The History and Features of the Hebrew Bible

by
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THE ANCIENT HEBREW TEXT

As is well-known, no autographs from the Hebrew Bible have survived (documents actually penned by biblical writers). Rather, contemporary scholars work from ancient copies (manuscripts) produced by later scribes, which have been preserved over the centuries. The Jews placed a high value on the faithful transmission of the text, but their practice was to use a text until thoroughly worn, make a fresh copy, and then reverently inter the old text in a geniza (a hidden repository for discarded sacred texts). Occasionally, the contents of a geniza are discovered by accident, such as in the Cairo Geniza, but this is more the exception than the norm. Suffice it to say that no document from the Hebrew Bible currently has been discovered, either in whole or in part, from earlier than the Babylonian exile. Hence, the following survey of the ancient Hebrew text will work backwards from our modern printed editions to the various earlier copies.

Codices from the Medieval Period

A printed edition of the Hebrew Bible appeared in Venice in AD 1518, the *Biblica rabbinica* edited by the Jewish scholar Jacob ben Chayyim, and this text of the Hebrew Bible became the Textus Receptus for nearly all Hebrew Bibles for four centuries until the modern period. This text underlies the earlier translations of the English Old Testament (William Tyndale, KJV, etc.). However, subsequently it has been determined that this text had many over-refinements and modifications made through the centuries, and today it is relegated to a minor role.

Contemporary scholars usually work from the Biblica Hebraica (currently in its 5th edition, though a further revised edition is currently in process). This modern printed edition of the Hebrew Bible is based on the Leningrad Codex,[1] known by the designation "L" and dated to AD 1008 or 1009. This is a pointed text, and a scribe noted at its end that it was equipped with vowels from manuscripts as corrected and annotated by Aaron ben Moses ben Asher from the Masoretic Tradition.[2] This text is widely recognized as the best available, and it is the world's oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible (currently housed in the Russian National Library).

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[1] The "codex" (a book with pages) was developed in the early Christian centuries, and unlike a scroll, which generally has writing only on one side, both sides of the pages in a codex can be used for writing.

[2] The Masoretes were a scribal dynasty active from about AD 500 to about AD 1000. Their fixing of the text by a system of counting verses, words and letters and other techniques established what we call the Masoretic Tradition.

A facsimile edition was made available in 1998.[3]

The only other "complete" Hebrew Bible from about the same period is the Aleppo Codex, known as "A", which was produced nearly a century earlier than the Leningrad Codex (ca. AD 930). Like the Leningrad Codex, the Aleppo Codex also was produced by the Ben Asher scribal family. However, this codex is currently fragmented, since it was damaged by fire in the 1947 riots in Aleppo, and the earliest portion of the text now available begins in Deuteronomy 28:17. Other pages are also missing in various parts of the text. Various other Hebrew manuscripts also exist from the Medieval Period, some with divergent vowel systems, some containing only portions of the Hebrew Bible, some preserved by synagogues, some in the form of scrolls and others as codices.

Going back into the period of the early centuries of Christianity, two other textual resources should be mentioned, Origen's *Hexapla* and the Samaritan Pentateuch. Origen produced a six-columned edition of Hebrew and Greek texts and versions, including a transliteration[4] of the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible into Greek letters. This work is especially helpful for discerning the pronunciation of Hebrew during his time, especially since it antedates by several centuries the finalization of the Hebrew vowel-pointing system. The Samaritan Pentateuch, a Hebrew text of the Torah produced by the offshoot Samaritans, is preserved in texts from the 11th century and later, the earliest being a copy kept by the Samaritan community at Nablus in Palestine. According to the Samaritan tradition, this text was composed 13 years after Joshua's invasion of Canaan, though modern scholars agree that it cannot be earlier than ca. 5th century BC and probably dating to the end of the 2nd century BC.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

Without doubt, the most important archaeological discovery in recent times bearing directly upon the text of the Bible is the collection of manuscripts popularly called the Dead Sea Scrolls, dating to as early as the 2nd century BC and rediscovered in the middle of the last century. While the various scrolls contain more materials than just biblical ones, the biblical materials are the ones important for the text of the Old Testament. It should be understood that these scrolls are largely fragmented, with faded ink, insect destruction, biodegrading and so forth. Hence, even though they push back the date of our Old Testament text a millennium earlier than the standard Masoretic Text, they cannot stand as the primary text from which

[3] David N. Freedman, gen. ed., *The Leningrad Codex* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans and Brill, 1998).

[4] A transliteration is not a translation, but a reproduction of the phonetic sounds of one language into the alphabetic letters of a second language.

translation work must proceed.

Obviously, with the oldest copies of the Hebrew Text only dating back about a thousand years, a question has always lurked in the background: just how accurate was the transmission of this text through the many centuries? To be sure, the traditional Jewish opinion, going back at least to the time of Flavius Josephus in the 1st century, was that the Hebrew text had been transmitted through the years without change.[5] Nevertheless, it was apparent that some discrepancies existed, even among medieval Jewish manuscripts. To complicate matters further, the ancient origin and development of the Hebrew language itself was a factor. Excavated ancient Hebrew inscriptions show variations in the development of the language long before the time of Jesus.[6] Furthermore, the ancient text was consonantal (i.e., it had no written vocalization). Jewish scholars began adding vowel points in the 5th century AD, but their work was not standardized until about the 10th century AD. In short, the Hebrew Text from which Bible translators worked for translating all the major English Versions until the 20th century dated only to about 1000 AD. There was no way to adequately answer the question about the accuracy of transmission other than on the basis of Jewish tradition.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls changed this picture radically. The biblical fragments from Qumran were a thousand years earlier than the oldest copies of the Masoretic Text. Now, the medieval Jewish text of the 11th century could be compared to Jewish texts of the 1st century and even earlier. To be sure, the Dead Sea Scrolls were not complete texts of the Hebrew Bible. While they contained portions of every book in the Old Testament except Esther, most of these scrolls had suffered significant deterioration through the centuries. Some, like 1QIsa[a], were complete.[7] Others were fragmented, and the fragments ranged from scrolls containing several complete chapters of biblical books to pieces with only a few alphabetic letters. Some of these fragments were pieced together like a jigsaw puzzle to form larger reconstructed texts, but others were isolated (or at least currently have not been reconstructed). Still, the roughly 170 manuscripts of biblical texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls made possible new avenues of textual criticism. All the scrolls date to between about 250 BC and AD 68.

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[5] "...for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them," *Contra Apion* 1.8.

[6] The most apparent variation is in the style of the letters themselves. Comparisons of the Gezer Calendar, the Stele of Mesha and the Siloam Inscription, all dating to before the exile, are cases in point, cf. *IDB* (1962) 1.89-91. The so-called "square text" of modern Hebrew is much later. To follow the development of the Hebrew Text, see F. Cross, "The Text Behind the Text of the Hebrew Bible," *BR* (Summer 1985), pp. 12-25 and (Fall 1985), pp. 26-29, 33-35.

[7] 1QIsa[a] contained all 66 chapters of Isaiah, and barring a few lines broken off from the bottoms of a few columns, the complete text survived.

Several things became immediately clear. First, at the time the Qumran scrolls were copied, there was no single form of the Old Testament text regarded as absolutely authoritative for the community. This was apparent since there were textual variants between different Qumran scrolls of the same biblical book. While by the end of the 1st century AD scholars can detect an authoritative recension of the Hebrew Bible that is the ancestor of the Masoretic Text, the discoveries at Qumran reveals other text types.[8] Further, the biblical texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls contain variants not found in the Masoretic Text at all.[9]

At the same time, it was equally clear that the agreement between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic Text was extensive. To a large degree, the Dead Sea Scrolls have confirmed the basic accuracy of the medieval Masoretic Text. There are many spelling differences, but the differences are largely insignificant for the meaning of the texts. Also, the Qumran scrolls demonstrate that the Septuagint[10] was not a careless translation (some had so accused it), and Hebrew precedents were found for a number of variants between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint.[11]

Today, scholars still use the Masoretic Text as the foundation for biblical translation, and rightfully so, since it is a complete text including all the books of the Hebrew Bible. However, translators sometimes are willing to depart from the Masoretic Text by following Dead Sea Scrolls texts, especially if the Dead Sea Scrolls agree with other ancient versions over against the Masoretic Text.

Biblical Hebrew

THE PUBLISHED HEBREW BIBLE

Our objective in studying biblical Hebrew is to be able to read first-hand the Hebrew Bible (for Christians, the Hebrew Old Testament). The availability of the published Hebrew Bible has gone through a lengthy history. Prior to the invention of printing (15th century), all Hebrew texts of the Bible were necessarily copied by hand, a slow, painstaking process. With the advent of printing, a much wider availability was possible.

The Early Printed Hebrew Bibles

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[8] F. Cross, *BR* (Summer 1985), p. 19.

[9] The Dead Sea Scrolls texts having the most striking variations from the Masoretic Text are Exodus, Samuel, Jeremiah and Daniel, cf. J. Fitzmyer, S. J., *Responses to 101 Questions on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Paulist, 1992), p. 41.

[10] The Septuagint (LXX) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible from ca. 250 BC.

[11] A case in point is the Book of Jeremiah. The form of Jeremiah is about one eighth shorter in the Septuagint than in the Masoretic Text. However, 4QJer[b] attests to a shorter recension of Jeremiah in Hebrew as well.

The first printed edition of any portion of the Hebrew Bible first appeared in Bologna in 1477 with the Psalms, and it was followed up the next year, 1478, with a complete Old Testament. This published edition was based on a limited number of manuscripts (some no longer extant). By 1518, a *Biblia rabbinica* was published in Venice, a Hebrew Bible with Jewish commentary. In 1524/25 a second rabbinic Bible edited by Jacob ben Chayyim was published, again based on a limited number of manuscripts. For better or worse, it became the *de facto* text for the translation of nearly all printed Bibles until relatively recently. Its dominance for four centuries was comparable to the *Textus Receptus* for the Greek New Testament. This was the text used by Tyndale and the translators of the King James Version. Still, while there is no doubt that this published text was an importance milestone, it also contained some weaknesses. Over the previous centuries, the Hebrew text had undergone various modifications and over-refinements, and these now became standardized.

The Masoretic Text

To properly understand the process of the Hebrew Bible's publication, it is necessary to understand what is now known as the Masoretic Text. The Masoretic Text refers to a Hebrew biblical text with vowel-pointing, something the original writings of the biblical authors did not have. The original Hebrew text has consonants only, but a consonantal text remained viable only so long as Hebrew was a spoken language. With invention of the printing press, the text of the Hebrew Bible would now be available to a wide range of readers whether or not it was read aloud. Early on, where some words might be ambiguous, certain "vowels-letters" (*waws* and *yodhs*) had been added to make the reading clear (the *mater lexionis*). Eventually, this use was extended to other words, and by the 7th century AD, the Masoretes (lit., "transmitters", Jewish families of scribes) began to produce the beginnings of a system of vowel-signs, punctuation and accents with small dots and dashes under, over or within the consonants of the Hebrew Bible. In time, three such systems of vocalization were produced, respectively called Babylonian, Palestinian and Tiberian, the latter of which eventually supplanted the other two. The purpose of the Masoretes was to transmit the text unchanged to future generations, just as they had received it. Where they felt the text might be corrected or where there were varying textual traditions, they provided notes to the effect in the margin. They used every imaginable safeguard to ensure an accurate transmission. The marginal notes of the Masortes, called the Masorah, were later expanded into lists at the tops or bottoms of the pages.[12]

Names known to us from the Masoretic families include Aaron ben Asher (about 930 AD), ben Naphtali (about the same time) and Jacob ben Chayyim (early

[12] For a detailed introduction to the Masorah, see P. Kelly, D. Mynatt and T. Crawford, *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

1500s). The Leningrad Codex (known as L and dated to AD 1009) is considered to be the premier example of this textual tradition, and it is the oldest complete codex of the Hebrew Bible.[13] Modern published versions of the Hebrew Bible rely on the Masoretic Text as the beginning point of all translation.

The Biblia Hebraica

In the modern period, scholars became increasingly aware that a published critical text showing known textual variants was needed for scholarly study. Between 1929 and 1937, scholars in Stuttgart, Germany produced the *Biblia Hebraica*, basing their work on the Leningrad Codex. This text of the Hebrew Bible was considered to be the best available, and it has been reprinted and updated several times, the most recent revision being the 5th and published in 1997.[14] This *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* is currently the most widely used published Hebrew Bible.[15] Its footnotes include the textual variants of various other ancient Hebrew texts,[16] the Greek Septuagint,[17] the Dead Sea Scrolls,[18] the Aramaic Targums,[19] Aquila,[20]

[13] Actual facsimile copies of each page are now available in *The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, USA/Cambridge, United Kingdom; Brill: Leiden/New York/Koln).

[14] As of this writing, a further major revision is in process, the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, and estimated to be completed by 2020.

[15] Karl Elliger, Willhelm Rudolph and Willhelm Rudolph, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006).

[16] At present, about 200 manuscripts are known from the ancient period (i.e., prior to AD 135 and the end of the 2nd Jewish Revolt), including the scrolls from Qumran, the caves in the Wadi Murabba'at, the caves at Nahal Hever and the fortress at Masada.

[17] A tradition preserved in the 2nd century BC *Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates* holds that in about 250 BC some 70 (or 72) Jewish scholars worked to translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek, the *lingua franca* of the Hellenistic world. The term *Septuagint* (Latin for 70) reflects this number. While the legendary character of parts of this tradition seems apparent, the fact remains that the Hebrew Bible was indeed translated into Greek at about this time, whatever the historical details. Today, there still exist some 1800 LXX manuscripts, some on papyrus and some on parchment. Printed editions of the LXX begin in 1518 (Venice) and 1521 (Spain).

[18] Also called the Qumran scrolls and dating from about 200 BC until not later than AD 73 (the fall of Masada), these texts include portions of every book in the Hebrew Bible except Esther. The original discoveries were made in 1947 at Qumran in the Judean desert near the Dead Sea. For an English translation of the biblical fragments of the Dead Seas Scrolls, see Martin Abegg, Jr., Peter Flint and Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999).

[19] Targums are Aramaic translations or paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible used in the ancient synagogues before and during the time of Jesus.

[20] In about AD 130, a Jewish proselyte from Pontus produced a Greek rendering of the Hebrew Bible in which he attempted to match each Hebrew verbal stem with a single Greek equivalent. His work became the accepted Greek version of the Old Testament in the later Roman and Byzantine Periods, but it has only survived in fragments.

Symmachus,[21] Theodotion,[22] Origen,[23] Lucian of Antioch,[24] the Samaritan Pentateuch[25] and various early versions in other languages.[26] Various attempts have been made to produce other critical editions of the Hebrew Bible, but all have fallen short of the *Biblia Hebraica*, which is now the standard text used by scholars world-wide.

Interlinears

Many beginning Hebrew students come to rely on interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testaments. An interlinear is a text in one language that features a translation written underneath or alongside it in a second language.

After the time of Wyclif and Tyndale, various Polyglot Bibles were printed, featuring the Old and/or New Testaments in several languages. One of the most important was the Complutensian Polyglot published in 1514. Alongside the Hebrew text in the first column, it included additional columns of the Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate, among others. Others, such as the Antwerp Polyglot, the Paris Polyglot and the London Polglot, followed over the next couple of centuries.

Today, students of the Hebrew Bible have at their disposal several interlinear Old Testaments, including John R. Kohlenberger III, *The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament*, 4 vols. or 1 vol. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), which is the one most widely used (uses the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* and available with either the NIV or the ESV versions), and Jay P. Green, Sr., *The Interlinear Bible*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), based on a Masoretic Text first published in 1866 by the British & Foreign Bible Society. In addition, there is available an interlinear Septuagint by Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (rpt. 1851 Grand Rapids: Zondervan), printed in two columns using the KJV and the LXX.

On-Line Editions

Several on-line editions of the Hebrew Bible and/or Interlinear Bibles are also

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[21] Near the close of the 2nd century AD, Symmachus produced a careful Greek rendering of the Hebrew Bible. It survives only in Origen's Hexapla.

[22] Around the same time as Aquila (Origen says it was prior to Aquila), Theodotion, a Jewish proselyte, also produced a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, often transliterating Hebrew words. His work also survives in Origen's Hexapla.

[23] Origen's *Hexapla Biblia* was a compilation of Hebrew and Greek sources for the study of the Old Testament text. His sources were arranged in six columns: 1) Hebrew consonantal text, 2) Hebrew transliterated into Greek, 3) Aquila, 4) Symmachus, 5) the traditional LXX, and 6) Theodotion.

[24] In about AD 396, Jerome indicated that in his day there were three commonly received textual traditions of the LXX, one from Egypt, one from Caesarea and one from the work of one Lucian (died in AD 312). The text of Lucian seems closely related the text used by Flavius Josephus near the end of the 1st century AD.

[25] The Samaritan Pentateuch is an early ancient text of the Torah preserved by the Samaritans and dating to about the 13th century AD.

[26] Syriac, Latin, Coptic, Ethiopic and Armenian

available. These include: "The Interlinear Bible" (http://biblehub.com/interlinear), which is keyed to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*; "Hebrew Interlinear Bible" (http://www.scripture4all.org); "The Complete Tanach" (http://chabad.org), with commentary by the esteemed Jewish Rabbi Rashi; "Without Vowels Project" (http://withoutvowels.org), this edition being a consonantal text only. Bear in mind that the order of the books in the Jewish Bible is different than for the Christian Old Testament, though the biblical material is the same.

Biblical Hebrew Grammars
(an abbreviated survey)

A grammar is a linguistic analysis of the properties, rules and conventions of a given language. It goes without saying that languages are oral, but it is important to recognize that they are oral before they are written. This means that grammars are written, not in order to create language, but in order to record the conventions of speech that already exist in a given language. Grammars are always important for studying language, but for ancient languages, especially, they are indispensable for explaining features and syntactical features that modern English speakers find difficult. Further, it must be acknowledged that ancient versus modern forms of language, like biblical Hebrew and its modern counterpart in Israel, are some considerable distance apart from each other. We find a similar distance between Old English, Middle English and Modern English. (It generally is a surprise to most people to discover that Shakespeare wrote in modern English, but once one goes back even earlier, the older forms of English are nearly indecipherable.)

It should be borne in mind, therefore, that Hebrew grammars are not "authoritative" in the strict sense of the word, even though they explain how the ancient language works. This is the case precisely because no modern person actually speaks ancient Hebrew. What a Hebrew grammar attempts to do, then, is describe and explain the features of biblical Hebrew based on the Hebrew Bible itself, using clues and patterns within the text, clues drawn from other cognate languages, and so forth.

Essentially, there are two types of Hebrew grammars, introductory grammars and advanced grammars.

Introductory Grammars

Introductory grammars present the basics of biblical Hebrew, and the beginning student must start here. The books in the Hebrew Bible are written in more than a single genre, though narrative is the one most widely used. It is probably fair to say that introductory grammars primarily address narrative prose, not Hebrew poetry or the other genres, but nonetheless, this is the place to start. They explore

writing, pronunciation and the major language components of nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions and syntax. Here, the student learns basic vocabulary, verbal tenses, noun conjugations and all the other formal aspects of the language. Mastering an introductory grammar is no small task, but the student should be advised that while this will enable him/her to read basic narrative texts, the study of biblical Hebrew will be ongoing. A number of introductory grammars are available, including:

Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Scribners, 1971).

C. L. Seow, *Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995).

Allen Ross, *Introducing Biblical Hebrew and Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

Duane Garret and Jason S. DeRouchie, *A Modern Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (B&H Books, 2009).

Miles Van Pelt and Gary Practico, *Learn Biblical Hebrew Pack* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

All of the above do essentially the same thing, so the question, "Which is the best?" is generally subjective and usually answered by, "The one I used when I was in university or seminary." I am no exception, and generally I follow Lambdin's grammar.

Advanced Grammars

Advanced grammars are designed for those who already know basic biblical Hebrew. They are designed, not to teach grammar, but to address unusual or difficult problems in the text that generally are not covered in basic grammars. In all likelihood, advanced Hebrew grammars will provide you with more information than you will ever need, and some can be difficult because of their detail and jargon. Following are three of the more important ones:

E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius Hebrew Grammar* (Dover Language Guides). Though two centuries old, this work has long been the definitive one for advanced biblical Hebrew.

Paul Jouon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Subsidia Biblica, 2011). Rivals Gesenius in importance.

Bruce Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Eisenbrauns, 1990). Not as detailed as the previous two grammars, this work is more readable and primarily addresses syntactical features.

CONCORDANCES
(an abbreviated survey)

Concordances are verbal indices of the Bible. They list biblical words alphabetically, followed by the biblical passages where these words can be found. Originally invented by Dominican Friars, who based their early concordances on the Latin Vulgate, the first concordance was completed in AD 1230. For the English Bible, concordances began to be produced in the mid-16th century in consonance with the advance of English Bible translation. In these early days prior to the use of computers, the production of a concordance to any work as large as the Bible was no small undertaking! Today, digital databases have made concordances a much simpler task.

Cruden's Complete Concordance

The concordance produced by Alexander Cruden, first published in 1738 for the King James Version of the Bible, is almost certainly the most important, having passed through various editions, abridgements and reprintings. Though titled a "complete" concordance, it is not fully complete, since it omits some extremely common entries that are unlikely to be helpful. Still, it contains most words in the KJV.

Other English Bible Concordances

With the proliferation of modern English translations, other concordances have become available which are translation-specific. The most important of these are:

The NIV Complete Concordance (Zondervan). Just as Cruden did for the KJV of the Bible, this concordance lists the major words in the *New International Version* of the Bible, currently the most widely used English translation.

Catholic Bible Concordance for the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition. Since the final version of the RSV also contains the apocryphal books, and is therefore the only current English version equally usable by all three major branches of the Christian church (Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant), this concordance lists the words in both the Old and New Testaments as well as the deuterocanonical books.

English Concordances Keyed to Hebrew and Greek Words

Two other concordances based on the KJV of the Bible have become widely known. In both, the English words are linked to the underlying Hebrew and Greek words in the original text. This is possible because the KJV falls under the category of a "word-for-word" translation (formal equivalence). Of course, some words in English, which are present in order to make acceptable English syntax in translation, will not be found, since there is no underlying Hebrew or Greek equivalent, but on the whole, most English words have a Hebrew or Greek equivalent. The two widely

known such concordances are:

Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible. Produced by Robert Young in the 1880s, this concordance was the product of many years work. It lists the words of the KJV in alphabetical order, and linked to each entry is the Hebrew or Greek word and its transliteration in English.

