

THE MASORETES AND THE SAMARITANS

The Hebrew text of the Old Testament was transmitted by a number of different groups within its history. The *Sopherim* (from Hebrew, meaning “scribes”) were Jewish scholars who preserved and copied the text from the fifth to the third centuries BC. The *Zugoth* (meaning “pairs” of scribes) were entrusted with this responsibility in the second and first centuries BC. By AD 200, the *Tannaim* (“repeaters” or “teachers”) took over this task until about AD 500.*

The Masoretes

From this point, the group of medieval scribes primarily responsible for transmitting (and introducing vowels into) the Hebrew text upon which all editions of the Hebrew Bible were based for centuries were known as the Masoretes, or Masoretic scribes (from *masora*, meaning “traditions”). Thus we call the text they produced the Masoretic Text.

There were two somewhat independent schools of Masoretes: the Babylonian and the Palestinian. The most famous Masoretes were the Jewish scholars living in Tiberias in Galilee in the late ninth and tenth centuries AD: Moses ben Asher (with his son Aaron), and Moses ben Naphtali. Though these two families are often considered to have formed separate traditions of textual preservation, they represent only a single textual tradition. The devotion and care with which the scribes copied the text is seen in the consonantal text—the pre-Masoretic text containing only consonants with no vowels. The versions preserved by the two families respectively contained a mere nine linguistic differences between them. The Ben Naphtali tradition eventually died out, while the Ben Asher tradition continued to flourish, representing the superior text.

The Ben Asher text is the standard text for the Hebrew Bible today and is best

* The work of the Tannaim can be found in the *Midrash* (“textual interpretation” of the Old Testament, a compilation of oral tradition), *Tosefta* (meaning “supplement” to the Mishnah, c. AD 240), and the *Talmud* (“instruction”), the latter of which is divided into *Mishnah* (“repetitions”) and *Gemara* (“the matter to be learned”). The Talmud constitutes a commentary on the Mishnah—literally a commentary on a commentary. Comprising two collections of Talmudic literature—the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmud—the Talmud was slowly written between AD 450 and 650.

represented by *Codex Leningradensis* B19A (L). It is utilized heavily in both the *Biblia Hebraica* (BHK) and the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), edited by Rudolph Kittel, and the *Aleppo Codex*, used for the Hebrew University Bible Project. Other Hebrew manuscripts that reflect the Masoretic text include *Codex Cairensis* (also called the *Cairo Codex of the Prophets*), *Babylonian Codex of the Latter Prophets* (MS Heb. B3), the *Cairo Geniza* manuscripts, *Reuchlin Codex of the Prophets* and the *Erfurt Codices* (E1, 2, 3). These are each considered below as individual witnesses emerging from the Masoretic tradition.

The Masoretic Text

As we have seen, the Masoretic Text encompasses an entire group of manuscripts, not just a single one, being represented by an array of different codices (that is, bound manuscript copies). Because all ancient biblical texts originally contained only consonants without vowels, many of the words could be pronounced in more than one way, which could lead to different readings of the same text. For instance, the consonants *dg* could be read as *dig*, *dog*, or *dug*. This posed a problem—a uniform style of reading needed to be established. In order to standardize the biblical texts, the Masoretes developed the *Masora* (discussed below), which added vowel signs in order to establish a fixed meaning to each group of consonants (for example, in a particular context *dg* would only refer to *dig*, not *dog* or *dug*).

Soon after the authoritative consonantal text of the Old Testament had been established, it was obvious that a reading aid would be needed. Before the consonantal text was formed there was evidence of the use of vowel reading aids. While one could still read the text with some freedom, the proper reading would be indicated by the use of vowel words using *scriptio plena* (a Semitic alphabet that contained vowel points)—that is to say, by inserting vowel points at will. The Isaiah Scroll and the Samaritan text are both witnesses to this stage of development with their respective use of *scriptio plena*. After the authoritative text was put into use, the practice of using the *scriptio plena* eventually ended.

