

## BOOK REVIEW

*Textual History of the Bible: The Hebrew Bible: Volume 1B – Pentateuch, Former and Latter Prophets*, 730 pp.; *Textual History of the Bible: The Hebrew Bible: Volume 1C – Writings*, 770 pp, Armin Lange and Emanuel Tov, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2017). Reviewed by Simcha Rosenberg.

These two hefty volumes bring together all available information regarding the textual history of each book of the Bible and its translations. Since most textual study of the Bible is very specialized and compartmentalized; these books serve as a handy reference for interested readers and scholars, each section written by a leading expert in the field. These are massive textbook type volumes, printed in double columns, with extensive notes and references.

For each book of the Bible there is a textual history, followed by a critical study of the text based on comparisons with ancient Hebrew manuscripts, both those close to the Masoretic Text (MT) and those that have significant differences, such as many of the Qumran scrolls. Comparisons are also made with the text of each book as found in the Septuagint and other primary translations, as well as with secondary translations. These translations can be reverse engineered to determine the reading in the text they were based on.

This is significant because while many books of the Bible seem to have only one textual branch (Judges, Job, Ruth, Kohelet, Lamentations and Psalms), most have two textual branches (Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Proverbs, Esther, Song of Songs, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles), some have even three (Joshua and Samuel), and the Torah has even more. Due to the popularity of the Torah, the text “was altered more than that of the other books” (p. 9). The main differences between different texts are harmonizations and variants replacing what were viewed as problematic readings.

The current state of knowledge views the proto-MT as “reflecting the oldest tradition of the Torah text...from which the others branched off”, since “all the texts found at the Judean Desert sites except Qumran are virtually identical to the medieval text of MT” (p. 10). This includes most ancient translations and quotations in rabbinic literature. Even in Qumran many of the texts are so close to MT so as to be termed “MT like” or “semi-Masoretic”. The

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other main textual branch is reflected in the Septuagint (LXX) and Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) which “probably derived from the proto-MT group” (p. 10) and then developed its own variants. The scribes copying the proto-MT scrolls and MT adopted an approach of not changing the content, while scribes not part of the proto-MT tradition approached the text differently, “freely changing its content, language, small details, and orthography, thus multiplying textual variation” (p. 14). However, even MT manuscripts have minor changes in their consonantal text “due to the fluidity of spelling and common types of scribal error” (p. 60), but are still close enough to be considered all one textual family.

The authors attempt a purely text based analysis to determine how the Bible developed, keeping in mind that “no solid facts are known about the textual condition of the Torah prior to 250 BCE” (p.8), the period of the first Qumran fragments. Anything that happened before that can only be termed “mere speculation.” Popular literary theories are considered “abstract theories derived from general ideas and not on the evidence itself” (p. 8).

Very interesting is the impact of all of this critical textual analysis on the Documentary Hypotheses (DH), which claims that the Torah as we have it today is compiled from a number of different, and often conflicting, earlier texts. The DH is based exclusively on MT, not taking into account non-Masoretic sources which are examined by textual scholars. The conclusion in this work is that “there is “virtually no additional evidence in the non-MT sources relevant to the DH” (p. 6). For this reason, the study of the textual variants actually provides negative conclusions regarding the DH.

It should be noted that this book is written from a purely academic perspective, and the Bible here is in no way considered a Divine work. However, even for a faith based reader of the Bible, there is much important and interesting material here. Some of the textual variants noted in these volumes are understood to be the result of scribal errors, which certainly can occur over time even if a work was originally dictated by God or written through Divine inspiration.

The field of Masoretic and textual study is one often ignored in the area of Bible study in favor of other methods, considered more accessible and less technical. We are indebted to the editors and authors of these volumes of for giving us access to this area of Bible scholarship.