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. Similar to Young's work, James Strong also produced a KJV concordance in the late 19th century but with a different method of linking the English words to the original languages. Strong follows each English word with a numerical code that references an appended dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words.

With the advent of contemporary English translations in the modern period, two other concordances are noteworthy that link the English words to their underlying Hebrew and Greek equivalents. These are also translation specific, which is to say, they function only for a particular English version. They are:

New American Standard Concordance of the Bible. Following the format of Strong's concordance, this concordance lists the words in the *New American Standard Bible* translation. Each word is followed by a numerical code for the dictionaries at the end.

Zondervan NIV Exhaustive Concordance. Following the same format but based on the *New International Version* of the Bible, this concordance not only provides Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries at the end, it also offers a Key for linking the numerical codes in Strong's Concordance with those in the NIV Concordance.

Concordances in Hebrew

Some concordances have been produced that are especially useful for those who have at least a rudimentary knowledge of either Hebrew or Greek.

The New Englishman's Hebrew/Aramaic Concordance to the Old Testament. Initially produced by George Wigram in 1839 (but revised and edited in later editions), this concordance lists the words of the Hebrew Old Testament, first in Hebrew square text which is then followed by an English transliteration. The lists of biblical citations are all in English, so the person with limited knowledge of Hebrew can follow them easily. This concordance is based on the KJV of the Bible and the underlying *Textus Receptus*, e.g., the Hebrew text available to the translators in 1611.

A Concordance to the Septuagint. The standard concordance to the Hebrew Bible as translated into Greek (the Septuagint) is by Edwin Hatch and Henry Redpath. The listing of words is in Greek, and all the scriptural citations are in Greek. Hence, full knowledge of the NT Greek language is assumed.

Mandelkern's *Concordance of the Bible.* Building on the work of predecessors, Mandelkern produced a concordance based on the ancient Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible in 1896. Use of this concordance requires full knowledge of biblical Hebrew, and all the biblical words listed as well as the scriptural citations are in Hebrew.

Gerhard Lisowsky's *Konkordanz zum Hebraischen Alten Testament.* Published by the German Bible Society (rpt 2010), this concordance is based on the 3rd Edition of Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* and is usable for Hebrew students, since all the entries are in Hebrew (the Introduction is in German). Also, since the *Biblica Hebraica* is based on the Leningrad Codex, it remains in agreement with those using current editions of the Hebrew biblical text in BHL, BHS and BHQ. Use of this concordance requires full knowledge of the Hebrew Bible, and as with Mandelkern above, all the biblical words listed as well as the scriptural citations are in Hebrew.

The above cited works by no means exhaust the various published concordances to the Bible, but these will put the student in touch with some of the more important ones.

HEBREW LEXICONS and WORD STUDIES
(an abbreviated survey)

Lexicons are dictionaries. For the student of biblical Hebrew, several kinds of lexicons exist for English speakers, ranging from the more traditional alphabetical listing of words moving from Hebrew to English to more sophisticated treatments of parsing, word studies and specialized treatments of certain periods of the language.

For Basic Word Definitions

Several lexicons exist for looking up the definitions and usage of Hebrew words along with their various nuances of meaning.

The older standard work for more than a century has been Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), reprinted with small corrections from the 1906 version (and subsequently reissued by Hendrickson Publishers in 1996). The acronym BDB is shorthand for this widely-used scholarly work. Affectionately (or not so affectionately) nicknamed "Slave-driver and Briggs", this tome includes not only all the words in the Hebrew Bible, which is the primary part of the work, but also a shorter section on the biblical words in Aramaic that appear in the books of Daniel and Ezra (though there are two short Aramaic passages in Genesis and

Jeremiah as well). The downside of this work is that the entries are arranged by the roots from which they are derived, hence requiring the user to be familiar with those roots, i.e., for the word מִזְבֵּחַ (= altar) one must look under the root word זָבַח (= sacrifice). However, the most recent issue of this work keys the Hebrew and Aramaic words to the numbering system of *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* for easier usage.

A shorter but very usable lexicon for general translation work is William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). Unlike BDB cited above, the words are all listed in alphabetical order. This shorter work is based on the larger lexicon of Koehler and Baumgartner, which is cited below. Even shorter lexicons are also available, usable primarily for a lighter reading the Hebrew text, such as, the *Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975).

The current standard in the field is the tome of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. M. Richardson (Leiden-Boston-Koln: Brill, 2001) in 3 volumes. No serious translator of texts in the Hebrew Bible can afford to neglect this prodigious work. It aims to bring the best of modern lexical research to the study of the Hebrew Bible, not only addressing the Hebrew and Aramaic words of Scripture, but also their relationship to other cognate languages, such as, Ugaritic, Akkadian, the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

For Analyzing the Inflectional Forms of Biblical Hebrew Words

Every reader of the Hebrew Bible will on occasion encounter forms of words that are not immediately understandable. The standard work in the field has for many years been Benjamin Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (rpt. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004). Containing a short introductory grammatical section on Hebrew forms, this work then lists alphabetically the inflected spelling forms for every word in the Hebrew Bible, followed by its description with respect to number and gender (nouns), person, number and tense and verb type (verbs), and so forth. Because this work is now beyond its original copywrite date and now in the general domain, it has been digitized and can be accessed on the internet in .pdf format.

For internet users, two major software programs are available, Accordance and Logos, both of which contain both the Old and New Testaments in their original languages, along with all the major translations in English and other languages as well as many optional add-ons for various other resources. In passages in the Hebrew Bible, one need only click on the word in the text and a pop-up window will appear analyzing its inflectional forms. These programs are quite sophisticated and may cost several hundreds of dollars (USD).

Free usage (or usage for a nominal donation) is available on certain websites for analyzing inflected words, such as: http://scholarsgateway.com

For Word Studies

Sometimes the student may wish to explore more deeply the background and usage of some particular Hebrew word. Several resources are available, the most complete being the magisterial *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) in fifteen volumes. This collection, generally abbreviated as TDOT, typically discusses not only the various nuances of each entry, but also early versions and etymology as well as homonyms, textual criticism, syntax, idioms and specific usages in particular passages. Not only biblical sources (Masoretic Text, Septuagint, Dead Sea Scrolls), but also sources from other ancient Near Eastern texts (Sumerian, Akkadian, Egyptian, Ethiopic, Ugaritic and Northwest Semitic) are correlated. Drawing from the best scholars in the world and from a wide range of religious traditions (Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Greek Orthodox and Jewish), the authors write in the area of their expertise.

A much shorter work, but still helpful, is the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1981) in two volumes, generally abbreviated TWOT. To make this work more accessible to pastors and laypersons with limited knowledge of Hebrew, the entries are coded with the numbering system from *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. At the end of Volume 2 there appears an index listing all the enumerations in *Strong's* and how to find particular words in TWOT.

Other word studies exist, some quite dated and of limited usage, such as, *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies* by William Wilson and *Synonyms of the Old Testament* by Robert B. Girdlestone. Other studies, though not as dated, are still quite useful, such as, Norman Snaith's *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946), which addresses itself to such word-concepts as holiness, righteousness, salvation, love, etc., in the Hebrew Bible. Snaith's insights into these theologically-laden concepts are still valid and helpful.

Two other works, while not specifically composed concerning vocabulary in the Hebrew Bible, contain extensive discussion of Hebrew words. The first is the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* edited by Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) in ten volumes. Even though this work addresses itself to Greek words in the New Testament, various entries also discuss related words in Hebrew, i.e., when discussing the Greek word ἀλήθεια (= truth) the article begins with a discussion of the Hebrew word אֱמֶת (= truth), both in the Hebrew Bible as well as in Judaism and the Septuagint. In Volume X, the work contains an index of

the various Hebrew and Aramaic words discussed and where to find them. The second work along these lines is *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* edited by Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) in three volumes. Similar to TDNT above, this work correlates Old Testament Hebrew words with New Testament Greek words.

Finally, the major Bible dictionaries should not be overlooked as resources for the study of Hebrew words. These include, among others, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* edited by David Noel Freedman (London-New York-Toronto-Sydney-Auckland: Doubleday, 1992) in six volumes, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* edited by G. A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962) in five volumes, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon) in five volumes and *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* edited by Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) in four volumes.

For Readers

For those who are learning to read the Hebrew Bible but have some gaps in their vocabulary, they may wish to consult *A Reader's Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Terry Armstrong (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013). With the student and pastor in mind, these works offer in canonical order definitions for those words appearing less than 50 times in the Hebrew Bible, saving the reader from having to look up a multitude of words. The work assumes, of course, that the reader has a reasonably well-developed vocabulary and knows the grammar. Another example is *A Reader's Hebrew Bible* edited by A. Phillip Brown II and Bryan W. Smith (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008). This work contains the complete Hebrew Bible with footnoted definitions for all Hebrew words occurring less than 100 times and all Aramaic words occurring less than 25 times.

HEBREW COMMENTARIES AND TRANSLATION GUIDES

For the reader of the Hebrew Bible, a variety of scholarly works offer textual and analytical commentaries based directly on the Hebrew text. These are often verse by verse, sometimes even phrase by phrase, commentaries, and while they may address the larger issues of cultural and theological context, they also offer direct information about translational issues that arise in the original Hebrew. Some of these works may cover a single book in the Old Testament, and several are offered in series that include the whole Old Testament.

Full Hebrew Translations and Commentaries

Five series, especially, should be acknowledged, since they offer independent

full translations and commentaries on the Hebrew text by various scholars for each of the Old Testament books.

The Hermeneia series, published by Fortress Press (Philadelphia), is designed to be a critical and historical set of commentaries. Each of the scholarly authors engages in both textual criticism as well as tradition criticism along with interpretative commentary. The series is designed to be international and interconfessional with no assumed theological preferences. Some of the volumes originally are written in languages other than English (e.g., German), but full English translations are available.

The Anchor Bible series, published by Doubleday (New York), is considered by many to be the cream of historical-critical scholarship. The theological spectrum of the authors is wide-ranging, and it is fair to say that while the scholars involved generally are not evangelically-oriented, indeed some are Jewish and not Christian, their scholarship with respect to the Hebrew text is valuable, theological preferences notwithstanding.

The Word Biblical Commentary series, published by Word (Waco, Texas), is generally more aligned with classical positions of Christian theology to which the scholars involved bring advanced linguistic and theological insights. These commentaries not only offer independent translations of the Hebrew text with accompanying textual commentary, they also provide extensive genre analyses with special attention given to form, structure and setting.

The Old Testament Library, published by The Westminster Press (Philadelphia), is a historical-critical commentary series featuring high level scholars from universities in America, England and Europe. Some of the volumes originally appeared in German (with German translations of the biblical text) but are available in English with an English equivalent of the author's German translation—based upon the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV) but deviating from it wherever necessary and checked against the Masoretic Text.

Finally, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament series, published by Eerdmans (Grand Rapids, Michigan), is evangelically aligned. The contributors come from various universities in the English-speaking world.

Other Important Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible

The Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch

(popularly called Keil and Delitzsch), while not offering a new translation, rigorously interacts with the Hebrew text. Though dated (first published in late 1800s) and now reprinted by Eerdmans (Grand Rapids, Michigan), it continues to offer an evangelical and scholarly approach to the Hebrew Bible,

The International Critical Commentary series, published by T & T Clark (Edinburgh), has been an important resource for scholarly study of both the Hebrew text and the Greek text for the past century. While the series is ongoing (i.e., new volumes are being written to replace older volumes), the older commentaries, which have passed their copyright date, are now available free on-line. The Old Testament commentaries of the scholarly authors are directly based on the Hebrew text without a full English translation, hence assuming that the reader is conversant with biblical Hebrew.

The New Interpreter's Bible[27], published by Abingdon Press (Nashville), offers extensive commentary using the *New International Version* (NIV) and the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) as the basic English translation. While not offering a new English translation, the commentary interacts regularly with the Hebrew text. The contributing scholars come from a wide range of universities in the English-speaking world.

The Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry series, published by Liturgical Press (Collegeville, MN), represents historical and critical Roman Catholic scholarship on the Hebrew Bible. While still in the process of being written, the series currently includes most of the books of the Old Testament.

The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, published by Prentice Hall (Englewood Cliffs, NJ), is the cream of Roman Catholic commentary on the Bible in a single volume (but double-columned and in small print).[28]

Translation Guides

A particularly valuable series is the "Helps for Translators" series produced by the United Bible Society (New York, London, Stuttgart). These translators' handbooks are available for most books of the Hebrew Bible as well as the Greek

[27] I have not listed The Interpreter's Bible, the predecessor of the New Interpreter's Bible, since it is dated and now superseded, but it still holds some value.

[28] I did not list the Jerome Biblical Commentary, the predecessor of the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, since it now is superseded, but it still holds value.

New Testament. They can be ordered at:

http://www.ubs-translations.org/cat/helps_for_translators/handbooks/english_series/

The analyses cover syntactical nuances as well as word choices and grammatical issues for each biblical passage. At the beginning of each section there appear *Today's English Version* (TEV) and *Revised Standard Version* (RSV), and it is fair to say that this series leans toward dynamic equivalence.

TRANSLATION THEORY

Translation, the art of moving articulated expressions from one language to another, is very old. The first instance in the Bible occurred just after the return from exile, when Ezra read the Torah aloud to the assembled congregation of Israel during the festival of the seventh month (Ne. 8:2ff.). During their decades in Babylon, the people gradually seemed to have adopted Aramaic as their *lingua franca*, and by the time of the return, some (perhaps many) could no longer fully understand the Hebrew text. Ezra, therefore, was assisted by a number of Levites who verbally clarified the Torah for the ones having difficulty (Ne. 8:7-8, the Hebrew word wr1PA, which means "to inform precisely", may very well mean to translate). Of course, in time the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek in about 250 BC at Alexandria, Egypt. Still later, the Scriptures were rendered in Aramaic in what are known as Targums. Relatively early in the Christian era, translations of both the Hebrew Bible and the documents of the New Testament were translated into various other languages, such as, Old Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Georgian and Ethiopic. If the language of Jesus was Aramaic, as seems nearly certain, then the Greek form of the canonical gospels would have required recasting his Aramaic teachings into Koine Greek.

From the time of Jerome (5th century AD), the Latin Vulgate was the standard text of the Bible in western Christendom for a millennium, while the Eastern Church retained, to a large degree, the Bible in Greek (including the Septuagint). With the rise of the Reformers, however, concerted efforts to translate the Scriptures into vernacular tongues, such as, German, English and other European languages, became the order of the day due to the linguistic efforts of Wyclif, Luther, Tyndale and others. Today, this translation effort is ongoing, and major modern versions not only cast the text of the Bible into modern languages, they continually are in the process of revising themselves as the language itself changes.

Interpretation Begins with Translation

Any time ideas and thoughts move from a first to a second language, the reader is to greater or lesser degrees at the mercy of the translator. Translators make

choices about what word or expression in the second language best captures what is intended in the first language. Because all language is idiomatic, a word in the original language sometimes cannot be translated by a single equivalent in the second language, depending upon nuance and context. Semantics differ from language to language. Figures of speech in one language may not reproduce in the second. It would be a fundamental mistake to assume that one can simply exchange words from language to language like numbers with precise, unambiguous values. Hence, it is entirely appropriate to speak of the "art" of translation, because the process requires sensitivity on the part of the translator to recognize nuances and find appropriate equivalents.

A good example, for instance, is the word פָּנִים (= face). At Sinai, Yahweh instructed Moses to depart with the people for Canaan, but he said that he himself would not accompany them because of their stubbornness (Ex. 33:1-6). Moses, however, pleaded with God so that God promised to send his פָּנִים, that is, his "face", with the Israelites (Ex. 33:12-17). Later, Moses could say that God brought the entire company out of Egypt by his פָּנִים (Dt. 4:37; cf. Is. 63:9). Because God was so powerfully present in the Tent of Meeting, the sacred bread, which was to be displayed at all times, was quite literally the "bread of the פָּנִים" (Ex. 25:30; 39:36). Similarly, the table upon which the sacred bread was placed was called the "table of the פָּנִים" (Nu.4:7). In passages such as these, the traditional rendering of פָּנִים has been "presence", since this most nearly captures the idiomatic value of the word for English-speakers. To translate it as "face" in such passages would likely create more confusion than clarity.

Other examples include Joshua's sending in "two pair of feet" to reconnoiter Jericho (שְׁנַיִם־אֲנָשִׁים מְרַגְּלִים = a pair of roaming feet). Appropriately, most English versions render this as "two spies". Though long before the issues of gender sensitivity arose in the late 20th century, the tradition translation of the "sons of Israel" (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל;) in the older English Versions has long been "children of Israel", a term not quite a precise as the Hebrew original. When the Book of Jonah describes the plant that quickly grew up and quickly withered as a "son of the night" (בֶּן־לַיְלָה), most translators render this as "overnight".

It is precisely here that the translator runs a significant risk. If not careful, he/she can import ideas into a translation that are absent in the original, either intentionally or unintentionally. Take, for instance, the Hebrew euphemisms for sexual intercourse. Hebrew had no direct verb for sexual intercourse, but rather, the pattern of the language was to use euphemisms, such as, the verbs יָדַע! (= to know) or בָּא־אֶל (= to come to) or שָׁכַב־עִם (= to lie with). Obviously, these euphemisms

require sensitivity on the part of the translator, but to attempt to render them in ways that are patently against the context, such as those who, in the interests of ameliorating any negative nuance to homosexual behavior, wish to say that the Sodomites merely wanted to get to know Lot's guests better (cf. Ge. 19:5), is irresponsible.

The Two Poles of Translation

Translation method ranges between two theoretical poles, Formal Equivalence (sometimes called "literal" or "word-for-word") translation and Functional Equivalence (sometimes called "dynamic equivalency" or "concept-for-concept") translation. The older English versions, dating from the time of Tyndale, tended toward word-for-word renderings insofar as they were possible. This method works to keep as close as reasonable to the form of the original language with respect to wording and grammar. Often, translators try to find a single word in the second language to represent a single word in the original language. They also try to retain the syntax of the original language to a considerable degree. The more a translation tends toward formal equivalence, the more the reader must be familiar with ancient culture and idiomatic language in order to properly understand the meaning of the text.

English versions that generally follow this approach include: *King James Version* (1611), *American Standard Version* (1901), *Revised Standard Version* (1952), *New American Standard Bible* (1960), *New King James Version* (1982) *and English Standard Version* (2001). The advantage of formal equivalence is that it remains closely tied to the text in the original language. The risk of formal equivalence is that readers who do not understand ancient idioms and syntax may actually misinterpret passages, because they attribute to them a modern meaning that is different than the ancient meaning.

Functional equivalence, the other translational pole, works to maintain the meaning of the original language by putting it into the idiom of the second language (i.e., the way one might say the same sort of thing in English). Here, a single word in the original language might require several words in the second language. A metaphor in Greek might require a different metaphor in the second language. The more a translator tends toward functional equivalence, the less the reader is expected to be familiar with ancient culture and idiomatic language, and further, the more the reader depends upon the translator's expertise to provide such nuance.

English versions that generally follow this approach include: *Good News Bible [formerly, Today's English Version]* (1966), *The New English Bible* (1970), *The Living Bible [Kenneth Taylor]* (1971), *The Message* [Eugene Peterson] (2002) and *The Voice* (2012). The advantage of functional equivalence is the readability of the text in contemporary language form. The risk is that translators can more easily

inject theological bias into the translations (whether intentional or not), and readers may be unaware of such biases.

Several translations attempt to maintain a middle ground between formal equivalence and functional equivalence. Here, translators try to find balance, using word-for-word renderings where they will be clearly understood and resorting to functional equivalence where necessary for a clear understanding. To guard against theological bias, translators often work in translation committees drawn from different denominational confessions.

English versions that strike for a such middle ground include: *New Jerusalem Bible* (1966, 1967, 1968), *New American Bible* (1971), *New International Version* (1978), *New Revised Standard Version* (1989, 1995) and *New Living Translation* (1996). The advantage of this approach is that it seeks the best of both worlds. The disadvantage is that the reader without knowledge of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek cannot tell what rendering is more word-for-word and what is more concept-for-concept.

NAVIGATING THE BIBLIA HEBRAICA

The standard published edition of the Hebrew Bible for many decades has been the *Biblia Hebraica*, the most recent editions based on the Leningrad Codex of AD 1009. The current publications are the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) and the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (BHQ or BH^5), the latter of which currently is being produced one facsimile at a time and will eventually replace the BHS. Both are approximately the same, but here we will focus on the BHS with some asides concerning the BHQ.