The end of this system provided the historical platform for a new system of vowel marking to emerge. One attempt to put such a vowel system into place incorporated the use of the Greek language, but the Jewish tendency to avoid anything Greek made it difficult for this solution to catch on. So, in the fifth to tenth century AD, a new system was adopted, one which implemented vowel markings written above and below the consonants of the Hebrew text. This system came to be known as “pointing” (that is, the vowel markings found within the Hebrew text from the fifth century on). Within the first stage of this development, vowel markings would be inserted only occasionally in the biblical text to make notations on proper pronunciations for liturgical purposes. This process eventually evolved into providing this pointing for the entire consonantal text.

Three different pointing systems were eventually developed in the east and west: 1) the Babylonian system, 2) the Palestinian system, and 3) the Tiberian system. The latter was created between the eighth and tenth century AD, and it dominated the other two traditions, supplanting them so thoroughly that the Babylonian and the Palestinian

traditions were forgotten for hundreds of years until their rediscovery in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Preservation of the Text's Integrity

On the basis of the Masora—the “tradition” the Masoretes had received—they codified and wrote down the oral criticisms and remarks on the Hebrew text. This Masora also became the foundation for an apparatus that the Masoretes created in association with their text, which then was transmitted in the margins of the text itself. The purpose of these marginal notes was to preserve the integrity of the Scriptures down to the minutest detail, so that nothing would be added or taken away from God's Word. This transmission tradition was born out of a high reverence for the Hebrew Bible, and especially the Torah, within Judaism. It served as the basis of their legal traditions, and thus there was a need to protect and preserve these sacred texts. Subsequent generations of Masoretes further developed the existing apparatus far beyond the marginal notes into separate volumes and handbooks of detailed observations of the biblical text.

During the fifth and sixth centuries AD it is believed that the Masoretes, having standardized the Hebrew text, systematically and completely destroyed all of the manuscripts that did not agree with their vocalization system and standardization. Although few early manuscripts exist, the quality of these manuscripts is quite exceptional. In fact, the very lack of the many early manuscripts attests to the accuracy of the ones we do have. When scribes made errors while copying a manuscript, or when errors were discovered in manuscripts, they were immediately destroyed. Also, even when accurate manuscripts eventually began to deteriorate, leaving portions of the text tattered, they also were destroyed. This was for the purpose of preventing erroneous and partial manuscripts from circulating.

Evidence for the integrity of the Masoretic Text can also be found in the comparison of duplicate passages within the Masoretic Text itself. For example, Psalm 14 occurs again in Psalm 53; much of Isaiah 36–39 is also found in 2 Kings 18–20; Isaiah 2:2–4 parallels Micah 4:1–3; and extensive portions of the Chronicles are found in Samuel and the books of Kings. Further examination of these texts and others show substantial textual agreement as well as, in some cases, an almost word-for-word identity. Consequently, the Old Testament texts, having endured years of transmission through the Masoretic traditions, have not undergone any sort of radical revision even if the parallel passages come from identical sources.

The witness of the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, is perhaps the best evidence for the reliability of the Masoretic Text. The Septuagint was translated during the third and second centuries BC in Alexandria, Egypt, and was for the most part a book-by-book, chapter-by-chapter reproduction of the scribal text of that day. A comparison of the two texts reveals only common stylistic and idiomatic differences. Moreover, it was the Septuagint Bible that Jesus and the apostles possessed, and it was from this Bible that the New Testament authors primarily drew their quotes. The Septuagint Bible from the third and second century BC closely parallels the Masoretic

Text dating to the tenth century AD, thus confirming the faithful and accurate transmission of the Old Testament Scriptures in the Masoretic Texts.

Attention to Detail

The Masoretes had as their primary concern the preservation of the sacred Hebrew Bible. Their attention to detail was remarkably evident within their work. They went to great lengths to develop the system of marginal notes with pronunciation marks and various instructions to make sure that the smallest detail of the text would not go unnoticed by the copying scribe. Every biblical book contained a “colophon” (that is, a scribe’s notation of the details of his work, usually attached at the end of his manuscript) and a count of the total number of consonants. Moreover, scribal notes were taken identifying the middle letter of the book by location and stating the exact number of characters that preceded the letter and followed after it. In addition to these, the Masoretes’ inclusion of accentuation notes in the Hebrew text was unique and most helpful. They served as punctuation marks, musical notes for the purpose of chanting the text in cantillation, and as accent marks to direct where the phonetic emphasis should be made on the various syllables of the words.

