dominique Barthélemy after one of its characteristic renderings, corrected the Old Greek toward the proto-Masoretic Hebrew (Barthélemy 1963). The Greek Minor Prophets scroll from Nahal Hever (8HevXIIgr), copied around the turn of the era, is the chief witness to it. In the second century CE Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion produced new versions closer to the Hebrew. In the third century Origen set the Hebrew and the Greek versions in parallel columns in his Hexapla and marked where the Septuagint was longer or shorter than the Hebrew, and his edited column then contaminated the manuscript tradition. The great codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus (fourth century) and Alexandrinus (fifth century) are Christian copies and reflect this mixed history. Recovering the Old Greek from them is the task of the Göttingen Septuagint.

5.2 Using the Septuagint as a witness to the Hebrew

A difference between the LXX and the MT may come from any of five sources: a different Hebrew Vorlage; a different vocalization of the same consonants; the translator's interpretation or paraphrase; the translator's error; or corruption within the Greek tradition. Only the first counts as evidence for a variant Hebrew text. Tov's *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* (3rd ed. 2015) sets out the controls. The more literal a translator is, the more safely his Hebrew can be reconstructed. The translators of Samuel-Kings and Jeremiah were quite literal, so their large divergences from the MT very probably reflect a different Hebrew text. The translators of Isaiah, Job, and Proverbs were free, so their divergences more often reflect the translator. The Greek Job is about one-sixth shorter than the Hebrew, and most scholars attribute this to abridgement by the translator.

The Qumran scrolls confirmed the method. Before 1947 a scholar who retroverted a Hebrew reading from the Greek could be accused of inventing it. Since 1947 a number of such retroverted readings have turned up in Hebrew manuscripts.

5.3 A different canon and order

The Greek Bible also differs in scope and arrangement. It includes books absent from the Hebrew canon (Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, 1–2 Maccabees, and others), longer forms of Esther and Daniel, and a 151st Psalm. It arranges the books by genre, ending with the Prophets, where the Hebrew Bible ends with the Writings. Christian Old Testaments inherited the Greek order, which is why the Protestant Old Testament has the contents of the Hebrew Bible in the order of the Greek.

Chapter 6. The Witnesses Compared: Test Cases

This chapter sets the witnesses side by side in passages where they differ. Table 3 summarizes the cases, and the sections that follow discuss the most significant.

Table 3. Selected passages where the witnesses diverge

Passage	MT	LXX	Dead Sea Scrolls	Scrolls side with
Jeremiah (whole book)	Longer edition; oracles against the nations at chs. 46–51	About one-seventh to one-eighth shorter; oracles follow 25:13	4QJer^{b} and 4QJer^{d} short; 4QJer^{a} and 4QJer^{c} long	Both
1 Sam 10:27–11:1	No introduction to Nahash	No introduction to Nahash	4QSam^{a} adds a paragraph on Nahash gouging out eyes (so also Josephus)	Neither
1 Sam 17:4	Goliath six cubits and a span	Four cubits and a span	4QSam^{a}: four cubits and a span	LXX
Deut 32:8	“sons of Israel”	“angels of God” (some early copies: “sons of God”)	4QDeut^{j}: “sons of God”	LXX
Deut 32:43	Four lines	Eight lines, including “let all God's angels worship him”	4QDeut^{q}: six lines, including “bow down to him, all you gods”	LXX (in part)
Exod 1:5	70 descendants of Jacob	75	4QExod^{b}: 75	LXX
Ps 145:13	No verse for the letter *nun*	Has the verse	11QPs^{a} has the verse	LXX
Ps 22:16 (Heb. 22:17)	“like a lion my hands and my feet”	“they dug (pierced) my hands and my feet”	5/6HevPs (Nahal Hever): a verb, “they dug / pierced”	LXX
Isa 53:11	“he will see” (no object)	“to show him light”	1QIsa^{a}, 1QIsa^{b}, 4QIsa^{d}: “he will see light”	LXX
Isa 7:14	*ha-'almah*, “the young woman”	*hē parthenos*, “the virgin”	1QIsa^{a}: *ha-'almah*	MT
Gen 4:8	Cain's words are missing	“Let us go out to the field”	4QGen^{b}: words missing	MT
Judg 6:7–10	Present	Present	4QJudg^{a} lacks the verses	Neither
Daniel and Esther	Short forms	Long forms with additions	Qumran Daniel scrolls lack the additions; Esther absent	MT
Ezekiel 36–39	Standard order	Papyrus 967: different order; lacks 36:23c–38	Masada Ezekiel follows MT	MT

