

The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Text of the Old Testament

Introduction

The Hebrew Bible that has been preserved today is called the Masoretic Text (MT), because Jewish scribes called "Massoretes" carefully preserved the text. The oldest surviving manuscript of the complete Bible is the [Codex Leningradensis](#) which dates to 1008 AD. The BHS (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia) follows this codex. Another important text is the Aleppo Codex which is now in Jerusalem. This text has some differences from the Codex Leningradensis. The HUB (Hebrew University Bible) follows the Aleppo Codex. The Isaiah and Jeremiah editions are now available. They incorporate readings from the Dead Sea Scrolls and other manuscripts.

One of the greatest discoveries of modern times has been the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Dead Sea Scrolls has revolutionized the study of the text of the Hebrew Bible. Below is some of the impact the DSS has had on the Old Testament.

Pre-Daniel Traditions

4Q242 Even before the discovery of the DSS, Wolfram von Soden posited that the stories about Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3 and 4 were actually stories told about Nabonidus. According to ancient Mesopotamia sources Nabonidus was the father of king Belshazzar, not Nebuchadnezzar as Daniel 5:2 states. It seems that 4Q242 preserves a tradition that pre-dates the Biblical text of Daniel. It seems that a scribe copying (or redacting) the Book of Daniel changed the name of the lesser known Nabonidus to the better known Nebuchadnezzar who destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

Non-Biblical Traditions of Daniel

4QPseudo-Daniel (4Q243-244-245) has a different perspective on history which starts in Genesis, but Daniel starts with the exiles. It seems that these fragments reflect a mixture of Enoch and Daniel traditions before the Book of Daniel was written.

4Q246 Aramaic Apocalypse or "Son of God Text" refers to a figure called "Son of God" and "Son of the Most High." This may be background for the Christology of Luke (Luke 1:32,35). This fragment seems to be dependent on Daniel 7 especially verses 14 and 27.

4Q552-553 Four Kingdoms preserves a vision of four trees which represent four kingdoms. One tree is identified with Babylon, and another with Persia. This vision may have developed from the Book of Daniel vision of one tree.

Scrolls of the Book of Daniel There are eight copies of the Book of Daniel found in Qumran Caves 1, 4, and 6. They are 1Q71-2, 4Q112-116, and 6Q7pap. The Hebrew and Aramaic sections are preserved. Generally the texts follow the Masoretic tradition, but there are some important differences (See Charlesworth, *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Vol.1, p.161).

1&2 Samuel

For the past two centuries textual critics have recognized that the Masoretic Text (MT) of 1&2 Samuel has much textual corruption. The Samuel MT is shorter than the LXX and 4QSam^a. The Samuel MT has improper word division, metathesis, and other orthographic problems. Certain phrases and clauses go against the Hebrew grammar rules. Parallel passages vary from each other. The Book of Samuel varies widely and frequently from the Masoretic Text. 4QSam^a preserves a number of superior readings that help correct errors in the Masoretic Text. Let's look at some of these.

One dramatic example is in **I Samuel 11** where the MT and KJV left out the first paragraph. The Longer reading in the DSS explains what happens in this chapter. It says:

"Nahash king of the Ammonites oppressed the Gadites and the Reubenites viciously. He put out the right eye of all of them and brought fear and trembling on Israel. Not one of the Israelites in the region beyond the Jordan remained whose right eye Nahash king of the Ammonites did not put out, except seven thousand men who escaped from the Ammonites and went to Jabesh-gilead."

1 Samuel 14:30 There is an incorrect division of words here in the MT. The 4QSam^a divides it differently which makes better sense. The MT has hkm htbr rather than hkmh hbr in the 4QSam^a.

1 Samuel 14:47 There is a singular instead of a plural noun in 4QSam^a. 4QSam^a is the better reading.

1 Samuel 15:27 There is an omission of the subject in the MT. According to 4QSam^a Saul is the subject who grabbed the garment, not Samuel.

1 Samuel 17:4 How tall was Goliath? The MT says, "six cubits and a span" while 4QSam^a says, "four cubits and a span." People don't usually grow to be over 9 foot tall, so the "four cubits"(7 feet) seems the most reasonable height of Goliath.

1 Samuel 26:22 The MT preserves two variant readings by combining them while the 4QSam^a just records the one correct word. The MT has an ungrammatical reading.

Biblical Texts that probably need to be changed as a result of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Genesis 1:9 4QGen^k has added "and dry land appeared" indicating that the longer reading of the LXX is from an ancient Hebrew text that the MT lost by haplography. The LXX addition says, "and the waters below heaven gathered into their gathering place and dry land appeared"

Genesis 4:8 leaves us with the unanswered question about What did Cain say to Abel? The Samaritan Pentateuch and the LXX have what Cain said. The LXX says, "Let us go out into the field." 4QGen^b does not have this reading, but scholars think the sentence dropped out because of scribal error (Ibid., 15).

Exodus 1:3 4QExod^b in Exodus 1:3 has "Joseph and Benjamin" while the MT, SP, and LXX have only "Benjamin." Frank Cross thinks 4QExod^b reading should be preferred (Ibid., 201-203).

Deuteronomy 32:8 4QDeut^j and the LXX say, "according to the number of the sons of God" while the MT and SP say, "according to the number of the sons of Israel." "Sons of Israel" does not make sense here. This is probably a theological change. The 4QDeut^j and the LXX seem to preserve the older reading that implies a god, or guardian angel for each nation.

Joshua 8:34-35 4QJosh^a locates the paragraph about Joshua's construction of an altar (Joshua 8:30-35, MT) at the beginning of Joshua 5. The LXX locates this paragraph at Joshua 9:7-8. Josephus follows the 4QJosh^a tradition which is probably the earliest or original order of Joshua.

Judges 6:6-11 4QJudg^a is different from the MT and the LXX in that it lacks Judges 6:7-10. These missing verses are said to be a literary insertion added by an editor. Here is clear evidence of scribal expansion of the MT.

Psalms

There are a number of additional Psalms in the DSS than in our Bible. Psalms 1-89 are basically the same as ours in the DSS (Psalm 32, and 70 are absent). From Psalm 91 on there are radical differences in arrangement, and/or in different Psalms that have never been seen before (Psalm 90 is not preserved). There are a total of 15 different Psalms which are not included in our present Bible, nine of which were completely unknown. None of the Psalm scrolls found has our present day arrangement of the Book of Psalms.

Psalms 22:17 in the MT "like a lion are my hands and feet" which does not make sense. The LXX and 5/6HevPs read "They have pierced my hands and feet."

Psalms 145 is an alphabetical psalm. Each verse begins with the next letter in the alphabet, but "N" verse is missing in the MT and KJV. In the DSS it is there, so somehow a scribe left this verse out.

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