The Masoretes were reluctant to change or alter anything within the received consonantal text. They noted a handful of preserved corrections within the text while still preserving the original to call attention to a needed correction. A particular set of corrections were known as the *Kethib-Qere* variants. These notes occur when the traditional reading—that is, the traditionally accepted pronunciation—differs from the pronunciation the letters would normally suggest. The *Kethib* (Aramaic for “written”) referred to what was written in the text itself, and the *Qere* (Aramaic for “read”) referred to the consonants in the margin with the vowels found in the text of the *Kethib*.

Many manuscripts also contain various Masoretic lists of differences between the Ben Asher texts and the Ben Naphtali texts, either at the beginning or at the end of the biblical books. The books of the second Rabbinic Bible have lists even more extensive than the biblical manuscripts themselves, which were chosen from various sources by the editor of that edition. This collection was later known as *Masora Finalis*, or Final Masora. The Final Masora of the second Rabbinic Bible also counts the number of letters, words, and verses found within the different books of the Bible. For example, at the end of the book of Genesis, the Final Masora states that there are a total of 1,534 verses in the book. From the final Masora we also learn that the Torah contains 5,845 verses, 79,856 words, and 400,945 letters. It is the Final Masora that contains the information regarding the number of words in a book or section, the middle word of a book, and even the middle consonant of a book. For the Masoretes, the purpose of these statistics is to ensure accuracy within the textual transmission process. If a scribe completed a copy of his manuscript and it could not be coordinated with the counts in the Final Masora, then he would know something went wrong in the transmission process and would therefore know not to transmit the text that was in error.

The Hebrew Christian Jacob ben Chayyim (c. AD 1525) first edited and published the standard edition of the Masoretic Text. It was for the most part based on the text of

the Masorete Ben Asher (c. AD 920). The Masoretic Text is now the greatest witness to the original Hebrew Old Testament text. It became the foundational text of all printed editions of the Hebrew Bible, including the critical editions used by scholars. It became the original-language basis for translations of the English Old Testament.

However, one important issue that confronts scholars today involves the vaunted role of “Masoretic” Text as the standard basis for the translation of the Hebrew Bible. Manuscript expert Frederic Kenyon posited a significant question when he asked whether the Masoretic Text truly represents the Hebrew text originally written by its authors. In order to answer Kenyon’s question, careful consideration must now be given to the texts and manuscripts that make up the Masoretic Hebrew Bible.¹

Manuscripts of the Masoretic Text

Codex Leningradensis (B19A)

In AD 1008, the *Codex Leningradensis* was copied in Old Cairo by Samuel ben Jacob (according to a colophon) from a previous manuscript (now lost) written by Aaron ben Moses ben Asher about eight years earlier. However, the testimony on this point remains conflicted since some (for example, Ginsburg) held it was copied from the *Aleppo Codex*. In any case, *Codex Leningradensis* represents one of the oldest extant manuscripts containing the complete Hebrew Bible. Rudolf Kittel employed this manuscript as basis for the third edition of his *Biblia Hebraica* (BHK), and the codex remains the major textual basis for *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), where it is symbolized as “L.”

Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, the *Codex Leningradensis* was the oldest manuscript containing the entire Old Testament. Its challenger, the *Aleppo Codex*, is missing pages as a result of suffering damage during anti-Jewish riots. Further, L serves as the primary source of text in the efforts to recover the missing texts in the *Aleppo Codex*. Practically speaking, since the *Aleppo Codex* was not available earlier this century to scholars, the *Codex Leningradensis* was used as the textual foundation for the popular Hebrew texts of today. L currently resides in the Leningrad Public Library (Russia) and serves as a valuable witness to the Ben Asher text.