BASIC LAYOUT

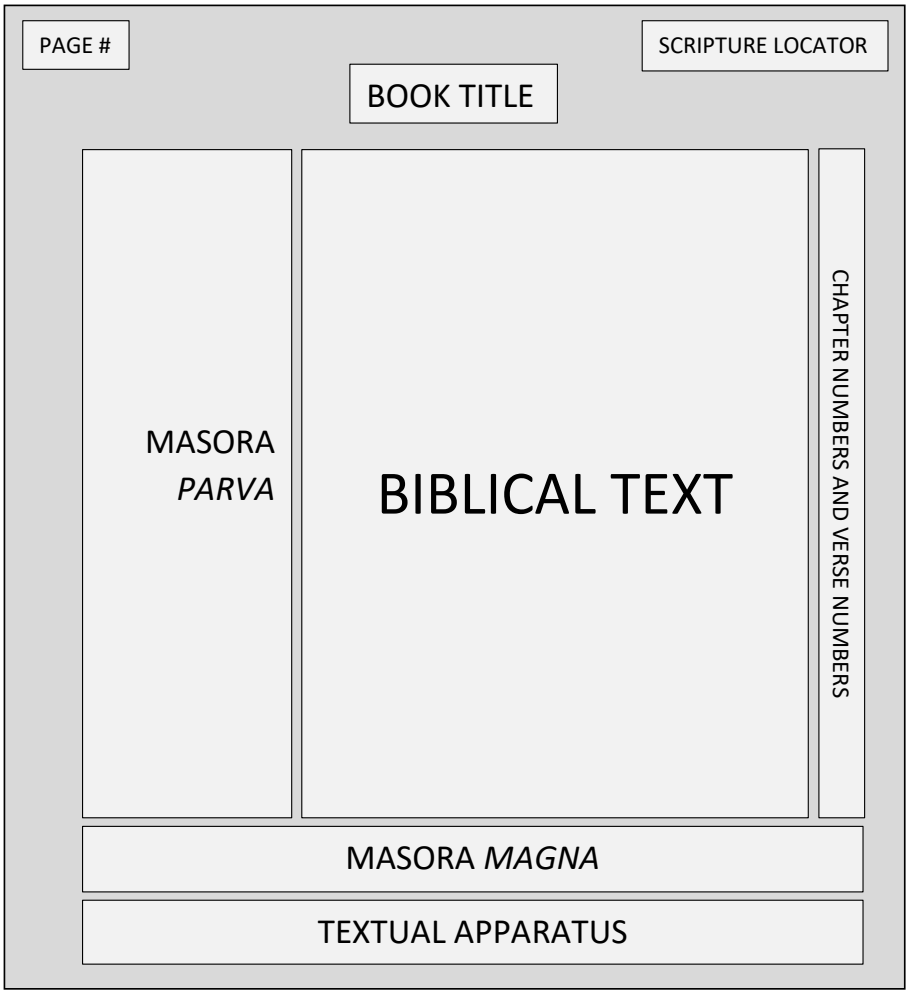
The first thing you will notice is that in keeping with the right-to-left orientation of Hebrew script, the BHS opens from right to left (i.e., beginning in what otherwise would be the back of the book). After the Prolegomena in several languages, including English, you will find an Index of the biblical books. You should note that this index follows the traditional Hebrew order and lists them in their Latin form as well as their Hebrew form. Other than for the Torah, this order is rather different than for the English Versions of the Bible, which largely follow the Septuagint. The order of books in the Hebrew tradition appear in three collections, roughly corresponding to what Jesus called “the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms” (Lk. 24:44). Because of this structure, the Hebrew Bible is often referred to as the *Tanak* or *Tanach* (Ta = Torah; Na = Nebiim; K = Kethubim):

TORAH (Instruction): תּוֹרָה	**LATIN TITLES**	**HEBREW TITLES**
Genesis	*Genesis*	בראשׁית (= in the beginning)
Exodus	*Exodus*	שׁמות (= names)

Leviticus	*Leviticus*		ויקרא (= and he called)
Numbers	*Numeri*		במדבר (= in the desert)
Deuteronomy	*Deuteronomium*		דברים (= words)
NEBIIM (Prophets): נְבִיאִים			
Joshua	*Josua*	FORMER PROPHETS	יהושע (= Joshua; Yahweh saves)
Judges	*Judices*		שׁפטים (= judges)
1 & 2 Samuel	*Samuel*		שׁמואל (= Samuel; name of God)
1 & 2 Kings	*Reges*		מלכים (= kings)
Jeremiah	*Jeremia*	LATTER PROPHETS	ירמיה (= Jeremiah; meaning unknown)
Ezekiel	*Ezechiel*		יחזקאל (= Ezekiel; God strengthens)
Hosea	*Hosea*		הושׁע (= Hosea; salvation)
Joel	*Joel*		יואל (= Joel; Yah is God)
Amos	*Amos*		עמוס (= Amos; burden-bearer)
Obadiah	*Obadia*		עבדיה (= Obadiah; servant of Yah)
Jonah	*Jona*		יונה (= Jonah; dove)
Micah	*Micha*		מיכה (= Micah; who is like Yah?)
Nahum	*Nahum*		נחום (= Nahum; consolation)
Habakkuk	*Habakuk*		חבקוק (= Habakkuk; embrace)
Zephaniah	*Zephania*		צפניה (= Zephaniah; Yah has treasured)
Haggai	*Haggai*		חגי (= Haggai; festal)
Zechariah	*Sacharia*		זכריה (= Zechariah; Yah remembers)
Malachi	*Maleachi*		מלאכי (= Malachi; my messenger)
KETHUBIM (Writings): כְּתוּבִים			
Psalms	*Psalmi*		תהלים (= praises)
Job	*Iob*		איוב (= Job; meaning unknown)
Proverbs	*Proverbia*		משׁלי (= sayings)
Ruth	*Ruth*	MEGILLOTH	רות (= Ruth; friend)
The Song	*Canticum*		שׁיר השׁירים (= song of songs)
Ecclesiastes	*Ecclesiastes*		קהלת (= teacher, preacher)
Lamentations	*Theni*		איכה (= how)
Esther	*Esther*		אסתר (= Esther; star)
Daniel	*Daniel*		דניאל (= Daniel; God is my judge)
Ezra	*Esra*		עזרא (= Ezra; help)
Nehemiah	*Nehemia*		נחמיה (= Nehemiah; comforted by Yah)
1 & 2 Chronicles	*Chronica*		דברי הימים (= words of the days)

In the BHS, these books appear in the traditional Hebrew order as listed above but without any divisions regarding the three collections (or, without subdivisions into the Former Prophets, Latter Prophets or the *Megilloth*). The first page of each biblical book has both the Latin title and the Hebrew title at the top. Subsequently, the Latin titles appear at the center of each odd-numbered page (left side), and the Hebrew titles appear at the center of each even-numbered page (right side). The pages of the BHS are filled with blocks of text of various kinds, only part of which is the biblical text. The biblical text appears in the largest type face. The remaining blocks, in a smaller type face, contain the special markings for scribal transmission and synagogue reading.

PAGE LAYOUT OF THE BHS – EVEN-NUMBERED PAGE EXAMPLE (ODD-NUMBERED PAGES ARE A MIRROR LAYOUT)



PARAGRAPHS, LESSONS, VERSES AND CHAPTERS

The Hebrew Bible is divided into paragraphs, a practice at least as old as the Dead Sea Scrolls. These are marked with either a פ or ס.

Through the centuries, the Jewish community grouped certain texts in order to produce a three-year lectionary cycle of 452 readings, much as has been done by liturgical Christians. These lessons are marked by a sideways *qamets*, which appears over the ס indicating paragraph divisions. Additionally, the Jewish community in Babylon divided the Torah into 54 lessons, called *Sedarim*, each marked beneath the various ס with פרשׁ.

Versification began in the early centuries of the common era with a *Sof Pasuq* (lit., "end of verse"), which looks like an English colon. Actual verse numbers began to appear in the 16th century, and these numbers appear both in the margin as well as within the biblical text itself. Bear in mind that versification in the English Versions generally follows Hebrew versification, but not always. Occasionally, especially in the Psalms, the verse numbers between the English Versions and the Hebrew Bible will not match.

The Hebrew Bible had no chapter divisions until the early 14th century, and interestingly enough, these chapter divisions were derived from the Christian Latin Vulgate of Jerome. Stephen Langton (1150-1228) developed the system, and it continues to be used to the present day, both in English Versions and in the Hebrew Bible.

It should be borne in mind that the above various divisions were not intended to guide interpretation, but rather, to guide readers so as to enable them to more easily locate passages. Occasionally, a translator or interpreter might wish the divisions had been otherwise (and sometimes such alternative opinions can be found in commentaries), but at this late date, any restructuring would cause more distress than benefit.

THE MASORAH

Students of biblical Hebrew are often puzzled by the multitude of strange looking blocks of text printed in the margins and at the end of each book of the BHS. These notes, otherwise known as the Masorah, are composed in abbreviated, unpointed Aramaic and comprise a veritable library of information about the Hebrew text in its formative period. They were designed to assist scribes in preserving an unaltered biblical text. It is fair to say that they are quite complex and can constitute

a lengthy course of study in themselves. In the introduction, the BHS provides a glossary in Latin of common terms (and in the BHQ they are in English). Here, we will attempt only to sketch in some basic information.[29]

The Masorah *parva* (Mp), or "small Masorah", are the blocks of text on the outer page margins. These comprise statistical details, such as, word counts, word placements (the exact middle of the book) and spelling peculiarities—all aiming at protecting the text from scribal error.

The Masorah *magna* (Mm), or "large Masorah", are blocks of text that serve as footnotes to another volume containing the full Masorah *magna*.[30] (The BHQ includes the full Masorah *magna*.) These notes analyze more fully the information found in abbreviated form in Mp.

The Masorah *finalis* (Mf) concludes each biblical book, offering a total verse count and identifying the middle word in the book. For instance, at the end of the Torah the Mf indicates that these five books consist of 5,845 verses, 158 *Sedarim*, 79,856 words and 400,945 letters!

TEXTUAL APPARATUS

Just as one finds textual variants in the footnotes of published Greek New Testaments, the BHS also contains footnotes for the most important textual variants to the Leningrad Codex. Unfortunately for the English reader, the BHS uses a mixture of symbols and Latin abbreviations. (Happily, the BHQ uses English abbreviations.) While a full listing of abbreviations is beyond the scope of this short monograph, following are the most important ones:

[29] For those who would like to study the Masorah in more detail, and excellent resource is Page H. Kelley, Daniel S. Mynatt and Timothy G. Crawford, *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: Introduction and Annotated Glossary* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambride, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1998).

[30] Gerard E. Weil, ed., *Masorah Gedolah iuxta Codicem Leningradensem B19a,* Vol. 1: *Catalogni* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1971).

BHS	BHQ	TITLE AND DESCRIPTION
M	M	**Masoretic Text (MT)** This is the standard text of the Hebrew Bible, designated Masoretic because it was produced by the family of Masoretic scholars working from approximately AD 500-1000.
L	M^L	**Leningrad Codex** (ca. AD 1009). This is the oldest complete copy of the Hebrew Bible and the basic text of the BHS and BHQ.
א, A	M^A	**Aleppo Codex** (ca. AD 925). A Masoretic text earlier than the Leningrad Codex but with about a fourth of it missing (most of the Torah is absent).
C	M^C	**Cairo Codex of the Prophets** (ca. AD 895). Said to have been written by Moses ben Asher
B	M^B	**Ben Chayyim Hebrew Bible** (ca. AD 1525). Also known as the Bomberg Bible, one of the earliest printed versions of the Hebrew Bible and the *Textus Receptus* underlying the older English Versions (i.e., William Tyndale, KJV, etc.).
Ms(s)	ms(s)	**Other Hebrew Manuscripts**. Various fragmented texts exist of the Hebrew Bible.
Q	Q	**Qumran Texts (DSS)**. The Dead Sea Scroll texts date to the period around the time of Christ and as much as two centuries earlier. While they are the oldest texts of the Hebrew Bible so far discovered, they are fragments of texts for the most part.
C	Gnz	**Cairo Geniza Texts**. These fragments of the Hebrew Bible were discovered in the late 19th century in what had been the geniza of a Cairo synagogue. (A geniza is a storage room used to "bury" old, worn out copies of the Scriptures.)
𝓜	Smr	**Samaritan Pentateuch**. These are the five books of Moses as preserved by the offshoot of Judaism called the Samaritans. They recognized only the Pentateuch as canonical, and they seem to have deliberately altered the text to designate Mt. Gerizim as the location for the temple.

BHS	BHQ	TITLE AND DESCRIPTION cont.--
𝖦	G	**Old Greek** or **Septuagint (LXX)**. This is the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek (ca. 250 BC) that became the most widely used Bible of the earliest Christians. It is older than the Masoretic Text, but it is in a second language and varies widely in its translation accuracy, though at times it supports readings in the Dead Sea Scrolls.
α′	α'	**Aquila** (ca. AD 150). This revision of the LXX survives only in quotations, in fragments of Origen's *Hexapla* and in palimpsests (manuscripts erased but written over, though the underlying text can still be deciphered).
σ′	σ'	**Symmachus** (ca. AD 170). Surviving only in fragments in the *Hexapla*, this is a more literary version of the LXX.
θ′	θ'	**Theodotian** (ca. AD 200). Another revision of the LXX, the Theodotian text of Daniel replaced the inferior LXX Daniel.
γ′	γ'	**The "Three"**. This is the designation when Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotian all agree.
Orig	Hex	**Origen's Hexapla** (ca. AD 230). Origen's polyglot (text in multiple languages) contained six columns: the Hebrew text, transliteration of Hebrew into Greek, Aquila, Symmachus, the LXX and Theodotian. It survives only in fragments.
𝕿	T	**Targums**. Targums are loose translations of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic for post-exilic Jews who no longer understood Hebrew, and they were read alongside the Hebrew text in the synagogue service. Targum Onkelos is the official Targum for the Torah, Targum Jonathan is the official Targum for the prophets and there are additional unofficial Targums as well.
𝖲	S	**Syriac Peshitta**. This translation, in a later dialect of Aramaic, became the Old Testament for the Syriac Church. It's origin may have been in the Jewish Community rather than the Christian Community.

BHS	BHQ	TITLE AND DESCRIPTION cont.--
𝔏	La	**Old Latin**. This refers to a collection of various translations of the LXX into Latin. While not complete text survives, pieces of Old Latin texts survive in the church fathers, old Latin liturgies and various other fragments.
V	V	**Jerome's Vulgate** (4th century AD). Jerome's translation of the Hebrew Bible into Latin, along with the New Testament in Latin, became the standard Bible of the Western Church for more than a millennium.
K	copt	Egyptian Coptic Christians produced translations of the Hebrew Bible in more than one Coptic dialect, the Sahidic (Sa) in upper Egypt and the Akhmimic (Akh) and Bohairic (Bo) in lower Egypt. It was based on the LXX.

The science of textual criticism—the effort to find the original text—uses the textual apparatus of the BHS (and BHQ) as the raw data for analyzing the possibilities and proposing a more accurate text. While scribes were very conscientious in their work, scribal errors did, in fact, occur. Since we no longer possess any autographs (the original works by biblical authors), we must rely upon ancient manuscripts (copies of the ancient Hebrew text) and ancient translations (the transferring of the Hebrew Bible into a second language). Few students will have access to all the above texts and versions, but the BHS (and BHQ) textual apparatus offers the major variations to be considered.

PAUSAL FORMS

The biblical text in the Hebrew Bible is divided into short groups of clauses known as verses (not to be confused with the numbered verses), and each verse is subdivided into two parts. The first part is indicated by an *'atnah* (֑) and the second by a *silluq* (ׅ), both appearing beneath the consonantal letters. These forms are "in pause," since they indicate a break in the recitation of the text, and some words at these points may have a slightly different vocalization than normal. There are several other such accents marks which, for our present purpose, are unnecessary to address.

CLASSICAL HEBREW POETRY

Generally speaking, we think of poetry as literature written in meter, which includes, rhythm (accented language), meter (patterns of verse), rhyme (repetitive elements), lyrical style (expression of deep personal feelings and emotion) and metaphorical language (words becomes symbols of other entities). Poets are

linguistic artists who, in addition to the mechanical features of their craft, draw for their listeners striking word pictures. They offer analogies, insights and reflections that the listener might not otherwise notice. They call upon the listener to think more deeply about life and reality.

Poetry in the Hebrew Bible demonstrates most if not all of these characteristics, but at the same time, it is not identical to English poetry. In an oral society, which is characteristic of the oldest periods of Israelite history, poetry is more easily memorized than prose due to its features of rhythm, rhyme and meter. Though humans invented writing around 3200 BC, general literacy was not characteristic of the Israelites for several centuries, even though writing was known. Writing was largely the provenance of specialists serving kings and their courts, and scribes were supported by the state. Even public documents were not for general consumption but were displays of royal power and authority. Most Israelites would hear the Torah read, for instance, at the great pilgrim festivals, and almost no one had private copies of biblical texts as is common in the modern world. However, largely due to Assyrian urbanization and bureaucracy, widespread literacy seems to have occurred about the 8th century BC, when there is an explosion of texts in the archaeological record. Among the Israelites, this growth of literacy likely stimulated the collection of poetry that had been preserved previously in oral memory (Pro. 25:1; cf. 2 Chr. 29:30).

It is widely recognized that a considerable amount of the Hebrew Bible is written in the style of ancient poetry, estimates ranging as high as a fifth of its content. This includes not only the generally recognized poetic books, such as, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song, but also large sections in the writings categorized as the historical books. Older English Versions (e.g., KJV, etc.) did not set out in poetic form the poetic texts in their translations. Newer translations generally do. More recently, it has been discovered that the poetry in the Hebrew Bible did not stand alone in the ancient world, but it was paralleled by poetry in surrounding cultures. In particular, Ugaritic poetic texts from Ras Shamra are important, because Ugaritic is a language closely related to Hebrew. Akkadian poetry, while more distant from the Hebrew language than Ugaritic, is also important. In both cases, we have large amounts of texts (numbering in the thousands). Both Ugaritic and Akkadian seem to use similar if not identical techniques and formal poetic devices, and this, in turn, assists modern scholars in exploring biblical poetry.

It is fair to say that there is ongoing discussion among Hebrew scholars concerning the essential character of Hebrew poetry with differing opinions about this or that feature. Some things seem to be emerging more clearly, such as, the fact that in Hebrew prose, the definite article ה, the relative word אֲשֶׁר and the object

marker **אֵת** are typical, whereas in poetry, they are atypical. Some biblical books, Psalms, Job and Proverbs, have special cantillation marks in the Masoretic text, such as the *revia gadol*, that may indicate the end of a poetic line. Other poetic features, such as, meter and rhythm and how to discern and define them in Hebrew poetry, are more debatable. In this lesson, we will not engage in the scholarly debates, but rather, we will confine ourselves to those features of Hebrew poetry that seem to be generally agreed upon (though, admittedly, even here there may not be scholarly unanimity).

Poetic Devices Not Translatable

Poetic devices that derive from phonetics are largely untranslatable. Insofar as poetic structures depend upon such things as puns, assonance, rhyme, alliteration, onomatopoeia, and the like, a second language is largely incapable of reproducing such elements from the donor language. However, because Hebrew poetry also emphasized the "rhyming" or relationship of ideas (as opposed to merely the rhyming of sounds), such elements are capable of being understood in a second language. Here, we will pay only marginal attention to the poetic devices that are untranslatable, and we will concentrate more directly on those features that can be reproduced in a second language.

Poetic Terminology

Before addressing any of these features, however, it will be important to recognize some basic poetic vocabulary.

Colon or ***Monocolon*** (a single line of poetry, either as an independent unit or part of a larger whole)

מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה־לְּךָ יְהוּדָה

"What shall I do to you, Judah?" (Hos. 6:4b)

Hemistich (a subdivision of a colon generally equal to half the length of the line)

בְּיוֹם אֶקְרָא *מַהֵר עֲנֵנִי*׃

"In the day [when] I call, *quickly answer me*." (Ps. 102:3)

Bicolon or ***Couplet*** (a two-line poetic verse, generally considered to be the "standard" in Hebrew poetry, because it occurs so frequently)

קָשְׁרֵם עַל־אֶצְבְּעֹתֶיךָ
כָּתְבֵם עַל־לוּחַ לִבֶּךָ׃

"Bind them on your fingers,
write them on the tablet of your heart." (Pro. 7:3)

Tricolon or ***Triplet*** (a three-line poetic verse forming a single whole or strophe)

כִּי הִנֵּה אֹיְבֶיךָ יְהוָה
כִּי־הִנֵּה אֹיְבֶיךָ יֹאבֵדוּ
יִתְפָּרְדוּ כָּל־פֹּעֲלֵי אָוֶן׃

"For look, your enemies, O LORD,
For look, your enemies will perish;
All doing wickedness will be divided." (Psa. 92:9)

Tetracolon or ***Quatrain*** (a four-line poetic verse forming a single whole or strophe)

כִּי־שְׁתַּיִם רָעוֹת עָשָׂה עַמִּי
אֹתִי עָזְבוּ מְקוֹר מַיִם חַיִּים
לַחְצֹב לָהֶם בֹּארוֹת
בֹּארֹת נִשְׁבָּרִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָכְלוּ הַמָּיִם׃

"For my people have done two evils:
They have deserted me, the spring of living waters,
To hew for themselves cisterns,
Broken cisterns that can hold no water. (Jer. 2:13)

Strophe (a poetic unit of one or more cola considered to be part of a larger unit, the stanza; the colon, bicolon, tricolon and tetracolon are all strophes.

Stanza (a sub-section of a poem; a poem is made up of stanzas, and each stanza consists of one or more strophs.)

Poem (an independent unit of poetry made up of one or more stanzas, such as, a psalm, a prophetic oracle, a speech, a wisdom poem or an acrostic.)

Parallelism

Many scholars believe that the parallelism of ideas is the quintessential feature of Hebrew poetry. The advantage of parallelism, of course, is that it can be conveyed in translation. Parallelism comes in different forms, but the basic idea is that an idea expressed in one poetic line has a conceptual relationship with an idea expressed in another line, hence, a "rhyming" of ideas. This relationship of ideas comes in several forms, which we will examine one by one.

Synonymous Parallelism also called *Congruent Parallelism*

Here, the relationship of ideas consists of a second line essentially restating the first line in similar, but usually not identical, terms. The symmetry of such parallelism is A_1, A_2 // A_1, A_2. Observe the following examples:

לְכוּ נְרַנְּנָה לַיהוָה
נָרִיעָה לְצוּר יִשְׁעֵנוּ׃
"O come, let us sing unto the LORD;
let us shout to the Rock of our salvation!" (Ps. 95:1)

Note the parallel structures: "let us sing" in line 1 (A_1) parallels "let us shout" in line 2 (A_1); "unto Yahweh" in line 1 (A_2) parallels "to the Rock of our salvation" in line 2 (A_2). The grammatical sequence is also symmetrical, i.e., verb/dative indirect object; verb/dative indirect object.

שְׂאוּ־נֵס בָּאָרֶץ
תִּקְעוּ שׁוֹפָר בַּגּוֹיִם
"Raise an ensign in the land;
blow a trumpet among the nations." (Je. 51:27)

Again, note the parallel structures: "raise an ensign" (A_1) parallels "blow a trumpet" (A_1); "in the land" (A_2) parallels "among the nations" (A_2). As before, the grammatical sequence is identical: verb/object/dative indirect object; verb/object/dative indirect object.

<u>*Chiasmus* also called *Mirror Symmetry*</u>

In chiasmus one also finds synonymous parallelism, but the order of the grammatical sequence is inverted, and the symmetry is A_1, A_2 // A_2, A_1. English versions many times ignore this chiasmus in translation, but it is apparent in the Hebrew text. Observe the following examples, and note that in translating them I have followed the grammatical sequence in the Hebrew text, even though it makes for somewhat awkward English style:

יָשׁוּב עֲמָלוֹ בְרֹאשׁוֹ
וְעַל קָדְקֳדוֹ חֲמָסוֹ יֵרֵד׃
"Returns his trouble upon his [own] head,
and upon his [own] pate violence descends." (Ps. 7:16)

Here, note that while there is synonymous parallelism, there is an inversion of the grammatical sequence, i.e., verb/subject/preposition and indirect object in line 1 (A_1, A_2, A_3); preposition and indirect object/subject/verb in line 2 (A_3, A_2, A_1).