6.1 Jeremiah: two editions

Jeremiah is the clearest case of a book in two editions. The Greek is shorter than the MT by about 2,700 words, and it arranges the material differently. Two small Cave 4 manuscripts settle the question of whether the translator abridged. 4QJer[b] preserves part of Jeremiah 9:22–10:21 in the short form and the order of the Greek, without 10:6–8 and 10:10, verses of praise to the God of Israel that interrupt the polemic against idols. 4QJer[d] has the short form of 43:2–10. The short edition therefore existed in Hebrew. Tov and most others conclude that the MT of Jeremiah is a later, expanded edition of the book, with added titles, formulae, and clarifications, and that the LXX translates the earlier one (Tov 2022).

Two other Cave 4 manuscripts, 4QJer[a] and 4QJer[c], have the long, Masoretic form, and 4QJer[a] is among the oldest scrolls from Qumran. Both editions were kept in the same collection. The community evidently did not regard one as right and the other as wrong.

6.2 Samuel

The MT of Samuel has long been recognized as a poorly preserved text, with many omissions through scribal oversight. 4QSam[a] often agrees with the LXX against the MT and sometimes preserves a better text than either. At 1 Samuel 10:27–11:1 it has a paragraph, absent from both the MT and the LXX but known to Josephus (*Antiquities* 6.68–71), which explains that Nahash the Ammonite had been gouging out the right eyes of the Gadites and Reubenites. The NRSV prints it in the text. At 1 Samuel 14:41 the LXX preserves a longer form of Saul's prayer that mentions the Urim and Thummim. The MT lost it when a scribe's eye skipped from one occurrence of “Israel” to the next, and the NIV restores it. In the David and Goliath story the Old Greek lacks 17:12–31 and 17:55–18:5, which removes the tension between chapters 16 and 17 over whether Saul already knew David. Whether the short form is earlier or is an abridgement is still debated.

6.3 Deuteronomy 32

In Deuteronomy 32:8 the MT says that the Most High fixed the boundaries of the peoples “according to the number of the sons of Israel” (*bene yisra'el*, בני ישראל). The LXX has “angels of God”, and 4QDeut[j] reads “sons of God” (*bene 'elohim*, בני אלוהים). The Qumran reading

explains the other two. The original spoke of a divine council, each nation being assigned to one of its members while Israel was the LORD's own portion (32:9). Later scribes in the proto-Masoretic line found the wording theologically awkward and changed one word, and the Greek tradition softened it to “angels”. This is the clearest case of a theological correction in the MT confirmed by manuscript evidence. In 32:43 the scrolls and the LXX again preserve a longer text in which heavenly beings are called on to worship. The Epistle to the Hebrews quotes it (Heb 1:6), and the line is not in the MT at all.

6.4 Isaiah and the Psalms

In Isaiah 53:11 three Qumran manuscripts and the LXX read “he will see light”, where the MT has only “he will see”. The NIV adopts the longer reading: “After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.” In Psalm 145, an alphabetic acrostic, the MT lacks the verse for the letter *nun*. The Cave 11 Psalms scroll and the LXX supply it, and the NIV prints it as 145:13b: “The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does.” In both places the MT has lost something, and the loss is not seriously disputed.

Psalm 22:16 is more delicate. The MT reads *ka'ari* (כארי), “like a lion”, which gives a sentence with no verb. The LXX reads *ōryxan*, “they dug”. A Psalms scroll from Nahal Hever (5/6HevPs) reads a verb ending in *waw* (כארו), which supports the Greek. Three cautions apply. The scroll is from Nahal Hever, not Qumran. The verb it attests is of uncertain meaning, and “pierced” is an interpretation. And a small number of medieval Masoretic manuscripts have the same reading. The evidence favours a verb over “like a lion”, but it does not establish the specific translation “pierced”.