The *Codex Leningradensis* was used for the comparison of manuscripts from the first period of the development that led to the Masoretic Text. This first period, which is characterized by the internal differences within the textual transmission, has an uncertain beginning since it is not clear exactly when the Masoretic Text came into being. Although ambiguity surrounds this first period’s beginning, its end can be confidently dated at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70.

Within the Masoretic Text group during this first period of development, there existed many differences between manuscripts. These differences mainly pertained to the content and orthography, which were usually limited to particular words and phrases only. Because there are so few complete parallel sources from antiquity, what scholars will usually do is describe these differences by comparing them with later manuscript sources. The second Rabbinic Bible was used for this purpose at an early stage of research, and now in recent studies, the *Codex Leningradensis* is used.

When the early manuscripts of the Masoretic Text are compared with the *Codex Leningradensis* from AD 1008 it is apparent how closely the texts align with one another. These close alignments apply to the vast majority of the Dead Sea Scroll (DSS) texts, as well as the Masada and other early witnesses of the Masoretic Text. These discoveries attest to the fact that the consonantal framework of the Masoretic Text has not undergone any significant change over the course of 1300 years.

The second period of Masoretic transmission begins sometime after the destruction of the Second Temple. The dismantling of the temple and its systems, along with other changes in social, religious, and economic climate, led to the decline of the circulation of textual variations. Because of this trend, one of the characteristics of this transmission period is greater unity of the texts within the Masoretic Text family. Here again the *Codex Leningradensis* is used to compare manuscripts. Texts found in Nahal Hever and Wadi Murabba'at and other ancient translations written in the second period give evidence of the decrease in textual variations. Hence, these texts follow very closely with the text of the *Codex Leningradensis*.²

The Aleppo Codex

The *Aleppo Codex* is the oldest Hebrew text of the entire Old Testament. The manuscript was copied in Israel in about AD 925 by Shelomo ben Baya'a, heir of a well-known family of scribes who specialized in the copying of biblical manuscripts. The *Aleppo Codex* is considered to be the earliest and most important manuscript of the Ben Asher tradition. It identifies Aaron ben Moses ben Asher of the city of Tiberias (c. AD 930) as the writer of the vowel pointing marks, according to the colophon. This manuscript was preserved by key Jewish communities in and around Israel for over a thousand years.

Scholars have dated the *Aleppo Codex* indirectly based on Shelomo ben Baya'a's Pentateuch manuscript, which contains inscriptions indicating it was written in AD 929. This also points to the approximate time of the writing of the *Aleppo Codex*. Based on a comparative analysis of the handwriting found on both manuscripts, scholars have determined and confirmed that both manuscripts were indeed written by the same person, thus confirming what is written in the dedication of the *Aleppo Codex*. Mordecai Glatzer has suggested that the codex was the personal property of Ben Baya'a and was kept for many years as he continually corrected it, adding Masoretic commentary and editing spelling defects among other things.

The *Aleppo Codex* was known as the *keter* (crown) of Aleppo and is considered to be the most accurate existing manuscript of the Masoretic tradition we possess today. Because this manuscript was corrected by Ben Asher, whose reputation as an excellent scholar in his day was renowned, it was heavily relied upon as a standard text for the correction of books. Ben Asher was known to have put much effort in his work on the various details of the text, making many corrections on it for many years. Upon examination of the pre-Masoretic texts that were preserved among the much earlier Dead Sea Scrolls, it was discovered that the *Aleppo Codex* and the pre-Masoretic texts were practically identical. It is these factors and others that contribute to the fame of the highly regarded *Aleppo Codex*.

By the mid-eleventh century AD the *Aleppo Codex* made its arrival in Jerusalem,

servicing as an authorized source for the Hebrew Bible to both the Karaites and rabbinical Jews. At the end of the eleventh century, when the Crusaders had conquered Jerusalem in 1099, the codex was stolen from Jerusalem and subsequently taken to Egypt. The conquerors avoided damaging the codex because they knew it was valuable to the Jewish communities and could, therefore, command a high ransom to secure its release. The manuscript was eventually released from its captors into the possession of the rabbinical synagogue in Fustat, Egypt.