כִּי־שִׁבַּר דַּלְתוֹת נְחֹשֶׁת
וּבְרִיחֵי בַרְזֶל גִּדַּע׃
"For he has shattered doors of bronze,
and bars of iron he has cut down." (Ps. 107:16)

Again, note the inversion of the grammatical sequence: verb/object (A_1, A_2); object/verb (A_2, A_1). The synonymous parallelism is retained.

Antithetic Parallelism also called *Assymetrical Parallelism*

Especially in the Book of Proverbs, one encounters a different sort of parallelism in which the relationship between the first and second lines is one of antithesis. The symmetry here is A_1, A_2 // $-A_1$, $-A_2$. Most antithetic parallelisms are bicolons belonging to wisdom literature. Observe the following examples:

מְאֵרַת יְהוָה בְּבֵית רָשָׁע
וּנְוֵה צַדִּיקִים יְבָרֵךְ׃

"The curse of the LORD [is] on the house of the wicked,
but the dwelling of the righteous he blesses." (Pro. 3:33)

Here, the "curse of the LORD" in line 1 (A_1) is the antithesis of "blessing" in Line 2 ($-A_1$), and the "house of the wicked" in Line 1 (A_2) is the antithesis of the "dwelling of the righteous" in Line 2 ($-A_2$). Note the disjunctive *waw*, which should be translated as "but" or "however". You'll also notice that there is chiasmus in the grammatical sequence (subject/object in Line 1 and object/subject in Line 2).

דְּאָגָה בְלֶב־אִישׁ יַשְׁחֶנָּה
וְדָבָר טוֹב יְשַׂמְּחֶנָּה׃

"Anxiety in the heart of a man depresses [him],
but a good word gladdens it." (Pro. 12:25)

Again, note the antithesis between the verbs, "depresses" (A_1) and "gladdens" ($-A_1$). As before, the disjunctive *waw* should be translated as "but", and this is typical of antithetic parallelisms in general.

Other Kinds of Parallelism

Several other kinds of parallelisms may be observed in Hebrew poetry. They include the following:

- *Gender Parallelism* (masculine and feminine, i.e., "sons" and "daughters" (Ps. 144:12), "nations" (m.) and "earth" (f.), etc.)
- *Word-pairs* (matching terms, such as, "snow" and "rain" (Pro. 26:1), "heaven" and "earth" (Isa. 66:1), "ascend" and "descend" (Isa. 107:26), "right" and "left" (Job 23:9), "light" and "darkness" (Isa. 5:20), and so forth).
- *Number Parallelism* (where consecutive numbers are used in parallel, such as, "one" and "two" (Jg. 5:30; Ps. 62:11), "two" and "three" (Ho. 6:2), "three" and "four" (Am. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6; Pro. 30:18-20), "six" and "seven" (Pro. 6:16), "seven" and "eight" (Mic. 5:5), "thousand" and "ten

thousand" (Dt. 32:30; Mic. 6:7), and so forth). In such cases, the numbers are not so much mathematical as emblematic.

- *Staircase Parallelism* (where a sentence is started, interrupted, and then started again, e.g., Nu. 24:3-4; Jg. 5:7; Ps. 57:8; 77:16; 93:3; Pro. 31:4; Ecc. 1:2; Song 6:1). Often, this sort of parallelism is employed to open a speech or to act as a refrain.
- *Terrace Patterns* (where repetition occurs from the end of one line and the beginning of another, e.g., Jg. 5:23; Ps. 8:40; 96:12b-13; 98:4-5; 115:12, 14; 116:16; 135:12; 136:21-22; Pro. 30:1; Song 2:15; Isa. 29:17; 38:11; Je. 2:13; Eze. 22:2; Am. 4:7b; Joel 2:27; Na. 1:2.

Acrostic Poetry

The most obvious example of acrostic poetry in the Hebrew Bible is Psalm 119. Here, every section of the poem is headed by the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order in eight-verse stanzas. English Bibles have retained these alphabetic headings because the Masoretic Text has them. While most readers of the English Bible may have noticed them, it is likely that they have only a vague understanding of why they are there

Acrostics are poems in which the successive poetic lines begin with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order. In Psalm 119, the first word in every verse in the first stanza begins with **א**, the first word in every verse in the second stanza with **ב**, and so forth to the end. This type of poetry not only appears in the Hebrew Bible, it also appears in Babylonian poetry as well, some in cuneiform, where it is not the first alphabetic letter but the first cuneiform sign that begins each verse. It should be immediately apparent that this characteristic of acrostics suggests that such poetry was more non-oral than oral, since the use of the alphabet in this way tends to appeal to the eye more than the ear. Also, not all acrostics use the full alphabet. For reasons not entirely clear, some acrostics are partial, going through some but not all of the alphabet. Also, some acrostics omit certain letters, again for reasons unknown.[31] Finally, some poems of 22 verses that one might expect to be acrostics, in fact, are not (Psalm 38; Lamentations 5).

Altogether, there are a handful of acrostics in the Hebrew Bible besides Psalms 119, but inasmuch as they are not marked in English Bibles, they mostly go unnoticed. The following poems are acrostics: Psalm 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145; Proverbs 31:10-31; Lamentations 1, 2, 3, 4 and Nahum 1:2-8.[32]

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[31] Psalm 25 omits ק; Psalm 37 omits ע; Psalm 145 omits נ.

[32] There is also an acrostic in the Apocrypha, Sirach 51:13-20, and one among the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QPs^{a} and 4QPs^{f}).

Phonetic Devices

As mentioned previously, phonetic devices are largely untranslatable. Still, for the reader of Hebrew, it is instructive to cover at least some of the more prominent of these devices. It is to the point that such devices functioned orally and were intended to be heard. Their purpose in poetry was to amuse or sustain interest, to assist in composition and memory, to lend authenticity and to link parts within the poem. They include:

- ***Assonance*** (where there is a repetition of vowel sounds, such as, the "a" sound, cf. Jer. 49:1b; the "e" sound, cf. Jer. 49:8; the "i" sound, cf. Ps. 113:8; the "o" sound, cf. Job 5:21 or the "u" sound, cf. Lam. 4:15).
- ***Alliteration*** (where there is a repetition of consonantal sounds, such as, ב, cf. Ps. 147:13b and Song 3:2a; ק, cf. Joel 2:15-16a; וּ, Is. 8:15; דּ, cf. Eze. 40:24 and שׁ, cf. Ps. 127:5).
- ***Rhyme*** (where two or more words sound the same or nearly the same, such as, words ending in נוּ, cf. Isa. 33:22 or ־ִים , cf. Is. 3:18 or word pairs like בֹּהוּ and תֹּהוּ, cf. Is. 34:11 or מְבוּסָה וּמְבוּכָה and מְהוּמָה, cf. Is. 22:5).
- ***Onomatopoeia*** (where the sound of the words suggests their meaning, such as, מִדַּהֲרוֹת דַּהֲרוֹת אַבִּירָיו, which sounds a bit like galloping horses, cf. Jg. 5:22).
- ***Pun*** (where the sounds of two words are similar or even identical but have different meanings). Good examples are שָׁקֵד (= almond tree) and שֹׁקֵד (= watching), cf. Je. 1:11-12; מִשְׁפָּט (= justice) and מִשְׁפָּח (= bloodshed), Is. 5:7b; צְדָקָה (= righteousness) and צְעָקָה (= outcries), cf. Is. 5:7c; תַּאֲמִינוּ (= to believe) and תֵּאָמֵנוּ (= to be confirmed), Is. 7:9. Micah 1:10-15 contains a whole series of puns using town names and the meanings of other similar sounding words:
    - **Gath** (גַּת) creates assonance with נָגַד, meaning to report or to announce [i.e., disaster].
    - **Beth Ophrah** (בֵּית עַפְרָה) means "house of dust", and its citizens are sentenced to rolling in the dust as an expression of lament.
    - **Shaphir** (שָׂפִיר), meaning "pleasant", sounds like שׁוֹפָר), the war trumpet; the town's pleasantness would be brutally reversed by a coming invasion.
    - **Tsaanan** (צַאֲנָן) creates assonance with the verb יָצְאָה, meaning "to come out". The citizens will refuse to engage in battle because it will be hopeless.

- **Beth Etsel** (בֵּית אֵצֶל) sounds similar to the verb אָצַל, meaning "to take away". The city's protection would vanish.
- **Maroth** (מָרוֹת) sounds like מַר, which means "bitter," and the bitterness of disaster would reach as far as the gates of the city of peace (Jerusalem).
- **Lachish** (לָכִישׁ) sounds like the word רֶכֶשׁ, which refers to a team of horses [i.e., chariot horses].
- **Moresheth** (מוֹרֶשֶׁת) sounds like מוֹרָשָׁה, meaning "possession", the very thing the citizens would give up when invaded.
- **Aczib** (אַכְזִיב) sounds like אַכְזָב, meaning "deceitful."
- **Mareshah** (מָרֵשָׁה) sounds like יָרַשׁ, meaning "to dispossess."

Imagery

Imagery in poetry is a figure of speech expressing some similarity or analogy. Broadly speaking, we call this technique metaphorical language (though, of course, a metaphor is a particular kind of analogy). Images are usually concrete and sense-related. Often, they contain surprises or unexpected comparisons, setting side-by-side things that usually are not compared in order to sharpen the intended meaning or offer an unexpected insight into how they are similar.

- ***Metaphor:*** A direct comparison in which the objects being compared are expressed as though the one was the other, such as:
  - דַּם־עֲנָבִים = "blood of grapes" (Ge. 49:11)
  - יְהוָה סַלְעִי = "Yahweh is my Rock" (Ps. 18:2)
  - גֹּזְלֵי עוֹרָם מֵעֲלֵיהֶם = "tearing the skin from them" (Mic. 3:2)
- ***Simile:*** An indirect comparison, often using the words "like" or "as", such as:
  - כְּסֻכָּה בְכָרֶם = "like a hut in a vineyard" (Is. 1:8)
  - אֱנוֹשׁ כֶּחָצִיר יָמָיו = "Man, his days [are] like grass" (Ps. 103:15)
  - יַעֲרֹף כַּמָּטָר לִקְחִי = "Let my teaching drop as the rain" (Dt. 32:2)
- ***Personification:*** Giving personal characteristics to inanimate things, such as:
  - הִרְחִיבָה שְׁאוֹל נַפְשָׁהּ וּפָעֲרָה פִיהָ = "Sheol has enlarged her appetite and opened her mouth" (Is. 5:14)
  - מִצְרַיִם כַּיְאֹר יַעֲלֶה ...וַיֹּאמֶר אַעֲלֶה = "Egypt rises up like the Nile...and says, 'Let me arise...'" (Je. 26:8)
  - הֶהָרִים רָקְדוּ כְאֵילִים = "the mountains skipped like rams"

(Ps. 114:4)

- ***Irony/Sarcasm:*** Expressing one thing when the opposite is expected or intended... In irony/sarcasm, the literal or overt meaning must give way to a derived meaning, usually in opposition to the superficial meaning, such as:
  - בֹּאוּ בֵית־אֵל וּפִשְׁעוּ = "Come to Bethel and sin!" (Am. 4:4)
  - לוּ־אִישׁ הֹלֵךְ...אַטִּף לְךָ לַיִן וְלַשֵּׁכָר וְהָיָה מַטִּיף הָעָם הַזֶּה = "If a man should go about [saying]...I will preach wine and beer to you, he would be the preacher for this people!" (Mic. 2:11)
  - אָמְנָם כִּי אַתֶּם־עָם וְעִמְּכֶם תָּמוּת חָכְמָה = "No doubt that you [are] the people and wisdom will die with you!" (Job 12:2)
- ***Metonymy/Synecdoche:*** Using an associated word to represent the object intended or using a part to signify the whole, such as:
  - וּבָנִיתִי לְדֹר־וָדוֹר כִּסְאֶךָ = "I will build your throne for all generations" [throne = dynasty] (Ps. 89:4b)
  - אֶת־פָּנֶיךָ יְהוָה אֲבַקֵּשׁ = "Your face, O LORD, I will seek" [face = God] (Ps. 27:8)
  - וְאָשִׁיבָה יָדִי עָלַיִךְ = "And I will turn my hand against you" [hand = God] (Is. 1:25).
- ***Apostrophe:*** An address to a person or a thing regarded as a person, often imaginary, such as:
  - מַה־תִּשְׁתּוֹחֲחִי נַפְשִׁי = "Why are you downcast, O my soul?" (Ps. 42:11)
  - בַּת־בָּבֶל הַשְּׁדוּדָה = "O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed" (Ps. 137:8)
  - אֵיךְ נָפַלְתָּ מִשָּׁמַיִם הֵילֵל בֶּן־שָׁחַר = "How have you fallen from heaven, O Shining One, Son of the Dawn?" (Is. 14:12)
- ***Hyperbole*** An intentional overstatement or exaggeration given to show emphasis, such as:
  - וְנָפְלָה נִבְלַת הָאָדָם כְּדֹמֶן = "And the corpse of a man will fall like dung" (Je. 9:21)
  - וַיַּמְטֵר עֲלֵיהֶם כֶּעָפָר שְׁאֵר = "And he rained flesh upon them like dust" (Ps. 78:27)
  - וְהֶחֱזִיקוּ שֶׁבַע נָשִׁים בְּאִישׁ אֶחָד = "And seven women will seize one man" (Is. 4:1)
- ***Merismus:*** A totality expressed in abbreviated form, such as:
  - מִכַּף־רֶגֶל וְעַד־רֹאשׁ = "From the sole of the foot even to the

head" [= the whole person] (Is. 1:6)
    - נְעָרִים...וְיִשִּׁישִׁים = "[The] young men...and [the] aged" [= everyone] (Job 29:8)
    - הַיָּם...וַיַּבָּשֶׁת = "The sea and the dry land" [= everywhere] (Ps. 95:5
- ***Hendiadys:*** Expressing a single complete idea by using two separate words, usually nouns or substantives; often, this means a translation can be other than strictly literal, such as:
    - בִּזְנוּתַיִךְ וּבְרָעָתֵךְ = "...with your harlotries and with your wickedness" [= your vile harlotries] (Je. 3:2b)
    - בְּקוֹל־רִנָּה וְתוֹדָה = "...with a voice of joy and thanksgiving..." [= a shout of joyful thanks] (Ps. 42:4)
    - יִרְאָה וָרַעַד יָבֹא בִי = "Fear and trembling came upon me" [= fearful trembling; note that the singular verb underscores that the two nouns are in hendiadys] (Ps. 55:5)
- ***Oxymoron:*** Linking two contradictory ideas or incompatible words so that the expression should not be taken literally; an oxymoron emphasizes one aspect by negating it, such as:
    - קְבוּרַת חֲמוֹר יִקָּבֵר = "he will be buried [with the] burial of a he-ass" [which is to say, he won't be buried at all] (Je. 22:19)
    - יִשְׂבַּע־רִישׁ = "...sated with poverty..." (Pro. 28:19)
    - וְלָשׁוֹן רַכָּה תִּשְׁבָּר־גָּרֶם = "...and a soft tongue will break bone" (Pro. 25:15)

Other Poetic Devices

- ***Rhetorical Questions:*** Posing a question to which the answer should be obvious; generally, rhetorical questions are used for dramatic effect in that they involve the audience directly or create tensions that require resolution, such as:
    - הֶהָיְתָה זֹּאת בִּימֵיכֶם = "Has such [a thing] happened in your days?" [the obvious answer is "no"] (Joel 1:2)
    - הַנֹּטַע אֹזֶן הֲלֹא יִשְׁמָע = "He who planted the ear—does he not hear?" [the obvious answer is "yes"] (Ps. 94:9)
    - מַה־לְּךָ הַיָּם כִּי תָנוּס = "Why, O sea, do you flee?" [obviously because Yahweh God had appeared] (Ps. 114:5)

  It is worth noting that rhetorical questions often appear in series, sometimes with a considerable number of rhetorical questions consecutively for added

emphasis (cf. Je. 8:19, 22; Job 10:4-5; Ps. 88:10-12; Am. 3:3-6; Job 41:1-7).

- ***Inclusio:*** Sometimes called "bracketing" or "envelope structure", inclusio is marking off a section by a common element at the beginning and at the end, which creates a frame, such as:
  - לֹא יָדָעוּ...לֹא יָדָעוּ = "They do not know...they do not know" (Je. 4:22)
  - הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה כִּי־טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ: = "O give praise to the LORD for he [is] good, for his steadfast love [lasts] forever!" (Ps. 118:1, 29)
  - בָּרֲכִי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־יְהוָה = "Bless the LORD, O my soul..." (Ps. 103:1a, 22b)
- ***Key Word Repetition:*** Repeating significant words to emphasize a central motif or idea, such as:
  - קוֹל יְהוָה = "The voice of the LORD..." (Ps. 29:3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9)
  - שָׁמַר in its various forms: שֹׁמְרֶךָ = "the [one] keeping you" (Ps. 121:3, 5); יִשְׂרָאֵל שׁוֹמֵר = "[the one] keeping Israel" (Ps. 121:4); יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרְךָ = "The LORD will keep you" (Ps. 121:7a); יְהוָה...יִשְׁמֹר אֶת־נַפְשֶׁךָ = "the LORD will keep your soul" (Ps. 121:7b); יְהוָה יִשְׁמָר־צֵאתְךָ וּבוֹאֶךָ = "the LORD will keep your going out and coming in" (Ps. 121:8)
  - וַיהוָה הֵטִיל רוּחַ־גְּדוֹלָה = "And the LORD hurled a great wind" (Jon. 1:4); הַמַּלָּחִים...וַיָּטְלוּ אֶת־הַכֵּלִים = "the mariners hurled [overboard] the cargo" (Jon. 1:5); וְהַטִּילֻנִי אֶל־הַיָּם שָׂאוּנִי = "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea" (Jon. 1:12); וַיְטִלֻהוּ אֶל־הַיָּם = "and they hurled him into the sea" (Jon. 1:15)
- ***Refrain:*** A reoccurring verse or phrase within a poem, such as:
  - וְלֹא־שַׁבְתֶּם עָדַי = "and you have not returned to me" (Am. 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11)
  - בְּכָל־זֹאת לֹא־שָׁב אַפּוֹ וְעוֹד יָדוֹ נְטוּיָה = "for all this his anger is not turned and his hand still is being raised" (Is. 5:25b; 9:12b, 17b, 21b; 10:4b)
  - כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ = "for his steadfast love [lasts] forever" (Ps. 136, where this refrain is repeated in all 26 verses)

SYMPATHETIC OBSERVATION

It goes without saying that writers choose words, but what interests us here is why the writer might choose *this* word instead of *that* one. Sometimes the structure of the composition may be the deciding factor, such as we saw in the previous lesson, when in the acrostic of Psalm 111, the poet chose the word טֶרֶף (= prey, meat) for the "food" provided to those who fear the LORD. Here, needing a word beginning with ט (one of the alphabetic letters with the fewest possibilities), the writer opted for this unusual word. Neither of the standard words for food, like אֹכֶל (= eating) or לֶחֶם (= bread), would fit the acrostic, since neither began with the letter ט.

There are many other reasons, of course, why a writer might choose some particular word or expression, such as, artistic reasons, emotive reasons, evocative reasons, allusive reasons, and so forth. For translators and interpreters, the challenge is to read the text sympathetically in order to get "under the skin" of the writer. This is rarely a matter of grammar and almost always a matter of gaining sympathy with authorial intent. When a writer chooses a word or expression in order to allude to some previous text in Scripture, for instance, he assumes his listeners will be sufficiently familiar with the pre-existing text to catch his allusion.

As an example, when Isaiah uses the rare combination תֹהוּ and בֹּהוּ to describe the desolation of Edom after judgment (Is. 34:11), he expects his audience to connect these words of formlessness and emptiness with the primordial chaos existing prior to the created order (Ge. 1:2; cf Je. 4:23). Sometimes common words or expressions might even be conspicuous by their absence, such as, when the Genesis account speaks of the sun and moon as the "greater light" and "lesser light" rather than as the "sun" and "moon" (Ge. 1:14-18). In Mesopotamian religion, the sun was a deity, and the word *Shamash* (Heb. *shemesh*) was an internationally known designation for the sun-god. If the Genesis creation account is in any sense an apologetic against currently-existing creation mythologies, then the absence of the term שֶׁמֶשׁ makes sense: God was not creating some additional deity for the pantheon, but rather, simply ordering celestial bodies in the physical universe.

All this is to say that the reader of the biblical text in its original language must do so sympathetically, paying attention not only to the meaning of words, but also to the choice of words—what I have called sympathetic observation. Most of the figures of speech we examined in the previous lesson regarding Hebrew poetry are also to be found in prose narratives from time to time. The use of literary techniques, like word repetition, metaphorical language, allusion to other biblical passages, and so forth, are things to which the reader should be sensitive. Indeed, the

more one discovers such elements in a prose narrative, the more blurred becomes the distinction between prose and poetry. If one compares major English translations, for instance, he/she will discover that they do not all treat passages the same. One version may treat a passage as prose, while another may treat the same passage as poetic. A good example is the varied treatment of Isaiah 8. The ESV renders most of this chapter as prose and sets out in poetic form only 8:9-10. The NIV, on the other hand, renders much more of this chapter as poetry, treating only the prefaces in 8:1-5, 11 and the conclusion in 18-22 as prose.