6.5 Where the scrolls support the Masoretic Text

It is often said that where the MT and the LXX differ, the scrolls support the LXX. In several famous passages that is true. As a general statement it is false, and Tov's own figures show it: scrolls close to the LXX Vorlage are about five percent of the corpus. In Isaiah 7:14 the Great Isaiah Scroll has *'almah* with the MT. In Genesis 4:8, where the LXX, the SP, and the Vulgate supply Cain's missing words, 4QGen^{b} lacks them with the MT. The Qumran copies of Daniel have none of the Greek additions. The Masada Ezekiel follows the Masoretic order against the old Greek papyrus 967. And there are passages, such as Judges 6:7–10 in 4QJudg^{a} or the Nahash

paragraph, where a scroll differs from the MT and the LXX together. An accurate summary is that the scrolls confirm that many LXX divergences rest on real Hebrew texts, and that they also confirm the antiquity and general reliability of the MT.

Chapter 7. The Archaeological Evidence

Archaeology bears on the text in two ways. Some finds are copies of biblical text and are direct evidence for its wording. Others are inscriptions and sites that show the linguistic and religious setting in which the text was written and copied. Table 4 lists the principal finds.

Table 4. Archaeological finds bearing on the text of the Hebrew Bible

Find	Date	Bearing on the text
Ketef Hinnom silver amulets (Jerusalem)	c. 600 BCE	The oldest known text paralleling the Bible: the Priestly Blessing (Num 6:24–26) in a shorter form. Supports the antiquity of the wording; shows it was not yet fixed in form.
Nash Papyrus (Egypt)	2nd century BCE	Decalogue and Shema in a liturgical, harmonized form that at points agrees with the LXX against the MT.
Qumran biblical scrolls	c. 250 BCE–68 CE	Textual plurality: proto-MT, pre-Samaritan, LXX-like, and non-aligned texts side by side.
Qumran tefillin and mezuzot	2nd century BCE–1st century CE	Some follow the later rabbinic selection and a proto-MT text; others contain extra passages and a harmonizing text.
Masada scrolls	before 73 CE	All biblical fragments are proto-MT; two were buried beneath the synagogue floor.
Murabba'at and Nahal Hever scrolls	before 135 CE	Proto-MT throughout; Mur 88 (Minor Prophets) nearly identical to the Leningrad Codex.
Greek Minor Prophets scroll, Nahal Hever (8HevXIIgr), with fragments recovered in 2021	c. 50 BCE–50 CE	A Jewish revision of the Greek toward the proto-MT; the divine name is written in paleo-Hebrew letters within the Greek.
En-Gedi Leviticus scroll	1st–4th century CE	Charred scroll read by micro-CT scanning in 2016; Lev 1–2 identical to the MT in consonants and paragraphing.
Ashkar-Gilson fragment and Cairo Genizah	7th–8th century CE onward	Bridge the gap between the scrolls and the codices; the Song of the Sea already has its Masoretic layout.
Mount Gerizim excavations	5th–2nd century BCE	A Samaritan sanctuary existed from the Persian period; background to “Gerizim” for “Ebal” at Deut 27:4 in the SP and the Old Latin.
Elephantine papyri (Egypt)	5th century BCE	A Jewish colony with its own temple and no trace of a written Torah.
Hebrew inscriptions (Siloam, Lachish, Arad, Kuntillet 'Ajrud)	8th–6th century BCE	Pre-exilic script and spelling differ from those of the MT; show the text was transcribed and its spelling modernized.

7.1 Finds that support the Masoretic Text

Ketef Hinnom. In 1979 Gabriel Barkay excavated a burial cave on the western slope of the Hinnom Valley and found two tiny rolled silver plaques. Unrolled, they proved to carry a form of the Priestly Blessing of Numbers 6:24–26 in paleo-Hebrew script. Re-imaging and re-study published in 2004 supported a date just before the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE (Barkay et al. 2004), though a minority of scholars prefer a somewhat later date (Na'aman 2011). The plaques are some four centuries older than the oldest Dead Sea Scroll. They show that this wording was in liturgical use in the late monarchy. They do not show that the book of Numbers existed in its present form, and the second plaque gives the blessing in a shorter form than the MT.

Masada and the Bar Kokhba caves. These have been discussed in Chapter 4. Their importance is archaeological as well as textual, because their dates are fixed by the Roman campaigns of 73 and 135 CE and do not depend on palaeography. They establish that the consonantal text of the MT existed, in a form accurate to the letter, in the first century CE.