The journey of the codex from Egypt to Aleppo (Syria) is unclear. The manuscript was still present in Egypt at the end of the twelfth century AD, but the earliest record of its presence in Aleppo dates from the fifteenth century AD. There is no clear information regarding the intervening years in which the transfer from Egypt to Syria would have taken place. Some have speculated that it was transferred toward the end of the fourteenth century AD since it was known that the grandson of Moses Maimonides' great-grandson, Rabbi David ben Yehoshu'a, traveled from Egypt to his home in Damascus



The Aleppo Codex is a Masoretic three-column text written in the Hebrew language with vowel points/dashes beneath the consonant letters. It is currently on display at the Shrine of the Book Museum in Jerusalem. (Photo by Zev Radovan.)

and Aleppo in 1375. During this trip, Rabbi David brought along many manuscripts with him, one of which may have been the *Aleppo Codex*.

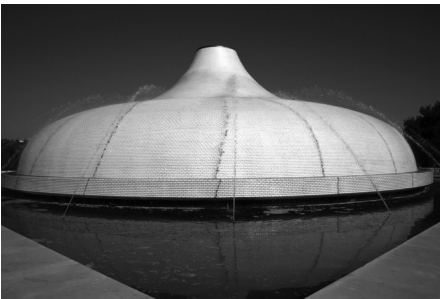
The Aleppo text originally contained the entire Hebrew Bible, but due to an anti-Jewish riot in 1947 at the synagogue in Aleppo, portions of the text were lost. Initially it was thought that the codex was completely destroyed. According to testimonies about the incident, rioters broke into the iron chest that contained the codex. Evidence shows that it was thrown around; the missing pages could be a result of this happening in the midst of the chaos, or of rioters intentionally tearing them out to destroy the codex, or a combination of both.

Most of what was missing from the *Aleppo Codex* comes from the beginning and from the end of the text, with a few isolated pages torn from the middle as well. Much of what was lost contained the Masora and many other important notes, such as its dedication and the inscriptions that provide information on its writing. The identity of the individual or group who rescued the manuscript is unclear, though it appears that it was passed on from one person to another for about ten years in order to keep it hidden and prevent further damage. In 1958, the codex was finally smuggled out of Syria to Jerusalem and delivered to the president of the State of Israel, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi.

When the *Aleppo Codex* arrived in Israel it was comprised of 294 parchment pages that were written on both sides. It was discovered, after further examination, that there were many pages missing besides what was mentioned above. Almost the entire Torah, with the exception of the last chapters of Deuteronomy, had been lost, as well as the final pages of the manuscript. In addition, portions of the Song of Songs, and all of Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah were missing, as well as a few pages from the prophets. It was discovered that the codex had originally had approximately 487 pages.

In Israel scholars began an intensive study of the codex. It was found that the spelling contained in the manuscript and the comments in the Masora matched to an extent surpassing that of any other manuscript. All aspects of the text were examined, such as the vocalization signs, cantillation marks, and the Masora apparatus, with similar results. Much effort was made to reconstruct the missing portions of the text. However, these

attempts unfortunately did not lead to many findings worthy of reproduction. These pages could have been burned, destroyed, or even hidden away. Subsequently, two important discoveries have been made: an entire page of the *Aleppo Codex* from the book of Chronicles was found, having been preserved by a family in the city of Aleppo. Another discovery yielded a portion of manuscript from the book of Exodus. This manuscript had been preserved in the wallet of a man who had used it as a good-luck charm.



Israel Museum's Shrine of the Book exhibit is located in Jerusalem. The unique roof of the exhibit is designed in the shape of the clay jar lid in which the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered.

The *Aleppo Codex* was revered by Jews and regarded as their most valued possession. It was strictly forbidden to remove it from the synagogue. It served as a model manuscript that was used liturgically only during the feasts of Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles. The text is now displayed in Jerusalem at the Israel Museum's Shrine of the Book exhibit. The three-quarters of the codex that have been preserved are now published in an exact copy by M.H. Goshen-Gottstein as *The Aleppo Codex*. It also now serves as the foundation of the *New Hebrew Bible*, published by Hebrew University.