Word Choices

English has a rich array of words enabling very subtle linguistic nuances. It makes a difference to say, "He was ambling" as opposed to "He was walking," for instance. Hebrew narrative, also, can be nuanced by word choices, especially when various possibilities exist between synonyms or near-synonyms or options for verbal tenses. Take, for instance, the verbs for "going" of which there are several: בּוֹא (= to come, go), הָלַךְ (= to walk), שׁוּב (= to go back), יָרַד (= to go down), יָצָא (= to go forth), עָלָה (= to go up) and several similar lesser verbs. In his grief over the loss of Bathsheba's child, David says, אֲנִי הֹלֵךְ אֵלָיו וְהוּא לֹא־יָשׁוּב אֵלָי (= I am going to him, but he will not return to me, cf. 2 Sa. 12:23). Two words for "going" are used, "walking" (a participle) and "he will not return" (imperfect tense). The fact that the author used a participle in the first instance, a verb that doubles for "going/walking" in a verbal form suggesting continuous or habitual action, introduces a subtle distinction from the second verb. The form is not אֵלֵךְ (= I will go, an imperfect tense), but rather, הֹלֵךְ (= I am walking/going, a participle), the image of a lifelong trudge toward his lost child and death itself. By contrast, the dead child is unable to return to life, indicated by the second verb which is NOT used in a habitual or participial sense, since there is no continuing motion for this child in the state of death. This subtle nuance of contrast, as described by Sarah Ruden, is between the man who can still think, plan and act and the innocent child who has passed beyond physical consciousness.[33]

As another example, the common verb for establishing a covenant is כָּרַת (= to cut). English Versions generally render this as "make a covenant", even though the verb עָשָׂה (= to make) may not be used. The verb "to cut" likely goes back to the fact that ancient Near Eastern covenants were traditionally sealed by cutting an animal (or animals) in pieces (cf. Ge. 15:8-17). God's covenant with Abram concludes with the statement, בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כָּרַת יְהוָה אֶת־אַבְרָם בְּרִית (= in that

[33] S. Ruden, *The Face of Water: A Translator on Beauty and Meaning in the Bible* (New York: Pantheon, 2017), p. xx.

day, Yahweh cut a covenant with Abram, cf. Ge. 15:18). This idiom is typical (cf. Ge. 31:34; Ex. 23:32; 24:8; Dt. 5:2, etc.). Hence, the reader of the Hebrew Bible must pay attention to word choices, and it goes without saying that the more familiar one is with Hebrew vocabulary, the more he/she is likely to detect such subtleties.

Repetition

When a writer chooses a particular phrase and repeats it, sometimes several times, it serves to emphasize some aspect of the narrative. Seven times in the creation account, the statement is made וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב (= and God saw that [it was] good", cf. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Hence, when the narrative then indicates that something was לֹא־טוֹב (= not good, cf. 2:18), the contrast is sharp!

Four times near the end of the Book of Judges the composer remarks, בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם אֵין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל (= in those days there was no king in Israel, cf. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). This striking repetition underscores the lawlessness of the period and prepares the reader for the beginning of the monarchy. Similarly, the Kings record is punctuated with the repeating phrase about each of the northern kings, וַיֵּלֶךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ יָרָבְעָם (= and he walked in the way of Jeroboam, cf. 1 Kg. 15:34, etc.), a statement that reflects backward upon Jeroboam's sins of building alternative shrines with an alternative priesthood and an alternative religious calendar for the northern nation (cf. 1 Kg.12:28-33; 13:33-34).

Sometimes, and usually less obviously, there is a repetition of a verb, noun or modifier in the narrative to which the reader of the Hebrew text should pay special attention. When God told Abraham that he would have a son by Sarah, for instance, even though at the time he would be 100 and she would be 90, the composer of Genesis wrote וַיִּצְחָק (= and he laughed, cf. 17:17). Later, when God repeated this same promise while Sarah was eavesdropping, the composer wrote וַתִּצְחַק (= and she laughed, cf. Ge. 18:12). This, then, prepares the reader for the naming of Isaac, who was called יִצְחָק (= he laughs), a child about whose birth Sarah would say, לִי־צְחֹק עָשָׂה לִי אֱלֹהִים כָּל־הַשֹּׁמֵעַ יִצְחַק (= God has made laughter for me; all hearing will laugh with me!, cf. Ge. 21:3, 6).

Similarly, when Jacob was returning from the north and heard the threatening advance of his brother, the writer repeatedly uses the word "face": Jacob said, פָּנָיו אֲכַפְּרָה (= I will cover his face[34]) with a gift לְפָנָי (= before his face), and then said, אֶרְאֶה פָּנָיו (= I will see his face), and אוּלַי יִשָּׂא פָנָי (= perhaps he will lift up my

[34] An idiom for appeasement

face[35]). So, he sent the gift עַל־פָּנָיו (= before his face, cf. Ge. 32:20-21a). This all prepares the reader for Jacob's eventual statement when meeting Esau, פְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים רָאִיתִי פָנֶיךָ כִּרְאֹת (= I saw your face like seeing the face of God, cf. Ge. 33:10).

Irony and Sarcasm

As in poetry, irony and sarcasm can be found in biblical narrative as well. A good example can be found in Joseph's dream interpretations of the two prisoners, the cupbearer and the baker. Each of them had strange dreams, and Joseph interpreted both using the same language. To each, he said their dreams meant, בְּעוֹד שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים יִשָּׂא פַרְעֹה אֶת־רֹאשֶׁךָ (= in yet three days, Pharaoh will lift up your head, cf. Ge. 40:13, 19). The irony, of course, is that these statements, while identical, meant two different things. For the one, "lifting the head" was an idiom for restoration; for the other, it meant summary hanging!

Irony can be found in various passages. Jonah's name, which means "dove", is an irony, since his life and career was anything but peaceful, a characteristic normally associated with the dove (Jonah 1, 4). Indeed, the whole book is filled with ironies: Jonah is a true prophet, but he flees from Yahweh (1:1-3); in the ship, he sleeps while the pagans pray (1:5); even the animals in Nineveh, together with their masters, cry out in repentance, but when God was merciful, Jonah was angry (Jon. 3:6-9; 4:1).

The sarcasm in Jeremiah's response to the false prophet Hananiah is a good example of sarcasm. When Hananiah predicated that the exiles of the 1st deportation would return home in two years, Jeremiah said, אָמֵן כֵּן יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה (= Amen! May Yahweh do so!). However, Hananiah's prediction was a direct contradiction to Jeremiah's own announcement that the exile would last a long time, and Jeremiah's response can only be read as dripping with sarcasm!

Allusions

Allusions are references to other literature or events with which the speaker or writer expects his audience to be familiar. When Jeremiah says, אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁילוֹ לְכוּ־נָא אֶל־מְקוֹמִי (= Go now to my place in Shiloh!), he expects his listeners to know the story from 1 Samuel 4:1-11, when God abandoned the tabernacle and the ark of God was captured by the pagan Philistines. Similarly,when both Jeremiah and Ezekiel quote the line, אָבוֹת אָכְלוּ בֹסֶר וְשִׁנֵּי בָנִים תִּקְהֶינָה (= Fathers have eaten unripe grapes and [the] teeth of the sons are blunted, cf. Je. 31:29; Eze. 18:2), they refer to an aphorism, apparently popular both in Jerusalem as well as among the

[35] An idiom for acceptance

exiles of the 1st deportation in Babylon. When Hosea names his first child Jezreel (Ho. 1:4-5), he anticipates that the blood-bath that happened at Jezreel (cf. 2 Kg. 9-10) would be generally known.

Hapax Legomena

At various times, the reader will encounter words that appear only once in the entire Hebrew Bible. These are called *hapax legomena* (a Greek derivative, ἅπαξ λεγομενα = single saying). Unlike NT Greek, where there are many available external texts to consult for understanding difficult words, there are no external texts in Hebrew other than a few inscriptions. Hence, defining a *hapax legomenon* in the Old Testament can be a challenge. A good example is Zechariah 14:6, which says, וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֹא־יִהְיֶה אוֹר יְקָרוֹת יִקְפָּאוֹן (= And it will be in that day there will not be light rare ???). The problem is the final word יִקְפָּאוֹן, which is a *hapax legomenon* and the modifier immediately preceding it. The modifier is a feminine plural adjective meaning "rare" or "precious", but the meaning of the final word is unknown, giving rise to a multiplicity of renderings: "...there shall not be either cold or frost" (RSV, ESV), "...the luminaries will dwindle" (NASB), "...the light shall not be clear, *nor* dark" (KJV), "...but heavy clouds and thick" (JPS), "...the light shall not be with brightness and with gloom" (ERV), and so forth. All these are scholarly guesses, and some English Versions offer a footnote, as does the ESV, that "the meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain".

Altogether, there are more than 1700 *hapax legomena* in the Hebrew Bible, excluding names, so "uncertain meanings" attend a significant number of passages. How, then, does one go about discovering a conjectured meaning of such an unknown word? There are several steps, the first of which is to identify as much of the form of the word as possible. Then, one should consult the earliest translation, the Septuagint, which in the above case renders the final two words in Zechariah 14:6 as ψῦχος καὶ πάγος (= cold and ice), a rendering followed by several English Versions (NAB, NIV, NCV, NRSV, TEV). One can also consult other early translations, such as, the Aramaic Targums, the Syriac, the Latin Vulgate, etc., to see what they say. At the very least, one can discover what these ancient translators *thought* the word meant. More daring, a translator can conjecture an emendation, in which a letter (or letters) in the word is changed so that it reads differently than the Masoretic Text. In any case, all such approaches are educated guesswork, and very little theological weight should be allowed to hang on such ambiguous passages.

STRUCTURE AND PATTERN

In the previous section, it was stated that the distinction between prose and

poetry is sometimes blurred. This is especially true when a prose narrative is highly structured. Structure tends to produce literary rhythm, and rhythm tends toward poetry. In all probability, early literary structures developed as a memory aid for ancient people living in an oral culture. Patterns may have assisted people in recalling how a story progressed. In whatever way they came about, structure and pattern certainly are to be observed, not merely in poetry, but also in prose. Sometimes this structure featured literary patterns, sometimes numerical patterns, and sometimes both.

The creation account in the opening of the Hebrew Bible is an excellent case in point. This highly structured narrative features a pattern of repeating elements. The days of creation show a marked parallelism, giving the account a decided poetic character, even though the account is not a poem *per se*.

- וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים (= And God said..., cf. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29)
- יְהִי (= ...let there be..., cf. 1:3, 6, 14a, 14b, 15 along with various other jussives in 1:9, 11, 20, 24, 26, a cohortative in 1:26 and imperatives in 1:28)
- וַיְהִי־כֵן (= ...and it was so..., cf. 1:3, 7, 9, 11, 15, 24, 30)
- כִּי־טוֹב (...that it [was] good..., cf. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31)
- וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר (...and it was evening, and it was morning..., cf. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31)

At God's creative word, seven times the narrative says, "it was so" and seven times it says "it was good", corresponding to the seven days of the creative week. These seven repetitions can hardly be accidental or incidental. Furthermore, the primary domains described in the first triad of days parallel the primary inhabitants of those domains in the second triad of days.

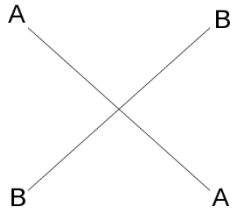
THREE PRIMARY DOMAINS	**INHABITANTS OF THE DOMAINS**
1st Day (celestial) *Light and dark*	**4th Day** *Sun, moon and stars*
2nd Day (sublunary) *Sky and water*	**5th Day** *Birds and fish*
3rd Day (terrestrial) *Earth, seas & vegetation*	**6th Day** *Livestock, game, and humans*

Other structures and patterns can be observed in passages such as Amos' diatribe to the nations, כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה עַל־שְׁלֹשָׁה פִּשְׁעֵי...וְעַל־אַרְבָּעָה (= Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions...and for four...," cf. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). To be sure, this diatribe is more easily identified as poetry, but the structure

would be there, whether it was poetry or not. Here, the number seven is also significant, since Amos is denouncing the nations that surrounded the northern kingdom of Israel. Inasmuch as the number seven seems to denote fulness or completion, after his seventh diatribe (this one against Judah), his listeners would suppose that he was done. He was NOT done, and the 8th diatribe is against Israel herself! The six "woes" of Isaiah concerning rampant social injustice in Judah is another sort of pattern (Is. 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22). The series of explosive הוֹי interjections (= Ah!, Alas!, Woe!) are like the repeating blows of a hammer!

Chiastic Structures

A special sort of structure, chiasmus, can also be found in prose. We initially encountered this device in poetry, where the parallelism follows the pattern of A_1, A_2//A_2, A_1, which is to say, the grammatical constructions or concepts are repeated in reverse order.



Chiasmus (chiasm) derives from the Greek term χιάζω (= to shape like the letter X). Chiasmus is represented as a "X" structure (similar to the Greek letter χ). When read left to right, top to bottom, the first element (A) is reiterated as the last (A), and the middle elements, (B) and (B), appear twice in succession.

This technique was popular in ancient literature, not only in Hebrew, but also in Akkadian and Ugaritic texts, as well as in Greek and Latin literature, and more recently, in Shakespeare and up into the modern period. Some chiasms are well-known, such as, "One should eat to live, not live to eat" (Cicero). As a literary device, chiasmus is used to create balance and subordination in a text, and it was especially helpful in ancient language groups that did not use paragraphing, punctuation or capitalization. If one could recall the first half of a chiastic structure, it was reasonably easy to recall the rest.

Especially in Hebrew, it is generally recognized that the center of the structure is emphasized—a sort of keystone which is supported by the elements from both sides (A_1, A_2 $\mathbf{X_3}$ A_2 A_1). While often chiasmus in poetic structures is short and usually has only two parallel elements (reverse parallelism), the same sort of structure can be elongated in prose, usually with a central element, and sometimes leading to quite elaborate structures. A word of caution is in order: given that virtually all scholars recognize chiasmus as a constituent element of ancient Hebrew literature, it still must be said that interpreters can be overly creative in discovering chiasms, and their results may say more about their ingenuity than about the text itself. Here, I will offer as an example a generally agreed upon chiasmus as representative of the style and then some examples that are arguable but less certain.

Chiasmus in Genesis 17:1-25

A *Abram's age (17:1a)*
  B *The LORD appears to Abram (17:1b)*
    C *God's first speech (17:1c–2)*
      D *Abram falls on his face (17:3)*
        E *God's second speech (emphasizing "names/ kings/nations") (17:4–8)*
          X God's third/most important speech (emphasizing "the covenant") (17:9–14)
        E' *God's fourth speech (emphasizing "names/kings/ nations") (17:15–16)*
      D' *Abraham falls on his face (17:17–18)*
    C' *God's fifth speech (17:19–21)*
  B' *The LORD goes up from Abram (17:22–23)*
A' *Abraham's age (17:24–25)*

Here, you can easily see how the various elements match each other in the larger structure.

Another generally recognized chiastic structure includes the five poems in Lamentations, in which the central poem (chapter 3), with its affirmation of divine faithfulness and mercy, is the most important. Other scholars have found chiastic structures in the books of 1 and 2 Kings,[36] the Song of Songs[37] and the eight night visions of Zechariah, to name just a few.[38]

Inclusio

Inclusio, which we looked at in regard to poetry, is a literary device in Hebrew prose in which the same language is used at the beginning and end of a section of literature. What falls between offers support or explanation for the beginning and ending statements. Inclusio is similar to chiasmus in that the opening of a section matches the ending. It differs in that the structure between the two "bookends" is less elaborate than chiasmus and not characterized by a series of matching inverted pairs.

As with chiasmus, ancient languages without paragraphing or punctuation used inclusio to help mark off sections and transitions. Sometimes it might appear in a short passage, such as, Jeremiah 4:22, when the passage has לֹ֣א יָדָ֔עוּ (= they do not know) near the beginning and repeats it at the end. These two statements bracket the description of Yahweh's wayward children that falls between them. A more extended example can be found in the questions posed by God in Jeremiah 1:11 and 24:3, מָה־אַתָּ֥ה רֹאֶ֖ה יִרְמְיָ֑הוּ (= what are you seeing, Jeremiah?) and the similar answers מַקֵּ֥ל שָׁקֵֽד (= an almond tree branch) and וְהָרָעוֹת֙ רָעוֹת֣ מְאֹ֔ד

[36] J. Walsh, *1 Kings [Berith Olam]* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996).
[37] G. Carr, *The Song of Solomon [TOTC]* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1984), p. 45.
[38] J. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary [TOTC]* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1972) 80, 93.

תְּאֵנִים הַתְּאֵנִים הַטֹּבוֹת טֹבוֹת מְאֹד (= figs—the good figs very good and the bad ones very bad). In between are various oracles illustrating the condition of the nation of Judah.

The move of Elimelech's family from Bethlehem to Moab (Ru. 1:1) and their return from Moab back to Bethlehem (Ru. 1:22) form an inclusio, bracketing the events of deprivation described in the opening chapter of this little drama. Similarly, two identical statements, יְהוָה אֶת־יוֹסֵף (= the LORD was with Joseph, cf. Genesis 39:2 and 39:21), bracket the narrative about Joseph's success, both in Potiphar's household as well as in the prison, despite adverse circumstances. In Numbers, the line, זֹאת עֲבֹדַת מִשְׁפְּחֹת הַגֵּרְשֻׁנִי (= this is the service of the families of the Gershonites), appears at the beginning of the section (Nu. 4:24) and is repeated at the end of the section (Nu. 4:28), marking off the description of the Gershonites' work in carrying the paraphernalia of the tabernacle.

The Use of Numbers

Numbers are used in more than one way in Hebrew literature. They can be used mathematically, of course, which is most akin to the way we use numbers in the modern world. However, they also can be used in a symbolic way, which generally is unlike the way we use them in the modern world. Furthermore, while sometimes numbers are stated explicitly within a text, in many cases they are implicit within a text, the reader being expected to mentally account for them, even though they are unstated. Little needs to be said about the use of numbers in a mathematical way, since we are accustomed to this usage (other than to point out that the transmission of numbers is especially problematic in ancient texts and their copies, an issue we will address in an upcoming lesson about textual criticism). It is important, however, to explore the use of numbers in ways that do not correspond to the way modern people use them.

The use of numbers as symbols means that they have special meanings beyond their mathematical value, and this especially concerns the numbers three, four, seven, ten, twelve, forty and a thousand.

- שָׁלֹשׁ (the number three) indicates completeness. Indications of this idiomatic meaning include: the three major *haggim* (pilgrimage festivals) each year (Ex. 23:14-17); the three standard times for daily prayer (Da. 6:10; Ps. 55:17); the three major spaces in the 1st temple, the אוּלָם (= vestibule, cf. 1 Kg. 6:3), the הֵיכַל (= temple proper, cf. 1 Kg. 6:3), and the דְּבִיר (= inner sanctuary, also called the Holy of Holies, cf. 1 Kg. 6:19, 16); the three pieces

of clothing for lay priests (Ex. 28:40); and the special efficacy of three-year old sacrifices (Ge. 15:9; 1 Sa. 1:24).

- אַרְבַּע (the number four) indicates boundaries. Indications of this idiomatic meaning include the four rivers bounding the Garden of Eden (Ge. 2:10-14), the four corners of the earth (Is. 11:12), the four winds which are from the four quarters of heaven (Je. 49:36; Da. 7:2), the four chariots patrolling the world (Zec. 6:1-5), and the four living creatures surrounding the divine throne (Eze. 1:5-10).
- שֶׁבַע (the number seven) indicates rest, fulfillment and completion. Indications of this idiomatic meaning include: the seven words in the first sentence of the Bible (Ge. 1:1); the seventh day of creation, when God rested (Ge. 2:2-3; Ex. 20:11); the seventh month, when the ark came to rest on the Ararat Mountains (Ge. 8:4); the seven animals for sealing a business transaction (Ge. 21:28); Pharaoh's dream of seven abundant years and seven harsh years (Ge. 41:1-36); the requirement for fields to lie fallow every seventh year (Lv. 25:2-7); the seven furnishings of the Tabernacle (bronze altar, laver, menorah, table, incense altar, veil and ark, cf. Ex. 25:10, 23, 31; 26:31; 27:1; 30:1, 17); and the seven garments of the High Priest (breastplate, ephod, robe, coat, turban, sash and engraved plate, cf. Ex. 28:4, 36-38). In addition, multiples of seven are also important, and they include: the 70 descendants of Jacob that migrated to Egypt (Ex. 1:5); the 70 elders of Israel (Ex. 24:1, 9); the 49 years when debts were cancelled and slaves released (Lv. 25:8ff.); the 70 years of Babylonian exile (Je. 25:12; 29:10; Da. 9:2); and the 70 prophetic weeks decreed for Israel (Da. 9:24).
- עֶשֶׂר (the number ten), like the number three, indicates completion. Indications of this idiomatic meaning include: the decalogue (Ex. 34:28; cf. 20:1-17; Dt.4:13; cf. 5:6-21); the ten plagues against Egypt (Ex. 7:8—11:10); the tithe (Lv. 27:30ff.; Dt. 26:12); the ten curtains for the Tabernacle (Ex. 26:1) and the ten frames and posts for the court (27:12; 36:8; 38:12); the apocalyptic kingdoms arrayed against God (Da. 2:42; 7:7, 24).
- שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר (the number twelve) indicates order, and especially, refers to the chosen people of God. Indications of this idiomatic meaning originate with the 12 sons of Jacob resulting in the 12 tribes of Israel (Ge. 29:31—30:20; 35:16-18; 49:28; Ex. 28:21; Jos. 3:12, etc.). When Benjamin was on the verge of extinction during the Tribal League, the other tribes took action to ensure that the nation would not be lacking in one tribe (Jg. 21:1ff.). When

Solomon reorganized the nation into new tax districts, bypassing the ancient tribal land divisions, he still retained the number 12 (1 Kg. 4:7ff.). Interestingly, even when some tribes more-or-less disappeared from the record (e.g., Reuben, Simeon early one; later, the northern tribes in Assyrian exile), the nation still is considered to be a people of 12 tribes (1 Kg. 18:31; Ezr. 6:17; 8:35). This, in turn, would lead to the 12 apostles chosen by Christ and the replacement of one apostle upon the defection and suicide of Judas Iscariot (Mk. 3:13-19; Ac. 1:15-26).