En-Gedi. A scroll burned in the synagogue fire at En-Gedi around 600 CE was excavated in 1970 as a lump of charcoal. In 2016 a team led by Brent Seales scanned it by micro-computed tomography and unrolled it digitally. It contains the opening of Leviticus. Radiocarbon dating gives the third or fourth century CE, and palaeography suggests the first or second. In the eighteen lines recovered, the consonants and the paragraph breaks are exactly those of the medieval MT (Seales et al. 2016; Segal et al. 2016). It is the earliest Torah scroll found in a synagogue ark, and it falls in the middle of the otherwise silent centuries.

The Greek Minor Prophets scroll. In 2021 the Israel Antiquities Authority announced the recovery of further fragments of this scroll, from Zechariah and Nahum, in the Cave of Horror in Nahal Hever. They were the first biblical manuscript fragments found in a controlled excavation in the Judaean Desert in about sixty years. The scroll shows Jews around the turn of the era correcting their Greek Bible toward the proto-Masoretic Hebrew, which is evidence that this Hebrew text already carried special authority.

7.2 Finds that complicate the picture

The Qumran scrolls themselves are the principal evidence against a single fixed text before 70 CE, as Chapters 4 and 6 have shown.

The Nash Papyrus, acquired in Egypt in 1902, combines the Ten Commandments with the Shema. Its Decalogue mixes the wording of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 and places adultery before murder, as the LXX and several New Testament passages do (Luke 18:20; Rom 13:9). It shows that the liturgical text known to Egyptian Jews in the second century BCE was not the MT.

Spelling and script. Hebrew inscriptions from before the exile, such as the Siloam tunnel inscription and the Lachish and Arad letters, are written in the paleo-Hebrew script with very few vowel letters. The MT is written in the Aramaic square script with many vowel letters. Any pre-exilic composition in the Bible has therefore been transcribed into a new alphabet and respelled at least once. The process left traces, among them confusions between letters that look alike in one script but not in the other.

Elephantine. The papyri of the Jewish military colony at Elephantine in Upper Egypt, from the fifth century BCE, include letters, contracts, and a directive of 419 BCE about the Festival of Unleavened Bread. They include no biblical text and never cite the Torah, and the community maintained its own temple, which Deuteronomy would forbid. This is an argument from silence, and its bearing on the date of the Pentateuch is disputed. It does suggest that the written Torah was not yet the governing authority for every Jewish community of that century.

Mount Gerizim. Yitzhak Magen's excavations showed that a Samaritan sacred precinct stood on Gerizim from the mid-fifth century BCE. At Deuteronomy 27:4 the MT commands an altar on Mount Ebal, and the Samaritan Pentateuch reads Gerizim. The Samaritan reading is supported by the Old Latin and by a Greek papyrus, and it is no longer assumed to be a sectarian change. Some scholars now think the MT's “Ebal” is the secondary, anti-Samaritan reading.

Kuntillet 'Ajrud. Inscriptions of about 800 BCE from this site in the Sinai invoke “Yahweh and his asherah”. They illustrate the religious world in which the older reading of Deuteronomy 32:8, with its divine council, was at home, and why later scribes preferred to change it.

7.3 Cautions

Two recent episodes call for caution. Around 2002 a number of “Dead Sea Scroll” fragments appeared on the antiquities market and were bought by collectors and institutions. Studies published from 2017 onward showed that many are modern forgeries, and in 2020 the Museum of the Bible announced that all sixteen of its fragments were fake (Davis et al. 2017). Unprovenanced fragments should carry no weight in textual argument. Second, a small folded lead object from Mount Ebal was announced in 2022, and published in 2023, as a Late Bronze Age curse inscription naming Yahweh. Epigraphers have widely questioned whether it bears any writing at all. Until the claim is independently confirmed it cannot be used as evidence.

Chapter 8. Is the Text Inerrant?

8.1 What the claim means

“Inerrancy” is used in at least three senses, and they must be kept apart.

- *Inerrancy of a manuscript or edition:* that some existing text, such as the Leningrad Codex or the Masoretic tradition as a whole, contains no errors of transmission.
- *Inerrancy of the autographs:* that the original documents were without error, although every copy may contain mistakes. This is the position of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978), whose Article X applies inspiration “strictly speaking” only to the autographic text.
- *Infallibility of the message:* that Scripture reliably teaches what it intends to teach about God and conduct, whatever the state of its wording.