The *Aleppo Codex* has made a major contribution to the field of Old Testament studies. It has provided us with an authoritative manuscript that was faithfully transmitted and corrected by the renowned scholar Moses ben Asher, and it has been deemed a reliable and superior codex throughout history, being considered a model text to which all other texts are to be compared. Although doubts may arise regarding the missing pages, faithful efforts have been made to restore what was lost. Today, much of it has been restored through diligent research conducted by scholars. The existence of this codex has demonstrated the faithful transmission by scribes who were driven by duty and desire to make clear the testimony of the Old Testament Scriptures.³

Codex Cairensis

According to its colophon, the *Codex Cairensis* was written and vowel-pointed in AD 895 by Moses ben Asher in Tiberias while in Israel. It contains the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings) and the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets). In the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* it is symbolized by a C and is considered to be the most authoritative Hebrew text within the Masoretic Text tradition.⁴

Babylonian Codex of the Latter Prophets (MS Heb. B3)

The writing of the Babylonian Codex is dated to approximately AD 916. On occasion it is referred to as the *Leningrad Codex of the Prophets* (Kenyon) or the *St. Petersburg Codex* (Wurthwein). It contains Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the 12 Minor Prophets. What makes this manuscript significant is that the Babylonian school of Masoretic scribes was rediscovered through it. The *Babylonian Codex* is symbolized as V(ar)P in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.⁵

The Cairo Geniza Manuscripts

The *Cairo Geniza* documents were originally discovered in the storeroom (Hebrew: *genizah*) of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Fustat (Old Cairo), Egypt. The manuscripts and fragments of this collection number in the tens of thousands and are now scattered throughout the world in various collections. Kahle has identified over 120 examples copied by the Babylonian group of the Masoretes. There have been 14 Old Testament manuscripts dating from AD 929 to AD 1121 discovered in the Firkovitch Collection in the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg. It is also contended that the 1200 manuscripts and fragments that come from the Antonin Collection in the Russian National Library are from the *Cairo Geniza* body of texts. (A list of 70 of these is published in

the prolegomena to the *Biblia Hebraica*, seventh edition.) Some of the superior texts are housed in the United States (New York) as part of the Enelow Memorial Collection at the Jewish Theological Seminary, as well in the United Kingdom at Cambridge and Manchester Universities.⁶

Reuchlin Codex of the Prophets and the Erfurt Codices (E1, 2, 3)

The *Reuchlin Codex of the Prophets* has been dated to AD 1105 and now resides at Karlsruhe, Germany. It has been a valuable resource in the establishment of the fidelity of the Ben Asher text and contains a critical revision by the Tiberian Masorete Ben Naphtali.

The *Erfurt Codices* (E1, E2, E3) are currently listed in the University Library in Tübingen and are representative (more so in E3) of the Ben Naphtali tradition of the text and markings. E1 is a manuscript from the fourteenth century AD, E2 is probably from the thirteenth century AD, and the E3 is the oldest manuscript of the three and has been dated before AD 1100.⁷

The Samaritan Pentateuch

The *Samaritan Pentateuch* is an ancient text of the Torah that was written and preserved by the Samaritan community. After extended religious and cultural struggles, a radical division occurred between the Samaritans and the Jews during the fifth or fourth century BC. At this time the Samaritans accepted only the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses) as canonical, and they canonized their own version of these Scriptures for their community. The *Samaritan Pentateuch* is not considered a version of its own in the strict sense; rather, it is considered to be a portion of the Hebrew text itself.

Although the Samaritan text contains only consonantal characters, the Samaritans developed vowel signs later on, but only rarely did they insert them into their manuscripts. Only the more recent generations of Samaritans wrote manuscripts with full vocalization, for use only outside of their community. Shechem and Mount Gerizim are featured prominently; the text reflects only the religious principles of the Samaritans. Historical data on this scroll revealed that it was written in the twelfth or thirteenth century AD, contrary to the claims made by the Samaritan community that their scroll was an ancient text. Samaritan tradition claims that their community's origins come from the beginning of the Israelite nation, and that it is actually they who preserve the true Israelite tradition. The Samaritans believe it was not they but the Jews who strayed away from the orthodox tradition, during the time of Eli the priest in the eleventh century BC (see 2 Kings 17:24-34 for Samaritan origins).