- אַרְבָּעִים (the number forty) indicates a complete cycle, and sometimes, cycles associated with deprivation. General cycles include periods of peace (Jg. 3:11; 5:31; 8:28) and the tenures of important leaders, such as, Eli (1 Sa. 4:18), David (2 Sa. 5:4; 1 Kg. 2:11), Solomon (1 Kg 11:42), and Jehoash (2 Kg. 12:1). Moses was on the mountain of God for 40 days and nights (Ex. 24:18). Cycles of deprivation include: the 40 days and nights of rain during Noah's flood (Ge. 7:12); the Israelite sojourn for 40 years in the Sinai Desert (Ex. 16:35; Nu. 14:34; Ps. 95:10); the oppression of the Philistines for 40 years (Jg. 13:1); the challenge of Goliath for 40 days (1 Sa. 17:16); and Ezekiel's prediction of the desolation of Egypt for 40 years (Eze. 29:12). All this naturally leads to the 40 days of Jesus' fasting in the Judean Desert (Mk. 1:13).
- אֶלֶף (the number thousand and its multiples) indicates a very large number. Indications of this idiomatic meaning include: God's mercy extended to a thousand generations (Ex. 34:7; Dt. 5:10; 7:9; cf. Ps. 105:8); the exaggerated estimate of Saul's and David's conquests (1 Sa. 18:7; 21:11; 29:5); the broad estimate of Judah's population (1 Sa. 23:23; Mic. 5:2); the broad estimate of unanswerable divine questions (Job 9:3; cf. 33:23); the merismus of cattle on a thousand hills (Ps. 50:10); the innumerable hosts of God (Ps. 68:17); and a thousand days or enemies or other entities indicating a large but indefinite number (Ps. 84:10; 90:4; 91:7; 119:72; Ecc. 6:6; 7:28; Song 4:4; Is. 7:23; 30:17; 60:22; Am. 5:3; Mic. 6:7, etc.). All these lead to the apocalyptic use of thousand, especially in the Book of Revelation.

The implicit use of numbers refers to instances where a close reading of the text reveals some of the above idiomatic usages, even though the numbers themselves are not explicitly stated. For instance, in the genealogies of Genesis, special notations are made in the 3rd and 7th generation from Adam. In the 3rd generation from Adam in the line of Cain, Enoch became a city-builder (Ge. 4:17),

while in the line of Seth, people began to call on Yahweh's name (Ge. 4:26). In the 7th generation from Adam in the line of Cain, Lamech threatens his wives with seventy-sevenfold revenge (Ge. 4:17-24), while in the line of Seth, Enoch is translated into the heavens (Ge. 5:6-24). In the Table of Nations (Ge. 10), there are enumerated 70 nations of the world, and this, in turn, informs the 70 disciples sent out by Christ (Lk. 10:1, 17).[39] The number 480 in 1 Kings 6:1 may be a programmatic number, since it is 12 x 40, which is to say, 12 generations or cycles. If so, it may not be intended as a mathematical number.

On occasion, a close reading may result in finding some of the above important numbers, but whether they have symbolic meaning or are simply coincidental may be unclear. For instance, there are 12 judges in the Book of Judges, and the name Yahweh appears 12 times in the Book of Ruth. Are these important or coincidental? The interpreter must decide.

READING HEBREW NARRATIVE AS LITERATURE

There is more narrative literature in the Old Testament than any other genre. One reason, no doubt, is that peculiar to Hebrew and other Semitic languages is the literary form called "narrative sequence," involving the use of complementary perfect and imperfect verbs connected by the conjunction "and": וַיְהִי (= and it was) and וְהָיָה (= and it will be). These well-known *waw*-conversive forms have no strict relationship to linear time, and further, they don't necessarily indicate whether something does/did or can/should happen. They often do express the passage of time and sometimes introduce new action or new scenes, especially when coupled with additional phrases, such as: וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר רָאָה (= "And when he saw...", or more literally, "And it was just as he saw...") or וְהָיָה כִּי תִשְׁמְעוּ אֶל־קוֹל (= "When you obey...", or more literally, "And it will be as you shall listen to the voice of..."). As discussed in Lesson 16, these phrases typically are NOT translated literally but call for a temporal nuance. The old English of the KJV, "And it came to pass..." is not technically wrong, but it is inadequate, since it doesn't convey the immediacy of what is to follow. Hence, while the translator encounters these formulae again and again in narrative literature, their nuance needs to be handled carefully. The same can be said for the word הִנֵּה (= "See!"). This predicator of existence is different than יֵשׁ (= "There is...") in that it also expresses a nuance of immediacy (see Lesson 20). It adds vividness and often implies such ideas as "here" or "now" or "just then", etc. The old English "Behold..." generally fails to convey this immediacy. The use of these literary techniques was the Hebrew way of introducing drama and suspense

[39] In some manuscripts of Luke, the number is 72, but this only reinforces the relationship between the Table of Nations in Genesis and Luke's Gospel, since the Masoretic Text has 70 names, while the Septuagint has 72.

into a narrative, and the translator should be sensitive to such dramatic movement and reflect it in his/her renderings.

Most of the material in Genesis, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther and Daniel is composed as narrative literature, and narratives tell a story. However, the point of such stories was not simply to record factual data in some disinterested way. Instead, they were stories intended to give meaning and direction to God's people who heard or read them later. Though stories are not laws, many stories reflect upon laws, showing how the implications of those laws were lived out in the history of Israel. Take, for instance, the law that forbade Israelite citizens from permanently selling their family property (Lv. 25:23-28). The story of Naboth, Ahab, and Elijah reflects upon this law. When the King of Israel wanted to buy a vineyard from Naboth, the man flatly refused on the grounds of the ancient law code (1 Kg. 21:1-3). Ahab was so cavalier about Yahweh's laws that he and his wife engineered a kangaroo court and a bogus capital sentence in order to circumvent this Israelite citizen's loyalty to the ancient statute. Elijah, God's spokesman, sentenced Ahab and his wife to death for violating this law (1 Kg. 21:17-19, 23-24). In the end, the story sharpens the focus of the law, shows the trend among the Israelites toward relaxing their obedience to God's covenant demands, and offers a warning to any reader that God's statutes are to be taken seriously!

In general, narrative literature features five common components: *narrator*, *plot, characters*, *scene* and *dialogue*. The narrator, of course, is in the background and not personally mentioned. Nonetheless, he is the one who chooses what parts of the story are to be told. His choice of materials shapes the way the story unfolds and emphasizes his theological viewpoint. In the story of Joseph, for instance, the narrator twice puts in bold relief the most important theological theme when Joseph says to his brothers: "I*t was not you who sent me, but God*," and *"You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good!"* (Ge. 45:4-8; 50:20). Similarly, in the story of the exile of Israel to Assyria, the narrator's potent conclusion was: "*All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God. [...] The LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers…but they would not listen"* (2 Kg. 17:7-23). When David sinned by committing adultery, it is the narrator who, at the end of the account, observes, *"But the thing David had done displeased the LORD"* (2 Sa. 11:27b).

The plot is the skeletal structure upon which the story is fleshed out. Plots, by definition, show the rise and fall of dramatic tension. They have a beginning, a middle and an end. In the beginning, the plot sets up the conflict. The middle section develops this conflict toward a climax or even a series of ascending climaxes (there may be several points of intensity before one reaches the final climax). Sometimes

there are subplots within the larger plot. At the end, the conflict gives way to resolution. Take, for instance, the plot in the story of Judah and Tamar (Ge. 38). The larger issue is that Judah, one of the sons of Jacob, might not have any heirs, thus leading to the elimination of one of the twelve tribes. Tamar, the wife of Judah's deceased son Er, and later the wife of his deceased son Onan, as yet had no children. Understandably, Judah restricted her from becoming the wife of his youngest son, Shelah (38:1-11, 26). Tamar took it upon herself to trick Judah into a levirate marriage (marriage to a close relative) in order to preserve the family line. She disguised herself as a cult prostitute, and Judah, not knowing who she was, impregnated her. However, because at the moment he had nothing for payment, he left some personal items for collateral until she could be paid. When he attempted to send payment, the cult prostitute could not be found (38:12-23). In time, it became obvious that Tamar was pregnant. Judah was furious and was on the verge of executing her for promiscuity (38:24). (There is, of course, the deep irony of Judah's double standard that screams for attention.) Before the execution, however, Tamar displayed the collateral that she had collected from Judah earlier, and in particular, it included his very own cylinder seal (38:25). He could hardly deny the items were his! In the end, he acknowledged what he had done, accepted Tamar's pregnancy as within her rights, and gave her protection. The birth of her twin boys is the resolution to the tension over whether or not the tribe of Judah would survive (38:26-30).

The main characters, of course, always figure prominently in any story. Oddly enough, to our way of thinking, the physical appearance of the characters in most biblical stories is not described. Rather, the biblical stories focus on the inner qualities of the characters as demonstrated in their words and actions. Sometimes those qualities are negative, as in the stories of Samson and Ahab (Jg. 16:20; 1 Kg. 21:25-26). Sometimes those qualities are positive, as in the kingships of Hezekiah and Josiah (2 Chr. 31:20-21; 34:29-33). In fact, in one story, the account of Samuel's role in anointing a new king, this quality of inner character is prominently underscored as the only issue of ultimate significance (1 Sa. 16:7). Sometimes this quality of inner character or even the story line itself is sharpened by the use of personal names that results in puns on elements within the stories. Samuel (a pun on the expression "heard of God") reflects upon Samuel's sensitivity to God when just a boy (1 Sa. 3:2-10). An antagonist of David, was named Nabal (= fool, cf. 1 Sa. 25:3, 25). Solomon's name (= peaceful) reflects upon the fact that God wanted a man of peace, not a man of war, to build his temple (1 Chr. 22:6-10). Elijah's name (= Yahweh is God) underscores the primary issue in the contest on Mt. Carmel (1 Kg. 18:21, 38-39). Often, main characters stand in parallel or contrast to each other. The Saul and David stories are a good example, where Saul is cavalier about his obedience to God, but David is a man after God's own heart (1 Sa. 13:13-14; 15:22-29). In the story of Deborah's war, Deborah, a woman judge, stands as a parallel

hero to Barak, the leader of the army. However, it was Deborah who was the true force behind Israel's victory, and Barak, though he figured in the outcome, is overshadowed by his female counterpart (Jg. 4:4-10; 5:7, 12, 15). The fact that Deborah's name is consistently mentioned first before Barak's is all the more remarkable in literature from a patriarchal era!

The narrative scene is perhaps just as important as the characters themselves. Some stories almost function like a stage play divided into acts. Take, for instance, the story of Ruth. The first scene is in Moab. It describes the tragedy that befell a family of Israelites during a famine, causing them to move from Judah to Moab. All the men in the family died in Moab, leaving three widows. Two of them, a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, decided to move back to Judah in the extremity of their situation (Ru. 1). Next, the scene changes to Bethlehem. When the two women arrived in Bethlehem, Ruth, the lovely young widow, began to glean in the fields of a rich farmer, Boaz, not realizing he was a relative of her deceased husband (Ru. 2). Because he was a near kinsman, according to Israelite law Boaz was a potential redeemer-husband (cf. Dt. 25:5-6). Now the scene changes to a night encounter between Ruth and Boaz. In view of Boaz' kindness to allow her to glean in his fields, Ruth, at her mother-in-law's encouragement, presented herself as a candidate for levirate marriage (close relative marriage) only to discover that another relative, who was even closer, had first marriage rights for the young widow (Ru. 3). The tension in the story builds when the mystery man, the closer relative (he is unnamed in the book), is confronted with the possibility of him marrying Ruth. He declined his right, thus making it possible for Boaz to marry Ruth. The two of them were happily married, and God gave them a son (Ru. 4:1-17). As the appendix makes clear, this story was far more than a romance. It was a story about the great grandparents of King David and how God providentially worked out his divine purposes in their lives (Ru. 4:18-22).

Virtually all the stories have dialogue, which helps the reader understand both the character of the speaker and the plot of the narrative. Sometimes the dialogue comes in the form of speeches that rehearse things like the Deuteronomistic theology. These speeches by spiritual leaders like Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon and others punctuate the Deuteronomistic history and recall the Deuteronomistic values (Jos. 23; 1 Sa. 12:6-15, 24-25; 2 Sa. 22:26-27; 1 Kg. 2:2-4; 8:33-53, 56-61; 9:3-9; 11:29-39). Sometimes dialogue comes in conversations that give clues to the character values of the speakers as well as the story plot. In the dialogue between God and Samuel, for instance, over the Israelites' request for a king so they could be "like other nations", God says to Samuel: "*It is not you they have rejected as their king, but me!"* (1 Sa. 8:7b). In the dialogue between Joseph and his family over his boyhood dreams, the question posed by his brothers actually sets the framework for

the entire narrative: *"Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?"* (Ge. 37:8a). The command of Saul, *"Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because they too have sided with David*," demonstrates how calloused and violent he had become (1 Sa. 22:17).

Name Identification

One feature which is especially characteristic of ancient Hebrew literature is the use of personal names to accent some feature of a narrative. Names were believed to carry the traits, nature or even the destiny of the one named. Often this aspect is implicit but sometimes it is directly stated, particularly when the name has value with respect to a person's life and role in sacred history. The name Adam (אָדָם), for instance, is obviously related to the word for soil or dirt (אֲדָמָה), implicitly connecting this primordial archetype with the human race as well as human mortality (Ge. 3:19). The name Eve (חַוָּה) is based on the verb "to live" (חָיָה), and indeed, attention is called to this fact (Ge. 3:20). Less obvious are names like Abel (הֶבֶל), which in the ordinary language means "vapor" (cf. Ecc. 1:2), so it is not too surprising that in the Genesis narrative his life ends prematurely. The name Deborah (דְּבוֹרָה), which means "bee", underscores her life as a judge and warrior (Jg. 4-5).

Various names are linked with the circumstances of birth, such as, Jacob (Ge. 25:26) and Esau (Ge. 25:25) and the twelve sons of Israel (e.g., Ge. 29:32-35; 30:6-8, 11-13, 18-24; 35:16-18). Most modern English Versions footnote such names and link the names with their Hebrew meanings.

Occasionally, fictitious names appear which carry ominous meanings, such as, the two prostitute sisters, Oholah and Oholibah, in Ezekiel's allegory of the nations of Israel and Judah (Eze. 23). The two names are directly related to the word אֹהֶל (= tent), and they suggest tents for prostitution.

Further, some names seem to have prophetic significance in that they foreshadow eventualities in the divine purpose. For instance Abram (אַבְרָם), whose name means "exalted Father", was renamed Abraham (אַבְרָהָם), meaning "father of a crowd" (Ge. 17:4-5), anticipating that he would become the father of many nations. The name Moses (מֹשֶׁה), which means "to draw out", not only reflects his being drawn out of the Nile River but also anticipates his eventual role in drawing the Israelites out of Egypt (Ex. 2:10). The names of Isaiah's sons, שְׁאָר יָשׁוּב (= a remnant will return) and מַהֵר שָׁלָל חָשׁ בַּז (= the spoil speeds, the prey hastens), were portents of a menacing divine judgment just on the horizon (Is. 7:3; 8:3).

Many names are compounds of two or more elements, and when combined,

function more or less as a descriptive phrase. Michael, the archangel, has a name meaning, "Who is like God?" (מִ + כָ + אֵל). Theophoric names are common that employ elements of the divine names El, Yah or Yahu, such as, Zechariah (זָכַר + יָהּ = Yahu has remembered) or Elimelech (אֵלִ + מֶלֶךְ = my God is King).

Finally, because of the importance of names, anonymity can also be important, where a missing name is conspicuous by its absence. It would be too much to say that all biblical names have emblematic meanings, but the reader of the Hebrew Bible should pay attention to names, since they regularly contribute to the story-line.

EUPHEMISMS AND APHORISMS

Euphemisms

We initially encountered euphemisms with respect to sexual intercourse, since Hebrew has no verb for it, but instead, uses expressions, such as, יָדַע (= to know), בָּא אֶל (= to come to), and שָׁכַב עִם (= to lie down with). Euphemisms are mild or indirect words or expressions substituted for others considered to be socially insensitive, too harsh, too blunt, unpleasant or socially embarrassing. Readers and translators of the Hebrew Bible should be sensitive to such expressions; otherwise, the essential meaning will be missed, sometimes missed entirely. It is to the point that such euphemisms depend heavily upon context rather than spelling or grammatical form. When Isaiah says, יָדַע שׁוֹר קֹנֵהוּ (= the ox knows his owner, Is. 1:3), the verb "to know" is used in its ordinary sense with no special nuance. However, when the Genesis author says, וְהָאָדָם יָדַע אֶת־חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ (= And Adam knew Eve, his wife..., Ge. 4:1a), it has a euphemistic nuance and refers to sexual intercourse. Later, the passage says, וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת־קָיִן (= And she conceived and bore Cain..., Ge. 4:1b), which makes abundantly clear the special nuance of the verb יָדַע.

Another example of euphemistic language is an expression for the human genital area, which is the word רַגְלַיִם (= feet). In various contexts, it does not refer to "feet" *per se*, but rather has this special nuance. In 2 Kings 18:27//Isaiah 36:12, for instance, in the insulting speech of the Babylonians about eating one's own dung or drinking one's own urine, the MT offers the *Qere* marginal reading[40] רַגְלֵיהֶם (= their feet). Obviously, no one can "drink" his own feet! This reading, in turn, help us understand Isaiah 7:20, which speaks of the Assyrian invader shaving Judah's

[40] A *Qere* reading in the margin of the MT is an oral substitute for the actual written word in the text itself. In other words, scribes would never change a text, but they would offer an alternative reading, in this case a euphemism, if the text as it stood was considered unsuitable for public hearing. The *Kethiv* reading is what is written in the MT itself; the *Qere* is what would be read aloud in the synagogue service.

head and the וְשַׂעַר הָרַגְלַיִם (= and the hair of the feet), here used as a euphemism for the genital area. It also enables us to understand the expression in Deuteronomy 28:57, a covenantal curse describing a mother in starving desperation eating the afterbirth of her own newborn: the text speaks of the בְּשִׁלְיָתָהּ הַיּוֹצֵאת מִבֵּין רַגְלֶיהָ (= afterbirth being disgorged from between her feet). When Saul went into the cave: וַיָּבֹא שָׁאוּל לְהָסֵךְ אֶת־רַגְלָיו (= And Saul came in to cover his feet, so KJV, 1 Sa. 24:3), he did not go in to take a nap, but rather, to relieve himself, as almost all contemporary versions recognize (e.g., ESV, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV, NLT, NRSV, RSV, etc.). The same euphemism can be found in Judges 3:24.

Aphorisms:

An aphorism is a maxim or pithy observation expressing a general truth. Ahab's aphorism, אַל־יִתְהַלֵּל חֹגֵר כְּמַפְתִּחַ (= Let not the one girding [his weapons] brag like [the one] loosening [them]!) expresses the idea that any boasting should be postponed until the battle is over. Earlier, in Lesson 32 under "Allusions", an aphorism popular both in Jerusalem as well as in Babylon was, "Fathers have eaten unripe grapes and [the] teeth of the sons are blunted" (Je. 31:29; Eze. 18:2).

Other aphorisms include the jibes against Ezekiel: הַיָּמִים וְאָבַד כָּל־חָזוֹן יַאֲרִכוּ (= The days are prolonged, and every vision perishes, cf. Eze. 12:22) and נִבָּא הֶחָזוֹן אֲשֶׁר־הוּא חֹזֶה לְיָמִים רַבִּים וּלְעִתִּים רְחוֹקוֹת הוּא (= The vision that he is seeing [is] for many days [from now], and he prophesies for distant times, Eze. 12:27). The description of the steward who was "over the house" in the court of David's dynasty contains an aphorism: וּפָתַח וְאֵין סֹגֵר וְסָגַר וְאֵין פֹּתֵחַ (= And he will open, and none shall shut; and he will shut and none will open, cf. Is. 22:22).

Prophetic Elements, Figures and Genres

In the 8th century BC, a new phenomenon occurred in Israel. The prophets began to write out their sermons in consonance with a growing public literacy. This prophetic literature is rich with a whole gamut of linguistic and literary devices employed to emphasize, enhance, urge, rebuke, and even shock the listeners. Since many of the prophetic oracles are in the form of poetry, figures of speech are quite common, especially metaphors, of which there are literally dozens. Some have become quite well-known, such as, the stump of Jesse and the branch (Is. 11:1; Je. 23:5; 33:15; Zec. 3:8; 6:12), and others are more obscure, like the boiling krater (Je. 1:13) or the fetus turned wrong in the womb (Ho. 13:13). Additionally, some unique rhetorical features are developed as well.

Signs and Parables

A sign (אוֹת or מוֹפֵת) is an act or manifestation that points beyond itself toward some purpose of God, either immediate or future. Isaiah's sign of the Immanuel birth is well-known (Is. 7:14), but indeed, all of Isaiah's children were signs, their names bearing messages about the future (Is. 7:3; 8:1-3, 18). His prophetic action of walking about "stripped and barefoot", the imagery of a war refugee, was a sign of judgment on Egypt and Cush (Is. 20:3). Ezekiel's task of building a model of Jerusalem with siege ramps was a sign of the city's coming destruction (Eze. 4:3). His shock and silence at the death of his wife was a sign that Jerusalem had fallen to the Babylonians (Eze. 24:24, 27).

Signs generally have two elements, an action and a divine word explaining the symbolism of the act. The two elements converge to confirm the prophet's word as authentic. Sometimes the sign is miraculous, such as, the backward movement of the sundial's shadow (Is. 38:7-8), and sometimes it is not, as with Ezekiel's mime of an escaping refugee, which was a sign of the coming exile (Eze. 12:6, 11). Sometimes, it is a prediction of an historical event (cf. Je. 44:29-30).

Sometimes in the prophets one finds a literary form called a מָשָׁל (= proverb, parable, riddle). Ezekiel, for instance, offers the parable of the cauldron, which in turn speaks to the disaster looming against Jerusalem, a city on the verge of being cooked until charred (Eze. 24:3). Sometimes the word מָשָׁל more or less equates to a taunt, a literary form that addresses an opponent, mocks his pretensions and scoffs at his destruction. The taunt against the King of Babylon is a good example (cf. Is. 14:4) as is the taunt against the power-brokers in Judah, who were perpetrators of social injustice (Mic. 2:4; Hab. 2:6).

More often, however, various prophets delivered their messages through acted out parables, mimes or actions that carried symbolic meaning. Micah's miming of a refugee is a good example (Mic. 1:8). Ezekiel's building of the siege model, shaving his hair with a sword, and the ordeal of lying on his side for an extended period is another (Eze. 4-5). Jeremiah delivered several such parables, including smashing wine jars and clay pots (Je. 13:12-14; 19:1ff.), burying his loincloth (Je. 13:1-11), and wearing an ox yoke (Je. 27:1ff.).

Allegories and Fables

The prophets also used literary forms such as allegories and fables. Allegories are stories using symbolic figures and actions to represent hidden meanings. One extended allegory is Ezekiel's story of the foundling who grew to be a young bride but then turned into a prostitute (Eze. 16). In this allegory, the abandoned baby represents the people of Israel, her discovery, rescue, upbringing and marriage the symbolism of Israel being united with God as his wife, and her prostitution as her history of covenant breaking.