Textual criticism can test the first directly. It can speak to the second only indirectly, and the third lies outside its competence.

8.2 The verdict on the transmitted text

In the first sense the Masoretic Text is not inerrant, and the evidence is of a kind that does not depend on any outside witness.

- The MT disagrees with itself in parallel passages. Ahaziah is 22 at his accession in 2 Kings 8:26 and 42 in 2 Chronicles 22:2. Elhanan kills Goliath in 2 Samuel 21:19 and kills Goliath's brother in 1 Chronicles 20:5. The same poem appears as 2 Samuel 22 and as Psalm 18 with dozens of small differences.
- The MT contains sentences that are defective as they stand. 1 Samuel 13:1 says, literally, that Saul was a year old when he became king and reigned two years. Genesis 4:8 says “Cain said to his brother Abel” and gives no words.
- The MT lacks text that its own structure requires, such as the *nun* verse of Psalm 145.
- The Masoretic manuscripts differ among themselves, as in the differences between the Aleppo and Leningrad codices and the hundreds of Ketiv-Qere notes.
- The tradition records deliberate changes: the eighteen corrections of the scribes, and the suspended *nun* of Judges 18:30.

To these the ancient witnesses add confirmed cases of omission (1 Sam 14:41), theological alteration (Deut 32:8), and editorial expansion (Jeremiah). None of this is controversial among textual critics of any confession. Conservative scholars who defend inerrancy do so in the second sense and accept these as copying errors (Gentry 2009; Brotzman and Tully 2016).

8.3 The problem of the autograph

The doctrine of inerrant autographs assumes that each book had an autograph: one finished original from which all copies descend. For some books that assumption is reasonable. For others the evidence of the scrolls is against it. If Jeremiah circulated in a shorter edition and then in a longer one, each used as Scripture, it is not obvious which is the autograph. Believers who hold that the earlier form is the original must accept that the LXX preserves it better than the MT. Those who hold that the final Masoretic form is the inspired one must grant that inspiration extended to anonymous later editors. Ulrich's conclusion is that composition and transmission overlapped, and that there was no moment at which a book was complete and afterwards only copied (Ulrich 2015). Tov is more cautious and still speaks of an original text, or a series of determinative originals, as the goal of textual criticism, while granting that it cannot always be reached (Tov 2022).

8.4 The other side: how good the text is

The limits of the criticism should be stated with equal clarity. The great majority of differences among the witnesses are matters of spelling, word order, and synonym, and they affect no statement of fact or doctrine. The proto-Masoretic text was copied with a discipline that has few parallels in the ancient world. The Ketef Hinnom plaques, the Masada fragments, and the En-Gedi scroll each show continuity of wording across very long periods. Peter Gentry and others have argued, with some force, that the pluriformity at Qumran is overstated when all variants are counted alike, and that many LXX differences are translational and do not reflect a different Hebrew text (Gentry 2009). A reader of the Leningrad Codex is reading, with small exceptions, what a reader in the Jerusalem of Herod's time read.

8.5 Assessment

My own judgment, which the reader is free to weigh against the evidence above, is as follows. As a claim about any text we possess, inerrancy is false, and the Masoretes knew that their text

had difficulties, because they annotated them. As a claim about autographs, it cannot be tested, and for several books it rests on a model of authorship that the manuscripts do not support. The claim that the Hebrew Bible has been transmitted with exceptional fidelity is true and is supported by archaeology. The traditional Jewish position has room for this. Maimonides' principle that the Torah in our hands is the Torah given to Moses stands beside the Talmud's frank admission that the scribes were no longer certain of every spelling. The first is a statement of faith. The second is a statement about manuscripts, and it was recorded by the same tradition.

Chapter 9. The Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, and the Greek New Testament

9.1 Three different kinds of text

The three bodies of text are different in kind. The MT is a Hebrew text in a continuous Hebrew tradition. The LXX is a translation, made from Hebrew scrolls that sometimes differed from the proto-MT, by translators whose methods ranged from word-for-word to paraphrase. The New Testament is a collection of original Greek compositions from the first century CE whose authors quote the Jewish Scriptures some 300 times, in most cases from a Greek version.

