

GUIDE TO THE USE OF *BIBLIA HEBRAICA STUTTGARTENSIA*

BETHEL SEMINARY



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1 Background

NOTES:

1.1 The Masoretic Text (abbrev. MT) is the Hebrew Bible equivalent of the *textus receptus*. The consonantal text had been carefully standardized by the Sopherim between 400 B.C. and 200 A.D. Referring to Jewish veneration of their Scriptures, Josephus Flavius wrote, "for although such long ages have now passed, no one has ventured to either add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable; and it is an instinct with every Jew, from the day of his birth, to regard them as the decrees of God, to abide by them, and, if need be, cheerfully to die for them." (*Contra Apionem*, I.42) The Sopherim were ordained theologians and Bible scholars who served as early Judaism's "United Bible Society" -- the custodians of the text of Scripture.

1.2 The Masoretes (בְּעֵלֵי הַמְסֹרֶת, "lords of the [oral] tradition") preserved in writing the traditional way of pronouncing and reading the text during the period c. 500 A.D. and 1000 A.D. They devised a system of marking vocalization, accentuation, cantillation and punctuation, thereby also standardizing grammatical forms. The resulting "masoretic" text serves as the basis for all modern critical editions of the Hebrew Bible. W. F. Albright concluded "we may rest assured that the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible, though not infallible, has been preserved with an accuracy perhaps unparalleled in any other Near Eastern literature."

1.3 The modern critical edition of the Hebrew Bible was first published in 1906 by Rudolph Kittel (BHK) and was based on the second Bomberg Edition (1525-6) of the מקראות גדולות – the Jacob ben Chayim text with

Masora and rabbinical notations. Kittel published a second edition in 1913. Kittel's first two editions did not include Masoretic notes. Kittel completed his third edition in 1937; this one based on the oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible.

NOTES:

1.4 In 1977, the German Bible Society unveiled the fourth edition edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph– *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS).

1.5 A fifth edition, *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (BHQ), is in process with the first fascicle (Megilloth) appearing in 2004, a second, Ezra-Nehemiah, in 2006, and a third, Deuteronomy, in 2007.

2 Exercise:

2.1 Read the English (or German, French, Spanish or Latin) Forward, pp XI - XVIII of the Prolegomena of BHS, looking especially for answers to the following questions:

2.2 What manuscript (MS) serves as the basis for the BHS, and how old is this MS? Why was this MS selected?

2.3 What are the notations in the margins of the MT/BHS called and what do they tell you?

2.4 What are the notations in the first register of footnotes called and what do they tell you?

3 KETHIV/QERE

3.1 The Masoretes exercised tremendous care in their dealing with the text of Scripture. Even when they came across what seemed to be an error, they would not correct the consonantal text. Rather, they devised a system whereby they would write in the margin the consonants of what they believed to be the correct spelling and mark it with a ק (abbreviating קרא, "read"), and leaving the written form (כתב, abbreviated as כ) as is in the text but marking it with a superscript circle (°) or asterisk and vocalizing it as the קרא word or spelling.

4 EXERCISE

4.1 Look up Jere. 42:6 and find the relative clause,

אֲשֶׁר אֶנִּי שְׁלָחִים אִתְּךָ אֵלָי

4.1.1 The form אֶנִּי is grammatically impossible. The Masoretes thought so too and marked it with a °.

4.1.2 Write out the problem word without vowels

4.1.3 Look up a table of independent personal pronouns (e.g. Seow's on p.52; Dobson's on p. 46 or 368) and find the form that comes closest to these consonants and write it out. What does this word mean?

4.1.4 Now write out the ק form you find in the *masorah parva* and fill in the vowel points the Masoretes supplied with the כ form of the word in the text. A post-biblical form crept into the ancient text and the Masoretes caught it. However, the meaning did not really change.

4.2 Look up Isa 28:15 and find the first colon in line 3. You'll see a ° (the third one actually) over the word עֲבֹר. Is the vocalized form grammatically feasible? The *masorah parva* suggests the ק (the third from the right, corresponding with the third ° from the right in the text)

4.2.1 Write out the ק and fill in the masoretic vocalization supplied with the כ. The result changes the grammar. Now how would you parse this form? And how would this change the meaning?

4.2.2 Which reading did the translators follow in the translation you use?

5 CRITICAL APPARATUS

5.1 For our purposes, the bottom register of footnotes, the critical apparatus, is more important. The *sigla* used in the apparatus are explained in the Prolegomena beginning on p. XLIV. Although the explanations are all in Latin, most are easily understood. See the *Guide to the Use of the BHS Critical Apparatus* online. An English key is available to use with your BHS: H.P. Ruger, *An English Key to Latin Words and Abbreviations and the Symbols of the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Biblia Druck, 1981.