A special kind of allegory is a fable, in which the main characters are personified animals or plants (cf. Jg. 9:7-15). Ezekiel has an extended fable of eagles and a cedar sprig (Ezekiel 17). Here, the great eagle refers to Nebuchadnezzar, the broken cedar top refers to Jehoiachin, the transplanted seed to Zedekiah, the second eagle to the Pharaoh in Egypt and the cedar sprig to the Messianic King.

Courtroom and Trial

The ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaty offered yet another image used by several prophets, the image of the courtroom. It is now well-known that the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai took the form of an ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaty.[41] Typically, such treaties were "witnessed" by the deities of the respective parties, inviting divine judgments if the covenant was violated, but in the case of Yahweh and Israel, the witnesses were the heavens and the earth (Dt. 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; 32:1).

When Israel, Yahweh's vassal, broke covenant, these witnesses were called to give testimony (Is. 1:2; Mic. 6:1-2). The charges against Israel took the form of a רִיב (= lawsuit). The use of רִיב both as a noun (a charge) and a verb (= to bring charges) appears repeatedly in the prophets (Is. 3:13; 41:21; Je. 2:9; Ho. 4:1; Mic 6:1-2). Other court vocabulary, also, is typical, such as, the verbs דִּין (= to judge, cf. Is. 3:13) and שָׁפַט (= to judge, settle a case, cf. Eze. 20:4), the verb עוּד (= bear witness, cf. Am. 3:13), the presentation of עֲצֻמוֹת (= arguments, defense, cf. Is. 41:21), and the resulting מִשְׁפָּט (= judgment, cf. Is. 3:14; Ho 5:1).

Songs and Exclamations

In addition to the well-known musical notations in the prefaces to many Psalms, various passages in the prophets are also referred to as "songs". Basic words like שִׁירָה (= song), שִׁיר (= to sing), and זִמְרָה (= melody, song) form the basic vocabulary. The most well-known is Isaiah's "Song of the Vineyard" (see below under "dirge"), but celebrations of redemption appear in various places (e.g., Is. 12:2; 26:1), and at least one song among the prophets seems to have been set to music (Hab. 3:1).[42]

Dirges are special kinds of songs. The Hebrews used a particular meter for

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[41] G. Mendenhall, *IDB* (1962) I.714; G. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East* (1955); M. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (1963); J. Plastaras, *Creation and Covenant* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1968); J. McConville, "Deuteronomy, Book of," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Alexander and D. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), pp. 184-185. See also the structure as outlined by Peter Craigie, cf. P. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy [NICOT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 24.

[42] The term שִׁגְיוֹנוֹת, the singular form of which also appears in Psalm 7:1, is obscure. Little more can be said than that it probably denotes an obscure musical or literary term.

expressing grief, the קִינָה (= lament: 3 + 2 stressed syllables, more or less like English iambic pentameter). Basic elements included the cry הוֹי (= Alas!), an exclamation announcing of death or destruction, the call to wail, and so forth. The prophets used this literary type to express warning for the coming death of the nation. Amos, for instance, warns about the fallen virgin Israel, and he sings this dirge in the קִינָה meter (Am. 5:1-3; cf. 5:16). Jeremiah sings a wrenching death song over Judah (Je. 8:18—9:3). God sings a dirge over his ruined vineyard (Is. 5:1-7), and indeed, this one contains a shock: the lyrics begin as though it is a love song, but the קִינָה meter introduces a jarring effect that finally develops into a proclamation of disaster.

Closely related to dirge, though not in the קִינָה meter, is the outburst of emotion describing approaching disaster. The primary feature, once again, is the exclamation הוֹי (= Woe! Alas!), which is followed by a list of evil deeds and their deserved judgments (Is. 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22; Mic. 2:1-5; Je. 23:1ff.). Some "woes" are extended over lengthy passages, such as, Isaiah's five denunciations, each of which begin with הוֹי (28:1; 29:1; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1).

Words with multiple meanings or plays on words

In order to make their messages memorable, the prophets often used plays on words or word meanings, and here are some examples. For instance, when Hosea announces Yahweh as saying, תִּקְרְאִי אִישִׁי וְלֹא־תִקְרְאִי־לִי עוֹד בַּעְלִי (= you will call me 'my husband' and never again call me 'my Ba'al', cf. Ho. 2:16), there is a play on the meanings of the words אִישׁ (= husband) and בַּעַל (= husband—but also the name of the Canaanite deity). The typical nuance of a phrase like בֶּן־אָדָם (= 'son of Adam' or 'son of man'), which is used extensively by Yahweh to address Ezekiel, emphasizes the prophet's humanness (Eze. 2:1, 3, 6, 8, etc.). However, Daniel uses a parallel term in Aramaic (בַּר אֱנָשׁ) to describe a heavenly figure who was given dominion over the nations of the world (Da. 7:13).[43] When Hosea announces concerning the Israelites, הֵמָּה מִצְרַיִם יָשׁוּבוּ (= they will return to Egypt, cf. Ho. 8:13), the word "Egypt" does not specifically mean Egypt *per se*, but rather, Assyria. Of course, the point of the play on words is that the Israelites will return to the captivity from which they once escaped in Egypt (cf. Ho. 9:3, 6).

One very important word that has multiple uses by the prophets is the verb

[43] Indeed, it is the ambiguity between these two nuances that underlies Jesus' use of the same expression "son of man" to refer to himself. Did he intend the Ezekiel nuance or the Daniel nuance? Jesus did not immediately clarify his intent until his trial (Mt. 26:64).

שׁוּב (= to turn, return). Several of the prophets use this term with a wide range of nuances:

- מַדּוּעַ שׁוֹבְבָה הָעָם הַזֶּה יְרוּשָׁלַם מְשֻׁבָה נְצַחַת (= Why have these people turned away, Jerusalem perpetually turning back? cf. Je. 8:5) Here, the nuance indicates apostasy, and "turning" is turning away from Yahweh and the Torah (Ho. 11:7).
- שׁוּבָה מְשֻׁבָה רִשְׂרָאֵל (= Return, back-turning Israel, cf. Je. 3:12). Here, the imperative mood demands repentance. Similarly, a few verses later, the language is, שׁוּבוּ בָנִים שׁוֹבָבִים (= Return, [you] sons of back-turning, cf. Je. 3:14, 22). The imperative form invariably has this same nuance (cf. Eze. 14:6; 33:11b).
- וְלֹא־שַׁבְתֶּם עָדַי (= yet you did not return to me, cf. Am. 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11). This repeating phrase points to Israel's stubborn refusal to repent or turn back to Yahweh (cf. Je. 5:3b).
- לֹא אֲשִׁיבֶנּוּ (= I will not turn back, cf. Am. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6)
- Because Israel will not turn, Yahweh will not turn! The *Hiphil* form of the verb describes the coming punishment, when Yahweh's anger will not be restrained (cf. Is. 5:25b; 9:12b, 17b, 21b; 10:4b; Je. 4:8).
- וְשָׁב אֶפְרַיִם מִצְרַיִם (= And Ephraim will return to Egypt..., cf. Ho. 9:3) The nuance here anticipates a return to slavery in exile (f. Ho 8:13).
- לְכוּ וְנָשׁוּבָה אֶל־יְהוָה (= Come, let us return to the LORD..., cf. Ho. 6:1) Here, the nuance is repentance. Eventually, because of divine discipline, the people of Israel will repent. כִּי־יָשֻׁבוּ אֵלַי בְּכָל־לִבָּם (...for they will turn to me with [their] whole heart, cf. Je. 24:7b).
- מִי יוֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנִחָם וְהִשְׁאִיר אַחֲרָיו בְּרָכָה (= Who knows [whether] he will turn and have compassion and leave a blessing behind him? cf. Jl. 2:14) Here, the prophet describes God relenting and turning back toward Israel who now has repented (cf. Je. 12:15).
- שְׁאָר יָשׁוּב (= A remnant will return! cf. Is. 10:21-22). In this final nuance, the exiled people of God will be restored and allowed to return from exile (cf. Is. 35:10; 51:11).

Day of Yahweh

Yet another important expression among the prophets is the famous יוֹם יְהוָה (= day of the LORD). It begins with Amos (5:18, 20), but is also used by Joel (1:15;

2:1, 11, 31; 3:14), Isaiah (13:6, 9), Obadiah (1:15), Zephaniah (1:7, 14), Jeremiah (46:10), Ezekiel (13:5; 30:3), Zechariah (14:1), and Malachi (4:5). This expression has a broad semantic range, on the one hand referring to near events, such as, the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions, and on the other, referring to apocalyptic scenes for an indeterminate future. The fluidity of the expression is not unlike the English word "doomsday."

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible (sometimes called Lower Criticism[44]) is the scholarly effort to discern the earliest reading of an Old Testament text.[45] The fact that we have different readings for various passages in the Hebrew manuscripts, not to mention different readings from the early translations, makes this discipline necessary. Take, for example, a passage such as 1 Samuel 13:1 as it appears in the MT:

בֶּן־שָׁנָה שָׁאוּל בְּמָלְכוֹ וּשְׁתֵּי שָׁנִים מָלַךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ (= Saul was one year old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years over Israel.)

Clearly, this is a difficult reading as it stands, since it suggests that Saul became king when he was a baby. One of the early LXX versions (Cambridge edition) reads "thirty" instead of "one" (and this reading is followed by the NIV, NET, NLT). The Syriac Peshitta, on the other hand, reads "twenty-one" (no major English version follows this reading). Several English Versions simply offer a series of dots with accompanying footnotes,[46] assuming that something has dropped from the text (so NJB, NRSV, RSV, early ESV). Others offer conjectures indicated by italics, such as, "*forty* years old" and "*thirty*-two years over Israel" (so NASB), or "fifty years" (so NEB), again presuming that something has dropped from the text. Still others "play" with the translation, such as, "Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel..." (so KJV and the updated ESV), though such translations are creative alternatives and do not follow the most natural reading of the Hebrew text. The above example is only one of numerous instances that could be cited. Hence, scholars examine these ancient variant readings with the goal in mind of determining the original text insofar as it is possible. It must be borne in mind, however, that this is a matter of probabilities, not certainties.

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[44] Lower Criticism is to be distinguished from Higher Criticism, the latter of which concerns issues such as authorship, genre, historical context, possible later editorial work, canonical recognition, and so forth.

[45] Textual criticism is a complicated and technical discipline. Here, I will only be able to offer a general introduction, but if one wishes a more comprehensive treatment, see E. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992, 2001).

[46] The RSV reads, "Saul was...years old when he began to reign; and he reigned...and two years over Israel."

Vocabulary

It will be helpful to begin with a working vocabulary of standard terms used by scholars in the field of textual study:

- **Autograph** This refers to the original document as penned by a biblical author. We have no surviving autographs by any biblical writers.
- **Manuscript** This refers to copies of the biblical text later than the autographs but eventually going back to them.
- **Witnesses** These are the varying Hebrew sources for textual study, such as, the Masoretic Text, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- **Versions** These are various translations of the Hebrew text into a second language, some ancient, some more recent and some very contemporary. English translations include the King James Version (KJV), Revised Standard Version (RSV), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), New American Standard Version (NASB), New English Bible (NEB), New American Bible (NAB), New Jerusalem Bible (NJB), New International Version (NIV), English Standard Version (ESV), and the New Living Translation (NLT), to name some of the more important ones.
- **Exemplar** This refers to an earlier text from which a later copy was made.
- **Variant** This refers to the reading of a text from one of the ancient witnesses, but for which there are different readings existing in other ancient witnesses. Because there are variants for different passages, scholars sometime refer to a text as "corrupt", which simple means different readings exist for that passage.

The Major Witnesses to the Ancient Text

The major witnesses to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament fall into three broad categories, the **Masoretic Text** (MT), the **Samaritan Pentateuch** (Smr), and the **Dead Sea Scrolls** (DSS) [see the monograph on "The Ancient Hebrew Text"]. It must be recognized, however, that these three broad categories represent groups of texts, not merely a single text. The major witnesses from ancient translations of the Hebrew text are the Greek **Septuagint** (LXX), the Aramaic **Targums** (T), the Syriac **Peshitta** (S), and the Latin **Vulgate** (V). Here, also, one must think in terms of groups of texts, not a single text.

When we speak of the Masoretic Text, we refer to a group of pointed manuscripts that are closely related and come from the early Middle Ages, a scribal tradition that reached its most widely accepted form in about the 10th century AD and is best represented by the Leningrad Codex of the Ben Asher family. However, even within this family of texts there are variants. In addition, the Samaritan

Pentateuch contains a consonantal text of the Torah written in early Hebrew script and preserved by the Samaritan community, also from the Middle Ages. The early forms of this text are without vowel-pointing, though in recent generations, a few manuscripts have pointing. In various ways it differs from the MT. The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in the late 1940s at Qumran, contain thousands of fragments coming from some 900 texts, more than 200 of them from biblical books.[47] While a millennium older than the MT, the fragmentary nature of the texts in this group means that they can only offer partial readings to some but not all of the Old Testament. (Fragments do exist, however, from all the OT books except Esther.) Still, even in those fragments that exist, there are variants from the MT, often in agreement with the Samaritan Pentateuch or other ancient witnesses.

Regarding ancient translations of the Hebrew Bible, it must be conceded at the outset that these can provide only indirect witnesses to the Hebrew text, since by the very nature of the case, the underlying Hebrew text must be reconstructed. Still, that being said, the dates of these ancient translations are earlier than the MT.

Kinds of Differences

There are various kinds of differences among the witnesses to the ancient text, some more important than others. In the first place, the sequence of books is not always the same. Chronicles, for instance, often appears as the last book in the "Writings", but it appears first in some editions. The order of the five books in the *Megilloth* is not always the same. Chapter and verse divisions were not always added consistently. These differences need not concern us very much, since they do not directly bear upon specific readings of passages.

Other differences are much more significant, since they DO bear directly upon how one understands particular passages. Especially, this concerns differences in actual words or phrases. It must be recognized, of course, that the system of copying the ancient Hebrew text, as developed by the *Sopherim*, aimed at producing a text faithful to its predecessors. The *Sopherim* counted every letter in the Torah, for instance, and marked the middle consonant of the Torah (the *waw* in גהון, Lv. 11:42), the middle word in the Torah (והתגלח, Lv. 13:33), and so forth. Still, it must also be conceded that in spite of their punctilious care, variations in the text occurred, and further, even had they been able to reproduce the text perfectly, they could not account for textual variations that had already occurred in ancient times prior to the development of their system. Hand-copied texts are always vulnerable to miscopying (indeed, even printed texts are vulnerable to mistype-setting), and perfect reproduction was not possible until the days of modern photography. Hence, while deeply respecting the ancient care which these scribes took to ensure accuracy,

[47] The major exception, which is not fragmented, is the famous complete text of Isaiah in 1QIsa[a].

we must not expect of them the impossible.

The Transmission of the Text

The books in the Hebrew Bible were copied and recopied through the centuries from the time of their original composition. Indeed, there is substantial evidence that this copying began very early indeed. We know, for instance, that Jeremiah's oracles were dictated to his scribe Baruch (Je. 36:1-4). After its initial public reading (Je. 36:5-10), Jehoiakim, the king, petulantly burned this original copy (Je. 36:22-24), and Jeremiah was compelled to produce a second edition (Je. 36:27-28, 32a). What is important is that this second edition was not identical to the first one, for as the text of Jeremiah says, "...many similar words were added" (Je. 36:32b). The text of Jeremiah that we now have presumably is the later, expanded edition. Much of 1 & 2 Kings is duplicated in 2 Chronicles, as is well known, but even though many sections are nearly word-for-word, there are differences, indicating that even in the most ancient times, variations in the text occurred. The same is true of the literary relationship between 2 Kings 18-20 and Isaiah 36-39. The psalm that appears in 2 Samuel 22 also appears as Psalm 18, but while the two texts are very close, they are not identical.

Various factors contribute to such differences, some implicitly and others more directly. Just the change in writing materials from stone to clay tablets to wood, pottery, papyrus, and eventually, leather scrolls was bound to have played some role. If texts were copied by dictation, which almost certainly some were, the possibility of variations from homonyms or errors in hearing was inevitable. We have examples of worn manuscripts that were sometimes patched, necessitating writing on the patch. Parchment sheets, at least after the development of the codex,[48] were inscribed on both sides, and the thinness of a single parchment sheet sometimes resulted in ink bleeding through from one side to the other, resulting in a difficult reading. In earliest times, not only was there no vowel-pointing, there was no punctuation or paragraphing, and often enough, no clearly demarcated spaces between the words. When such helpful devices were introduced, it was bound to be the case that variations occurred. As is well-known, some letters have final forms (e.g., ך, ם, ן, ף, and ץ), but these were not always used consistently in the ancient texts, and where they were not, it introduced ambiguity. All these factors and more contributed to the variations that now exist between the various witnesses to the text.

Textual Footnotes in English Translations

The observant reader of English Bible translations will notice that it is not

[48] The codex, that is, the binding of single pages on one side into the form of a book, dates to the early Christian era. Prior to this development, texts were written on scrolls and only inscribed on one side. The codex, however, made possible writing on both sides of the page.

uncommon for there to be textual footnotes explaining the difficulty of this or that reading. Indeed, even in the traditional King James Version the 47 translators from Oxford and Cambridge Universities frankly conceded in the preface that their work would not be perfect, pointing out that all Bible translation is a history of revision and correction. In particular, *hapax legomena* were notoriously difficult, and they also acknowledged that variant readings in the manuscripts at their disposal near the beginning of the 17th century were problematic.

Modern translations regularly offer textual footnotes, the most extensive being those in the NRSV, which often cites readings from the major witnesses underlying the Hebrew text as well as the major ancient translations. As an example, consider three treatments of the passage we examined earlier, 1 Samuel 13:1, with its attendant textual difficulties. The NRSV has two footnotes, one saying, "The number is lacking in the Heb text (the verse is lacking in the Septuagint)", and the other saying, "*Two* is not the entire number; something has dropped out." The NIV also has two footnotes, one explaining the preference for "thirty" as Saul's ascension age (which is printed with brackets), saying, "A few late manuscripts of the Septuagint; Hebrew does not have *thirty*," and the other explaining the preference for "forty" for Saul's tenure (which also is printed with brackets), saying, "See the round number in Acts 13:21; Hebrew does not have *forty*." Finally, the ESV has a single footnote, "Hebrew *Saul was one year old when he became king and he reigned two years over Israel* (see 1 Samuel 10:6): some Greek manuscripts give Saul's age when he began to reign as thirty years." Obviously, all three of these translations clearly recognize the textual difficulty of the passage as it stands in the MT, and they each offer their scholarly conclusion for how the passage should be read, explaining briefly their rationale.

HOW TEXTUAL VARIANTS OCCURRED

We do not know directly, of course, how textual variants occurred, but we can reasonably deduce how they may have occurred. Concerning the initial stage of producing the autographs, our knowledge is very limited. We know that some texts originally were written on stones or plastered stones (Dt. 27:2-3; Jos. 8:32), but it is to be assumed that at some point these texts were copied onto scrolls. Jeremiah speaks of tying a stone to a text in order to cause it to sink in the river (Je. 51:60-63), which might suggest that the text was on papyrus, since a leather scroll would have sunk even without a stone tied to it. In Ezekiel there is mention of a scroll written on both sides (Eze. 2:10), though typically a scroll is written on only a single

side.[49] Jeremiah is the only book that offers any real insight into the writing process, which involved dictation to a scribe (Je. 36:1-4, 27-28, 32a), the text apparently written in columns (Je. 36:23). How this process may have been duplicated for other biblical works can only be speculated.

The second stage, which involved copying the text, is the one with which we are concerned here. It is in this transmission of the text for later generations that variants began to appear. From the Qumran texts and from *Soferim* we know something of the methods for correcting the inevitable hand-written mistakes. Incorrect letters were canceled with a horizontal line or with a series of dots, corrective notations were written in the margin, and some scribes wrote corrections above the line or at the end of the line.[50] In some cases, letters could be erased by scraping the parchment with a sharp instrument. Incorrect letters could be reshaped by writing over the old letters. However—and this is the main point—not all variants were caught, and even for the ones that were noticed by later scribes and corrected, not all the "corrections" were themselves correct, some being made apparently from memory and some from an exemplar that was faulty.

In the state of things are they presently are, we find textual variants involving both things that are missing as well as things that are additions, caused either accidentally or intentionally.

Omissions

Here, some parts of a text seem to have been inadvertently dropped. Consider the following examples:

Example A (random omission Ge. 4:8)

וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל־הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי בִּהְיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה (MT)

And Cain spoke to his brother Abel. And when they were in the field... (so KJV, NASB, ESV)

ויאמר קין אל הבל אחיו נלכה השׂדה ויהי בהיותם בשׂדה (Smr)

And Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go [to] the field." And when they were in the field... (so RSV, NRSV, NLT, NJB, NIV, NIB, NET, NAB)

Here, the reading in the Samaritan Pentateuch has an extra line, and this reading is supported by the Septuagint, the Syriac Peshitta and the Latin Vulgate, which in turn means that it was in the Hebrew exemplar used by these translations, even though it is now not in the Masoretic Text. Most scholars believe the line is likely to be original but was inadvertently omitted in the MT.

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[49] There are exceptions. Some Qumran texts of *tefillin* and *mezuzot* (small portions of biblical texts for wearing on the arm or forehead in small pouches or for posting on door jambs, cf. Dt. 6:8-9) were written on both sides.

[50] Good examples from the great Isaiah scroll from Qumran (1QIsa[a]) can be found in Tov, pp. 214-215.

Example B (haplography Is. 26:3-4)

Haplography refers to writing once what should have been written twice, sometimes single letters and sometimes whole words.

...כִּי בְךָ בָּטוּחַ׃ בִּטְחוּ בַיהוָה... (MT)

...for he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD...

...כי בכה׃ בטחו ביהוה...

...for in you. Trust in the LORD... (1QIsa[a], LXX, S)

Here, the ending word "trust" of 26:3 in the MT is missing in the Dead Sea Isaiah Scroll. The Septuagint and the Syriac Peshitta support the shorter reading. All the texts have the word "trust" at the beginning of 26:4. Apparently, a scribe did not see the double appearance of the word "trust" and inadvertently omitted it at the end of 24:3.