9.2 How the New Testament quotes the Old

Table 5. Old Testament quotations in the New Testament where the MT and LXX differ

New Testament	Source	Reading in NA28	Relation to MT and LXX
Matt 1:23	Isa 7:14	*hē parthenos*, “the virgin”	Follows LXX; MT has *'almah*, “young woman”
Heb 10:5	Ps 40:6 (LXX 39:7)	“a body you prepared for me”	Follows LXX; MT: “my ears you have opened”
Acts 7:14	Gen 46:27; Exod 1:5	Seventy-five persons	Follows LXX (and 4QExod^{b}); MT: seventy
Acts 15:16–18	Amos 9:11–12	“that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord”	Follows LXX; MT: “that they may possess the remnant of Edom”
Heb 1:6	Deut 32:43	“Let all God's angels worship him”	Follows LXX; the line is absent from MT and partly attested in 4QDeut^{q}
Luke 4:18	Isa 61:1	“recovery of sight for the blind”	Follows LXX; MT: release for the prisoners
Matt 2:15	Hos 11:1	“Out of Egypt I called my son”	Follows the Hebrew; LXX: “his children”
John 19:37	Zech 12:10	“the one they have pierced”	Follows the Hebrew; LXX: “because they mocked”
Matt 8:17	Isa 53:4	“He took up our infirmities”	Closer to the Hebrew than to LXX (“bears our sins”)

The first six rows show the dominant pattern. The New Testament authors wrote in Greek for Greek-speaking readers and quoted the Bible their readers knew. In Acts 15 the difference matters to the argument. James quotes Amos to show that Gentiles may seek the Lord. The Hebrew of Amos speaks of Israel possessing Edom. The Greek translator read *yidreshu* (“seek”) for *yireshu* (“possess”) and *'adam* (“mankind”) for *'edom*, a difference of one letter and one set

of vowels in each word. In Hebrews 10 the argument that Christ offered his body depends on the Greek of the psalm.

The last three rows show that the pattern has exceptions. Matthew's use of Hosea 11:1 depends on the Hebrew “my son” and would not work from the Septuagint. The New Testament authors therefore drew on more than one form of the text, as the Qumran scribes did. The textual plurality of the first century is visible in the New Testament itself.

9.3 Why the three differ

Different Hebrew sources. Some differences go back to different Hebrew scrolls. The 75 descendants of Jacob, the longer Deuteronomy 32:43, and the shorter Jeremiah all existed in Hebrew, as the scrolls show.

Vocalization. The translators read unpointed consonants. In Genesis 47:31 the consonants *mth* can be read *mittah*, “bed”, as the MT has it, or *matteh*, “staff”, as the Greek translator read, and Hebrews 11:21 follows the Greek. Neither reading alters a letter.

Translation and interpretation. Rendering *'almah* by *parthenos* (παρθένος) in Isaiah 7:14 is a translator's choice. The Hebrew word (עלמה) means a young woman of marriageable age. The Greek word usually, though not always, means a virgin. The Great Isaiah Scroll confirms that the Hebrew was *'almah*. The difference lies in the translation, and Matthew cites the translation.

Separate community histories. After 70 CE rabbinic Judaism transmitted the proto-Masoretic Hebrew text exclusively and came to regard the Septuagint with reserve; the newer Greek versions of Aquila and others were made to match the Hebrew. The church, by then largely Gentile and Greek-speaking, kept the Septuagint as its Old Testament. By the mid-second century the wording itself was a matter of dispute: Justin Martyr accuses Jewish teachers of removing passages from Scripture (*Dialogue with Trypho* 71–73), and his opponent would have said that Justin's Greek contained things the Hebrew never had. When Jerome translated the Old Testament into Latin from the Hebrew between about 390 and 405, appealing to the *Hebraica veritas*, Augustine objected that this would divide the Latin churches from the Greek (Augustine, *Epistle* 71). The Western churches eventually followed Jerome, and the Eastern churches kept the Septuagint, as they do today.

Christian transmission of the Greek. The Septuagint manuscripts were copied by Christians, and occasionally the New Testament influenced them. In Romans 3:13–18 Paul strings together several Old Testament passages after quoting Psalm 14. Some Septuagint manuscripts then insert the whole string into Psalm 14 (LXX Psalm 13), a case of the quotation rewriting its source.

