



Chronology of the Hebrew Text Development

Chronological divisions of the Hebrew text

The Hebrew text before 90 AD.

The Hebrew text from 90 AD to 135 AD.

The Hebrew text from 135 AD to 500 AD. Talmudic Period

The Hebrew text from 500 AD to 1,000 AD. Massoretic Period

The Hebrew text from 1,000 AD up to now.

Significant factors in the basic time periods mentioned above

The Hebrew text up to 90 AD:

The Hebrew language was first called that in the Prologue to Ecclesiasticus in 132 BC. Clay tablets, leather and papyrus were used for materials. Prong type, old Phoenician letters, were used up to about 444 BC then moved to the square letters as we have them today. Ancient Hebrew copies of the Scriptures, those before 200 BC, differ considerably from the present Hebrew text such as in writing materials, general format and the alphabetic form of the letters. Critics say that the content also differs. We disagree on the last count. The date, 90 AD, is significant in that it marks the date of the Council of Jamnia. This was the closing of the Jewish canon of Old Testament scriptures.

The Hebrew text from 90 AD to 135 AD:

The Jewish Christian controversy: The Council of Jamnia not only declared the book of the Hebrew text finally closed as to canonicity, but also declared the Gospels and the books of the Christians as NOT Scripture.

There was a group of Judeo-Christians, believers in Christ who still followed Judaism in the synagogues, who held that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. They were finally expelled in 132-135 AD after Bar-Cocheba's rebellion. These were called Nazarenes.

Another factor was the controversy over which text, the Septuagint or the Hebrew, should be held to. This brought about a resurgence of interest in settling these questions.

Rabbi Akiba introduced the exegetical methods of study of the texts. He died in 132 AD. This resulted in the minute standardization of the Hebrew text.

However, all this has shown, when compared to the present, that there is no substantial difference in the contents of present day Hebrew Bibles and the ancient Hebrew manuscripts.

The Hebrew text from 135 AD to 500 AD: The Talmudic Period

Subdivisions were added: Verses, Paragraphs, and Pericopes: See the Parashah, open and closed.

Punctuation marks, diacritical marks: Heavy dot over a word or letter. The paseq or divider. The inverted nun. Raised letters. Enlarged letters. A blank space in the text. The removal of so-called obscenities. Elimination of the names of pagan gods.

The Hebrew Text from 500 AD to 1,000 AD: The Massoretic Period



Contributions of Jewish scholars in Babylonia: Christianity in Palestine forced Jewish scholars to migrate east in the second century AD. By the third century, academics of Jewish learning were established lasting up into the tenth century. They developed a system of accents and vocalizations in Babylonia, but their system did not prevail. They supplied lists of textual variants to supplement the western lists of variants. You can find their list in Kittel's *Biblica Hebraica*, third edition, 1929-1937.

Massoretic scholars in Palestine:

Moslem conquest of Palestine around 638 AD brought a revived interest in scholarship and learning in Palestinian schools. The city Tiberius, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, became the center for Jewish scholars in the eighth and ninth centuries. These learned rabbis were called Massoretes and were strict adherents to the traditional text. Massora in Hebrew means "tradition."

The Massoretic scholars made many contributions: They preserved the traditional text of preceding centuries. Their primary task was to determine the exact text handed down to them from all available evidence and to hand it on to future generations without change. They standardized the consonantal text. Kethiv: the "written in the text." Qere: "to be read" noted in the marginal listing.

They vocalized the consonantal text: There were no vowel pointings at the end of the sixth century. Jerome (died in 420 AD) and the Targums and Talmud make this clear. They added a vowel system to facilitate pronunciation. This vowel system was developed between 500 and 900 AD - probably around the seventh century. This vowel system, from the Tiberian school of the Massoretes, won over the vowel system of the Babylonian academics, which were passing off the scene in the eighth century. Had seven signs written below, above or within the Hebrew consonants. They introduced an elaborate system of accents: two systems of accents; one for the poetical books and one for the other books of the Old Testament canon. They took measures to insure the exact transmission of the text.

Monographs: These were early Palestinian manuals dating around the seventh century, outlining precise instructions on preparing acceptable copies of the Scripture.

Annotations: These are marginal comments of the Massorete scholars, and are divided into several categories: The Initial Massora: deals with the first word or name of the book. The Small Massora: written in the margin. Gives data or similar words, spellings, or peculiarly written letters. The Large Massora: written on top and bottom deals with more details of the Small Massora. The Final Massora: written at the end of a book contains data on vowel points, accents, spelling, etc.

All extant Hebrew manuscripts were produced on the basis of the work of the Massoretes.

The Hebrew text from 1,000 AD up to now:

Earliest printed editions of the Hebrew Bible: First to be printed: Psalter in 1477 AD. First edition of the whole Hebrew text: 1488 AD Milan, Italy. This first edition was the text translated by Martin Luther, R. Stephanus and Bomberg.

Printed editions of the Hebrew text under Christian direction: Complutensian Polyglot, Antwerp Polyglot, Paris Polyglot, and London Polyglot.

Standard printed edition of the Massoretic text: text of Jacob Ben Chayyim. Used by Rudolph Kittel in the first and second editions of Hebrew Old Testament. The received text of our standard editions is that of Jacob Ben Chayyim. Kittel's third edition has the Ben Asher text in purest form and critical apparatus contributed by other scholars.