Example C (homoioteleuton Jos. 21:35-38)

Homoioteleuton refers to an "identical ending", which is to say, a given text might have two identical words or phrases separated by an intervening section.[51] Because of these identical parts, the scribe's eye jumps from the first appearance of the word or phrase to the second appearance, inadvertently omitting the section between them.

(35) ...וְאֶת־מִגְרָשֶׁהָ עָרִים אַרְבַּע׃ (36) וּמִמַּטֵּה רְאוּבֵן אֶת־בֶּצֶר
וְאֶת־מִגְרָשֶׁהָ וְאֶת־יַהְצָה וְאֶת־מִגְרָשֶׁהָ׃ (37) אֶת־קְדֵמוֹת וְאֶת־מִגְרָשֶׁהָ
וְאֶת־מֵיפָעַת וְאֶת־מִגְרָשֶׁהָ עָרִים אַרְבַּע׃ (38) וּמִמַּטֵּה־גָד... (MT)

(35) ...with its pasture-lands—four cities; (36) and from the tribe of Reuben, Bezer with its pasture-lands, Jahaz with its pasture-lands, (37) Kedemoth with its pasture-lands, Mephaath with its pasture-lands—four cities; (38) and from the tribe of Gad... (followed by the LXX and all major English Versions)

(35) ...וְאֶת־מִגְרָשֶׁהָ עָרִים אַרְבַּע׃ (38) וּמִמַּטֵּה־גָד... (Leningrad Codex)

(35) ...with its pasture-lands—four cities; (38) and from the tribe of Gad... (followed by some Targums and the Latin Vulgate)

Here, in different copies of the MT, some have the longer passage and some omit verses 36-37. Note that verse 35 ends with "four cities" and verse 37 ends with "four cities". Apparently, the scribe writing the shorter version inadvertently jumped from one to the other, thus leaving out verses 36-37. (Remember, of course, that there were no verse divisions to aid in sight reading.)

[51] There is also *homoioarcton*, which is when the identical elements occur at the beginning, rather than the end, of the omitted section.

Additions

Here, some parts of a text seem to have been added inadvertently. Consider the following examples:

Example D (dittography Isaiah 31:6)

Dittography is the writing of doubled letters or doubled words.

שׁוּבוּ לַאֲשֶׁר הֶעְמִיקוּ סָרָה בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ (MT)

Turn, sons of Israel, to whom [the people] have so deeply revolted!

שׁוביו לאשׁר לאשׁר העמיקו סרה בני ישׂראל׃ (1QIsa[a])

Turn, sons of Israel, to whom to whom [the people] have so deeply revolted!

Here, it seems obvious that the scribe copying the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah inadvertently wrote the same word twice in succession.

Example E (conflation 2 Kings 19:9; Isaiah 37:9)

A conflation (sometimes called a doublet) is the combination of two similar or parallel passages. The example below comes from the fact that 2 Kings 18:13—20:19 parallels Isaiah 36-39.

...וַיָּשָׁב וַיִּשְׁלַח מַלְאָכִים... (MT, 2 Kg. 19:9b)

...so he turned and sent messengers...

...וַיִּשְׁמַע וַיִּשְׁלַח מַלְאָכִים (MT, Is. 37:9b)

And when he heard, he sent messengers...

...וישׁמע וישׁוב וישׁלח מלאכים (1QIsa[a] plus LXX, Is. 37:9b)

And when he heard, he turned and sent messengers...

Here, even though much of the larger passage in 2 Kings is word-for-word with the same passage in Isaiah, there is a variation in the verb, 2 Kings using **שׁוּב** and Isaiah using **שָׁמַע**. In the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah, however, the two verbs are conflated so that the passage contains both verbs. The Septuagint follows this conflation and reads, ...καί ἀκούσας ἀπέστρεψεν καὶ ἀπέστειλεν ἀγγέλους... (= ...and [when] he heard, he turned and sent messengers...)

Interchanges

An interchange is the mistake of visually confusing one letter with another similar letter or audibly confusing one sound with another similar sound.

Example F (similar appearing letters Genesis 22:13)

Many letters were interchanged due to rough writing surfaces or unclear formations. Most of them concern visual similarities in the formation of individual

letters, such as, ר/ד, ו/י, and נ/ג, etc.

...וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה־אַיִל אַחַר נֶאֱחַז בַּסְּבַךְ בְּקַרְנָיו... (MT, V)

And he looked, and behold, behind [him] a ram caught in the thicket with his horn... (followed by KJV, RSV, NASB, ESV)

...וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה־אַיִל אֶחָד נֶאֱחַז בַּסְּבַךְ בְּקַרְנָיו... (Smr, LXX, S)

And he looked, and behold, one ram caught in the thicket with his horn... (followed by NAB, NIV, NJB, NRSV)

Here, the variance of a single letter between **אחר** and **אחד** produces a slightly different meaning. The English versions are split between the readings, but it is interesting to note that the NRSV has opted for a different reading than its parent, the RSV.

Example G (similar sounding words 1 Samuel 17:7a)

Sometimes copies were made by scribes who wrote as they listened to a reader, and because some words sound similar to each other, errors of hearing resulted in manuscript variations.

וְחֵץ חֲנִיתוֹ כִּמְנוֹר אֹרְגִים (MT *Kethiv* reading)

And the arrow of his spear [was] like a weaver's beam...

וְעֵץ חֲנִיתוֹ כִּמְנוֹר אֹרְגִים (MT *Qere* reading)

And the shaft of his spear [was] like a weaver's beam...

Here, even though the MT text has "arrow", virtually all English Versions follow the marginal reading of "shaft", thus acknowledging that the sounds of the two words וְחֵץ and וְעֵץ were likely confused. (For *Kethiv* and *Qere* readings, see Footnote #1, Lesson 35.)

Word Divisions

Many ancient texts were written either without word divisions or with spaces between words so small as to be hard to detect. This, in turn, could create confusion about word division.

Example H (Ezekiel 42:9)

...וּמִתַּחְתָּה לַשָּׂכוֹת הָאֵלֶּה (MT *Kethiv* reading)

And from beneath these chambers...

...וּמִתַּחַת הַלְּשָׂכוֹת הָאֵלֶּה (MT *Qere* reading)

And from beneath these chambers...

Here, one can see that the ה is placed differently in the *Kethiv* reading as opposed to the *Qere* reading. While the translation is not affected, the *Qere* reading is grammatically preferable.

Example I (Emendation Amos 6:12a)

הֲיִרְצוּן בַּסֶּלַע סוּסִים אִם־יַחֲרוֹשׁ בַּבָּקָרִים (MT)

Can horses run on a cliff? Can one plow with oxen?

הֲיִרְצוּן בַּסֶּלַע סוּסִים אִם־יַחֲרַשׁ בְּבָקָר יָם (emendation)

Can horses run on a cliff? Can the sea be plowed with oxen?

Here, many scholars suggest an improper word division in the MT, since the initial sentence is a rhetorical question describing something incongruous (horses galloping on a cliff). The following question, it would seem, should logically describe something equally incongruous. Incongruity continues in the succeeding lines as well (Am. 6:12b). The sentence, "Can one plow with oxen?" seems particularly out of place, since it is such an ordinary activity and hardly incongruous. The suggestion of a different word division seems to solve the contextual problem. If one adopts the MT as it stands, then English Versions tend to supply extra words to make it work (so KJV, NASB, ESV, NLT). If one adopts the alternative word division, then the passage makes more sense (so NAB, NET, NIB, NIV, NJB, RSV, NRSV). Still, this suggested word division is daring, since it has no other text to support it.

Intentional Changes

Changes are deliberate alterations to the text during the process of copying, sometimes regarding single letters and sometimes regarding words. Such changes reflect a scribe's idea about what he thought the text should have said.

Example J (Synonymous Readings 2 Samuel 22:1//Psalm 18:1)

This Psalm appears twice in the Hebrew Bible, once in 2 Samuel and once in the Book of Psalms. In the superscription, the word pairs כַּף (= palm) and כַּף have been replaced by כַּף and יָד (= hand) or vice versa.

...הִצִּיל יְהוָה אֹתוֹ מִכַּף כָּל־אֹיְבָיו וּמִכַּף שָׁאוּל: (MT 2 Sa. 22:1)

...the LORD delivered him from the palm of all his enemies and from the palm of Saul.

...הִצִּיל־יְהוָה אוֹתוֹ מִכַּף כָּל־אֹיְבָיו וּמִיַּד שָׁאוּל: (MT Ps. 18:1)

...the LORD delivered him from the palm of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.

It often is difficult to tell which is the original and which is the change. On the one hand, the change could be intended to create stylistic variation, and on the other, it could be intended to create consistency.

Example K (harmonization Isaiah 1:15b; 59:3)

Sometimes scribes seem to have adapted elements in a text in order to match elements in other parallel texts, thus bringing them into harmony.

יְדֵיכֶם דָּמִים מָלֵאוּ׃... (MT Is. 1:15b)

...your hands are filled with blood.

ידיכם דמים מלאו אצבעותיכם בעאון (1QIsa[a] Is. 1:15b)

...your hands are filled with blood, your fingers with iniquity.

...כִּי כַפֵּיכֶם נְגֹאֲלוּ בַדָּם וְאֶצְבְּעֹתֵיכֶם בֶּעָוֹן (MT Is. 59:3a)

For your palms are redeemed with blood and your fingers with iniquity.

כיא כפיכמה נגאלו בדם ואצבעותיכמה בעוון (1QIsa[a] Is. 59:3a)

For your fingers are redeemed with blood and your fingers with iniquity.

Here, you can see how the shorter phrase in Is. 1:15 (MT) has been lengthened in the same passage in the Dead Sea Isaiah scroll, bringing it into harmony with the later passage in Isaiah 59:3. (Alternatively, one could conjecture that the MT of Is. 1:15 has been inadvertently shortened, but the general opinion of scholars is that the others have been lengthened.)

Example L (theological "corrections" 1 Samuel 3:13)

We know that scribes made deliberate changes in at least some cases, since such "corrections of the scribes" is actually described in the *Masora magna*, particularly for euphemisms and/or texts that were considered to be irreverent.

...כִּי־מְקַלְלִים לָהֶם בָּנָיו... (MT)

...because his sons were cursing themselves... (so KJV, NASB)

כי מקללים אלהים בניו (*Masora magna*; LXX)

...because his sons were cursing God... (so ESV, NAB, NET, NIB, NIV, NJB, NLT, RSV, NRSV)

Out of respect for God, the *Masora magna* indicates that the term להם was substituted for אלהים to avoid the language of cursing God.

EVALUATING TEXTUAL VARIANTS

The ultimate goal of textual criticism, insofar as it is possible, is to determine the original text of a biblical author. There is no mechanical way to do this, and Bible translators must be prepared to accept the conclusion that there will be more ambiguity than certainty in many cases. To be sure, various scholars have advanced "rules" for determined what reading is to be preferred, but such guidelines, at best, can only be followed as a general rule of thumb, for notable exceptions to each "rule" can be found. Nonetheless, it may be helpful to be aware of these suggested guidelines so long as one bears in mind that they do NOT produce certainties, only probabilities (and sometimes only possibilities).

The six primary sources in which one finds textual variants are: 1) the **Masoretic Text** (keeping in mind that there are variations between different versions of the MT), 2) the **Samaritan Pentateuch** (keeping in mind that this covers only the first five books of the Hebrew Bible), 3) the **Dead Sea Scrolls** (keeping in mind that these are fragmented texts), 4) the **Septuagint** (keeping in mind that this is a Greek translation), 5) the **Targums** (keeping in mind that these are Aramaic translations), the **Peshitta** (keeping in mind that this is a Syriac translation), and 6) the **Vulgate** (keeping in mind that this is a Latin translation).

External Criteria

External criteria concern those factors that do not arise from any particular text, but rather, from assumptions about the general nature of texts. These include:

Preference for the Masoretic Text

Here, all other things being equal, the assumption is that Masoretic Text is generally preferred over all other textual sources. The Masoretic Text is the baseline, and all other variants are gauged against it. Only if several other sources agree over against the Masoretic Text would there be enough weight to consider overthrowing a particular reading in the Masoretic Text (see "Broad Attestation" below). The extreme care that attended the transmission of this text, which is well-documented, usually is cited as the primary reason for assuming its priority. Still, it must be conceded that careful practices of the *sopherim* cannot predate the exemplars from which they made their copies.

Theory of Unequal Status of Textual Sources

Here, analogous to the MT priority "rule," some sources are believed to carry more weight than other sources. The Dead Sea Scrolls, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Septuagint are thought to carry more weight than, say, the Targums. There is no scholarly consensus about the relative weight to be given between the DSS, the Sam and the LXX. It once was popular to assume that the LXX was a "loose" translation, because of its many divergences from the MT, but now, with so many LXX readings being supported by the DSS, this negative evaluation is being reversed.

Broad Attestation

Here, if a reading is widely attested it is believed to be preferable. For instance, if a variant in the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint agree over against the Masoretic Text, it is worth considering. If it has even broader attestation (i.e., the Sam, LXX, Peshitta and Vulgate), it becomes even more probable.

Age of the Textual Witness

The witnesses to the text come from varying periods of time. The Masoretic Text comes from the Medieval Period, the Peshitta and the Vulgate from the early

Christian era, the Targums from about the time of Jesus and earlier, and the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint from before the time of Jesus. In this "rule", older witnesses are preferable to more recent ones on the assumption that the older the witness, the closer it is to the original text composed by a biblical author. As such, a reading in the Qumran Scrolls is older than a reading in the Masoretic Text, even though both are in Hebrew. The Septuagint is older than the Masoretic Text, even though it is in a different language. Such a guideline inevitably leads to periodic tension, since the Masoretic Text, which usually serves as the baseline, is not the oldest text. Furthermore, older does not automatically mean better, for a scribe producing an older copy might not have been as punctilious as a scribe producing a later copy.

Internal Criteria

Internal criteria concern those factors arising from the text itself and any assumptions about their value for determining a preferable reading. These include:

Difficult Readings

Here, the theory is that the more difficult of variant readings is to be preferred on the grounds that a scribe would be more likely to make a reading smoother or simpler than the other way around.

Shorter Readings

Here, the theory is that the shorter of two readings is preferable, since scribes were more apt to make things explicit which originally were implicit. Glosses were added to explain difficult words or ideas.

Assimilation

Here, variants are believed to have arisen due to scribes assimilating similar or parallel texts with each other. Hence, if **Text A** and **Text B** are similar or identical, but other witnesses differ from both **Text A** and **Text B**, then **Text A** is thought to be assimilated.

Modification

Here, the theory is that a scribe may have deliberately changed a text in order to provide an interpretive nuance so as to conform to a particular theological viewpoint.

About all these so-called "rules", much caution is advised. While on the face of it they make sense, in practical instances they remain subjective and theory-laden. This is not to say that such guidelines should be ignored, but rather, than they should be used with reserve and not as absolutes.

Examples:

Following are some examples of textual variants and how they might be evaluated:

Example A (Genesis 47:21)

וְאֶת־הָעָם הֶעֱבִיר אֹתוֹ לְעָרִים... (MT, Targums, Peshitta)

And the people, he transferred them to cities... (so KJV, JTE, NASB)

ואת העם העביד אתו לעבדים... (Sam)

καὶ τὸν λαὸν κατεδουλώσατο αὐτῷ εἰς παῖδας... (LXX)

And the people, he enslaved them to servitude... (so NAB, NET, NIB, NIV, NJB, NLT, RSV, NRSV, ESV)

Here, it is immediately apparent that the variants concern the reading of two similar consonants, ר and ד, which appear in the verbs (עָבַר vs. עבד) and the nouns (עָרִים vs. עבדים). Some English Versions give preference to the Masoretic Text, which is supported by the Targums and the Peshitta. Other English Versions opt for the earlier readings, following the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint. As one can see, a preference for the MT can be at odds with the age of the witnesses, so a firm conclusion is difficult.

Example B (Jeremiah 23:33)

וְכִי־יִשְׁאָלְךָ הָעָם הַזֶּה אוֹ־הַנָּבִיא אוֹ־כֹהֵן לֵאמֹר מַה־מַּשָּׂא יְהוָה

וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם אֶת־מַה־מַּשָּׂא... (MT)

And when this people or a prophet or a priest asks you, "What [is] the burden of the LORD?" you shall say to them, "What burden?" (so KJV, NASB, NIV, NIB)

καὶ ἐὰν ἐρωτήσωσί σε ὁ λαὸς οὗτος ἢ ἱερεὺς ἢ προφήτης λέγων τί τὸ λῆμμα κυρίου καὶ ἐρεῖς αὐτοῖς ὑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ λῆμμα... (LXX and followed by the Vulgate)

וְכִי־יִשְׁאָלְךָ הָעָם הַזֶּה אוֹ־הַנָּבִיא אוֹ־כֹהֵן לֵאמֹר מַה־מַּשָּׂא יְהוָה

וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם אַתֶּם הַמַּשָּׂא... (reconstructed from the LXX)

And when this people or a prophet or a priest asks you, "What [is] the burden of the LORD?" you shall say to them, "You [are] the burden..." (so RSV, NRSV, NAB, NET, NJB, NLT, ESV)

Here, you can see that the primary issue is word division, the MT dividing the words as אֶת־מַה־מַּשָּׂא, while the text apparently underlying the LXX divides the words as אַתֶּם הַמַּשָּׂא. The MT is the more difficult reading grammatically, since it uses the object marker in an unprecedented way, which is why so many English Versions opt for the alternative reading. However, if one follows the guideline that the more difficult reading is likely to be original, as do several versions, then the

more difficult reading is to be retained.

Example C (1 Samuel 1:24)

וַתַּעֲלֵהוּ עִמָּהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר גְּמָלַתּוּ בְּפָרִים שְׁלֹשָׁה... (MT, Targums)

And she brought him with her, after she had weaned him, with three bulls... (so KJV, NET)

ותעלהו עמה כאשר גמלתו בקר משלש ולחם...

(4QSam[a], LXX, Peshitta)

And she brought him with her, after she had weaned him, with a three-year-old bull and bread... (so NAB, NASB, NIV, NJB, RSV, NRSV, ESV, NIB, NLT)

With this text, there are three issues. In the first place, there is a different division of words. The MT divides them as בְּפָרִים שְׁלֹשָׁה, while the Dead Sea Scroll divides them as בקר משלש. In addition, the two nouns in question, פַּר (= young bull) and בָּקָר (= cow), were confused due to the misreading of one consonant and the presence of the י in the plural form of בְּפָרִים. Finally, the Dead Sea Scroll and the Septuagint have the additional words "and bread." Most scholars agree that it seems more likely that the additional words "and bread" were added to the DSS text rather than dropped from the MT, and none of the English Versions adopt this part of the alternative reading. However, most (but not all) English Versions follow the Dead Sea Scroll and Septuagint reading that Hannah brought a three-year-old bull rather than three bulls.

Example D (Deuteronomy 32:8)

...לִמְסְפַּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: (MT, Sam, Targums, Peshitta, Vulgate)

...according to the number of the sons of Israel. (so NASB, JTE, NIV, NIB)

...בני אלהים (4QDeut[j])

...the sons of God. (so RSV, ESV)

...κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων θεοῦ. (LXX)

...according to [the] number of the angels of God.

There is a decided difference of content in these three readings, one referring to the "people of Israel," one to the "sons of God," and the other to the "angels of God." This change could hardly have been accidental. Most scholars conclude that "sons of God" was likely the original text, since the other two readings can be explained as interpretative glosses. The expression "sons of God" COULD refer to the Israelites (cf. Dt. 32:19), but it also could refer to angels (cf. Job 1:6, etc.). Hence, most scholars conclude that it was deliberately changed to "sons of Israel" due to scribal discomfort with any implied recognition of the Canaanite pantheon, which could also be called "sons of God". Several English Versions offer dynamic

equivalencies, some opting for "the number of the gods" (NRSV) or "the divine beings" (NAB), translations that directly favor the **בני אלהים** reading. Others offer "the number in his heavenly court" (NLT) and "the heavenly assembly" (NET), translations that remain ambiguous, though they can be taken to favor the Septuagint interpretation that the "sons of God" referred to angels. The traditional dynamic equivalency of "children of Israel" (KJV), on the other hand, favors the **בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** reading. Obviously, textual criticism at this point merges into theological preferences, not only in attempting to determine the original reading of the text but also in attempting to translate the phrase into theologically acceptable terms.

Example E (2 Samuel 11:1b; 12:30a; 1 Chronicles 20:1b-2a)

וַיַּשְׁחִתוּ אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן וַיָּצֻרוּ עַל־רַבָּה וְדָוִד יוֹשֵׁב בִּירוּשָׁלָ͏ִם׃

(MT 2 Sa. 11:1b)

And they spoiled the Ammonites and put Rabbah to siege, but David was staying in Jerusalem.

וַיִּקַּח אֶת־עֲטֶרֶת־מַלְכָּם מֵעַל רֹאשׁוֹ (MT 2 Sa. 12:30a)

And he took the crown of their king from upon his head...

וַיַּשְׁחֵת אֶת־אֶרֶץ בְּנֵי־עַמּוֹן וַיָּבֹא וַיָּצַר אֶת־רַבָּה וְדָוִיד יֹשֵׁב בִּירוּשָׁלָ͏ִם...

(MT 1 Chr. 20:1b)

And they spoiled the land of the Ammonites, and came and besieged Rabbah, but David was staying in Jerusalem.

וַיִּקַּח דָּוִיד אֶת־עֲטֶרֶת־מַלְכָּם מֵעַל רֹאשׁוֹ... (MT 1 Chr. 20:2a)

And David took the crown of their king from off his head...

It is well known that 1 Chronicles relies heavily on 2 Samuel, so much so that many sections are virtually word-for-word. Here, however, as can easily be seen, the entire section of 2 Sam. 11:2—12:29 has been omitted from the Chronicler's record, and this can hardly have been accidental. In 1 Chronicles, David is presented as an ideal king in order to encourage those returning from exile, and the glory of his successes are repeatedly emphasized, while the narratives of his failures are passed over. It is not that the author of 1 Chronicles is unaware of David's history (cf. 1 Chr. 22:8; 28:3), but rather, than he has deliberately constructed a model for ideal kingship based on David's reign. In this model, the sordid affair of David and Bathsheba was probably omitted as detracting from the overall purpose, and the Chronicler could assume that his readers would be aware from the other sources of David's moral shortfall.