9.4 Two disciplines compared

The textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible and that of the Greek New Testament differ because the evidence differs. Tov devotes an appendix of his fourth edition to the comparison.

Table 6. Textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible and of the Greek New Testament

Aspect	Hebrew Bible	Greek New Testament
Period of composition	Many centuries; some books edited in stages	About fifty to seventy years; each book largely a single composition
Earliest manuscripts	Fragments from the 3rd century BCE; centuries after composition for most books	Papyri from the 2nd century CE; within a century or so of composition
Number of witnesses in the original language	Some 250 ancient scrolls, mostly fragmentary; thousands of medieval manuscripts of one tradition	About 5,700 Greek manuscripts of varied text
Role of translations	Central: the LXX is often the main witness to a variant Hebrew text	Secondary
Standard edition	Diplomatic: one manuscript (Leningrad) with apparatus (BHS, BHQ)	Eclectic: a reconstructed text (NA28, UBS5)
Stated goal	Disputed: an original text, a final edition, or several editions	The initial text (*Ausgangstext*) from which the surviving tradition descends
Current method	Case-by-case evaluation; debate over eclectic editing	Reasoned eclecticism; the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method in recent editions

In plain terms, the New Testament has many early copies that differ in many small ways, so its editors compare them and reconstruct the text. The Hebrew Bible has one superbly controlled tradition and a scattering of older fragments and translations that sometimes point elsewhere. Its editors therefore print the one tradition and note the alternatives. Neither discipline claims to print an inerrant text.

9.5 Two Bibles and two communities

Some writers treat the divergence between the Hebrew and Greek Bibles as a cause of the separation between Judaism and Christianity. The evidence supports a more limited claim. The textual plurality predates Christianity. It is a Jewish phenomenon of the Second Temple period, and the earliest Christians inherited one of its forms. The separation of the communities had other causes, chiefly the claims made about Jesus and the admission of Gentiles without the Law. Once the communities were separate, each transmitted one textual form exclusively, and the difference in texts then became a marker and an instrument of the division, as Justin's *Dialogue* shows. The texts reinforced a division they did not create. Christian arguments built on distinctively Greek readings (Isaiah 7:14, Psalm 40:6, Amos 9:12) could not be accepted by readers of the Hebrew, and to that extent the two Bibles did keep the two communities apart.

Chapter 10. Conclusions

The findings of this study can be stated briefly.

- The consonantal text of the MT is ancient. It is attested in substance from the second century BCE and to the letter from the first century CE. The Aleppo and Leningrad codices are faithful medieval copies of it and differ from each other only in minutiae.
- The proto-Masoretic text was one of several forms of Scripture in use before 70 CE. The Qumran scrolls show a pluriform text, and for books such as Jeremiah they show more than one literary edition.
- The Septuagint is often a witness to a real Hebrew text that differed from the proto-MT. The scrolls have confirmed this in specific passages. They have not shown that the LXX is generally superior, and in many passages they support the MT.
- Archaeology supports the antiquity and stability of the Masoretic wording (Ketef Hinnom, Masada, Murabba'at, En-Gedi). It also shows that the text's script and spelling were updated, and that not all ancient Jewish communities read the same text or, in the fifth century BCE, any written Torah at all.
- The MT is not inerrant as a transmitted text. It contains errors of omission, internal inconsistencies, and deliberate corrections, and its own tradition records many of them. It is nonetheless the most carefully preserved text to survive from the ancient Near East.
- The MT, the LXX, and the Old Testament quotations of the Greek New Testament differ because of different Hebrew sources, different vocalizations, translation technique, and the separate histories of the synagogue and the church. The New Testament mostly follows the Greek and sometimes the Hebrew.

The practical consequence for the student of Scripture is that no single witness should be read alone. The MT is the proper base text. The Septuagint and the scrolls are its necessary controls. Modern translations such as the NIV already work this way, adopting readings from the scrolls and the versions at places such as 1 Samuel 14:41, Psalm 145:13, and Isaiah 53:11, and recording the evidence in their notes. Crawford's description of the Second Temple scribes applies to the tradition as a whole: they handed on what they received, and in doing so they also interpreted it. The task of textual criticism is to tell the two activities apart where the evidence allows.

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