

To Err is Human: The Imperfection of Manuscript Transmission

Before I sat down to put this work together, I'd actually been thinking about writing such a book for over a year. The main reason for my hesitancy concerns this chapter.

I *know* the Bible code is fraudulent because I know about the history of the Torah text, and have worked in the original languages doing textual criticism. I have spent hours studying variant readings in many books of the Hebrew Old Testament, and am very well acquainted with its textual uncertainty. Indeed, the text itself and its variances are the most powerful arguments against the Bible code. Unfortunately, I also knew that, for the most part, readers of this book would not have this background, and would probably not be able to read Hebrew or Greek. Hence my dilemma – how to illustrate what I am asserting in such a way that it is digestible to the non-specialist and non-Hebrew reader. Below are some examples of how I demonstrate the uncertainty of the every-letter sequence of the Torah in *The Bible Code Myth*.

Important Terms for understanding the Examples (also provided in the book):

Masorettes – The scribal families who developed: (1) a system of vowel marks for the consonants of the Torah; and (2) a system of notations (Masorah – see below) in the margins of the Torah text concerning the condition of the text itself.

- **Pointing / "points"** – vowel marks put into the consonantal text by the scribes.

Text Families – Groups of manuscripts that have a high degree of agreement with one another, and a high degree of common *disagreement* with other manuscripts (see "Plurality of Texts" below). Essentially, a text family is an "edition" of the Torah. It must be recognized, however, that although the word "edition" makes it seem that one text family followed another chronologically, this is not the case when speaking of text families of the Torah. "Edition" is used here for convenience, since the word "version" means something entirely different in text-critical terminology.

Plurality of Texts – The fact that there was more than one text family. In other words, before the text became "standardized" in roughly 100 A.D., Jews in Palestine and other parts of the Mediterranean used a variety of "editions" of the Torah – there was more than one text, and those texts never agreed in every place. We know this is true because the manuscripts found at Qumran (site of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovery) did not agree with each other. Hence, they reflected different texts of the Torah, and were thus grouped by scholars into "text families". Significantly, the people who lived at Qumran apparently did not care that the Torah existed in several "editions" that differed at points. It was only in the first century A.D. that textual standardization became a concern.

Standardization – The process of arriving at one text "edition" of the Torah. The process was completed by around 100 A.D.

Masoretic Text (referred to as "MT" by textual critics) – One of several text families. The Masoretic Text was the Hebrew Bible passed down through centuries (since 100 A.D.) by the Masoretes. The MT eventually became the official text of the Torah. Even before the Masoretes existed as a professional group that "standardized" the Torah text and added vowel marks and other notes to the margins of that text, there existed a text-family that resembled the one the Masoretes would eventually produce. This text-family would be one of the three unearthed at Qumran, site of the Dead Sea Scrolls library. Once this lost text family was discovered, scholars immediately could see that the medieval manuscripts used and copied over and over by the Masoretes must in some way be related to this more ancient text-family. As a result, scholars called the Dead Sea finds of this text family the "Proto (Prior) Masoretic Text" so as to give it priority of place. In this book, unless I specify that I am talking about either the Qumran or the medieval MT for a specific point, I will use "Masoretic Text" as a label that covers both the Dead Sea family and the later Medieval "standardized" MT.

Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) – Another text family testified to at Qumran along with the "Proto" Masoretic Text. This text family only contains the first five books of the Old Testament (the Torah or "Pentateuch") and was common in the region of ancient Palestine known as Samaria. It contains many deliberate changes that reflect the religious idiosyncrasies of Samaritan Judaism.

Septuagint (commonly abbreviated as "LXX") – Another text family testified to at Qumran along with the "Proto" Masoretic text and the Samaritan Pentateuch. In modern times, the word "Septuagint" also refers to the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (a work done somewhere between 300-100 B.C.). The reason scholars use this word to refer to a *Hebrew* text family among the Dead Sea Scrolls and a *Greek* translation of the Hebrew Bible is because those scholars who translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek used a particular text family when they did so – *one that did not match the Proto-Masoretic Text or the Samaritan Pentateuch*. In other words, the "base text" used by the Greek translators of the Septuagint came from a Hebrew text family witnessed to at Qumran, but that did not match MT in many places. Hence, scholars refer to certain Hebrew manuscripts from the Dead Sea (or elsewhere) as "Septuagintal" or as "Septuagint manuscripts." The "LXX" ("70") abbreviation comes from the largely fanciful tradition that 70 men translated the Septuagint in 70 days.

Examples:

Genesis 2:11

MT = כל-ארץ החוילה
SP = כל-ארץ חוילה

MT = "all the land of *the* Havilah"

SP = "all the land of Havilah"

Note that the MT has an extra letter. In Hebrew grammar, this letter is the definite article (the Hebrew equivalent to the English word "the"). Scholars are certain MT is defective here (the letter should NOT be here) for two reasons: (1) everywhere else in the Hebrew Bible, "Havilah" is written without the article; and (2) in Hebrew grammar, proper nouns do not take the article.

Genesis 4:8

MT reads:

ויאמר קין אל-הבל אחיו ויהי בהיותם בשדה

(Literally, "And Cain said to Abel his brother . . . <?> . . . And it came to pass, when they were in the field")

MT has lost what Cain said. Scholars have found these words in the two other major text families.

LXX and SP read (note the extra enlarged and boldfaced letters):

ויאמר קין אל-הבל אחיו **נלכה** השדה ויהי
בהיותם בשדה

(Literally, "And Cain said to Abel his brother, '**let us go to the field.**' And it came to pass, when they were in the field")

This is a classic example of parablepsis. The scribe's eye skipped from the ׀ (waw) at the end of one word (the last letter of the fifth word [reading right to left] just before the enlarged letters) to the same letter occurring at the beginning of the first word after the enlarged words. The result was the loss in MT of the two words in question. Not only do the LXX and SP have the missing words, but scholars are also sure the MT is deficient here for other reasons:

- a. The extra words are in the Syriac translation (the Peshitta) the Latin translation (the Vulgate), and the Palestinian Targum (an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Torah).
- b. The *Masoretes noticed the deletion*, and noted that something was missing in the text by their insertion of a section division marker in the *middle* of the verse (section division markers are almost always placed at the end of verses).

A total of eight letters are affected this time – eight letters that throw off the “code”.

Example 3 - Dots Over Doubtful Letters (the "extraordinary" dots)

In ten places in the Torah, the Masoretes placed dots over certain letters because they doubted these letters should be in the text. This was also a common practice of ancient scribes at Qumran to indicate that these letters *deserved erasure*. In two instances, their omission is even preserved in ancient manuscripts – manuscripts in the rabbinic and MT tradition!ⁱ The specific verses and words that bear these letters are listed below:ⁱⁱ

Passage	Words with Dotted Letters Above
Gen 16:5	וביניך
Gen 18:9	אלין
Gen 19:33	ובקומה
Gen 33:4	וישקהו
Gen 37:12	את
Numbers 3:39	ואהרן
Numbers 9:10	רחקה
Numbers 21:30	אשר
Numbers 29:15	ועשרון
Deuteronomy 29:28	לנו ולבנינו

When the dots are added up, we have a total of 33 letters *that by Masoretic notation should be deleted from MT* (not counting the required dots over the letter ש).

In only three examples, then, we have 42 letters that are wrong in the accepted text of the Torah, or, in terms of the Bible code, 42 inaccuracies in the every-letter

sequence required for the code to exist. There are many more than these documented in *The Bible Code Myth*.

ⁱ Ibid., 56.

ⁱⁱ The chart from which this list is drawn comes from Kelley, et. al., *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 32.