Some scholars depart from both the Samaritan and Jewish traditions in their perspectives of the origins of the Samaritan community by asserting that the Samaritan community originated at a much later period. They base this view on the book of Ezra, where the Samaritans are seen as a group of people from Samaria who separated from the Judahites during the Persian period. Other scholars make their formulations on the origin of the Samaritan community based on the works of Josephus and other historians. Most are still unsure as to when exactly the *Samaritan Pentateuch* was written; some

claim it could have been written prior to the establishment of the community itself or could have been created much later (though there exists no known manuscripts of the *Samaritan Pentateuch* earlier than the eleventh century AD). Evidence appears to support Samaritan origins sometime during the sixth to fourth century BC.

When the *Samaritan Pentateuch* and the Masoretic Text are compared, there appear to be approximately 6000 differences, which are considered to be a result of sectarian differences between the Samaritans and the Jews. Still others regard the *Samaritan Pentateuch* as a sectarian revision of the Masoretic Text itself. Because of these opinions, many scholars failed to give the text much attention upon its discovery in AD 1616, considering it useless in the realm of Old Testament textual criticism. However, upon further examination it was found that the *Samaritan Pentateuch* represented a textual tradition that preceded that of the Masoretic Text, offering insight into textual history.

The discovery of the texts that are now considered pre-Samaritan texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls has offered us much insight into the formation of the *Samaritan Pentateuch*, even though these pre-Samaritan texts are not Samaritan documents. The best preserved pre-Samaritan text contains large portions of Exodus 6 and 37 (4QpaleoExod^m). The pre-Samaritan texts are identified by the main characteristic feature of harmonization within the Pentateuch (discussed below). Though both the pre-Samaritan texts and the *Samaritan Pentateuch* have much in common, there are many instances where they diverge. The *Samaritan Pentateuch* deviates from the pre-Samaritan texts mostly in the Samaritan ideological changes that were inserted into the Torah. Though little can be said regarding the relationship between various pre-Samaritan texts, their overall agreement in important features seems to indicate a single common text from which subsequent varying manuscripts emerged. The pre-Samaritan texts give valuable insight into the development of the *Samaritan Pentateuch*, insight that was not available to scholars prior to their discovery.

The *Samaritan Pentateuch* also contains many linguistic corrections throughout its texts. Many of these “corrections” seem to be a result of attempts to smooth out the readings and to make the text more grammatically sound. Differences in content can also be found between the *Samaritan Pentateuch* and the Masoretic Text. These are minor changes that involve interchanging of single consonants and different words. Though many of these differences can be shown to be a result of the Samaritan stratum, it appears upon further inspection and comparison with the pre-Samaritan text that most of these differences are ancient and can be attributed to scribal errors that came into either the Masoretic Text or the *Samaritan Pentateuch*. Linguistic differences, in terms of morphology and vocabulary, can also be found in the text as well. Most of these are found in the pre-Samaritan texts.

The *Samaritan Pentateuch* has ideological elements interwoven throughout its text as well. However, these are only minor additions to the Torah. A few passages and wordings were altered in order to support Samaritan traditions, but the main ideological change made in the *Samaritan Pentateuch* concerns the Samaritans’ central place of worship. An example of these alterations can be found in Genesis 22:2. In the *Samaritan Pentateuch* Abraham goes to build an altar for the sacrifice of his son Isaac on Mount Moreh

near Shechem, which is a chief place of worship for the Samaritans. The Masoretic Text identifies the place Abraham goes to sacrifice his son as Mount Moriah. Another example is found in Deuteronomy 12:5. In this passage of Scripture Moses tells the nation of Israel that they are to “seek the place the LORD your God will choose” (NIV), alluding to Jerusalem in the Masoretic Text. Since in the Samaritan view the place of worship has already been chosen by Yahweh, the *Samaritan Pentateuch* changes the same passage from its future tense to past tense, portraying Moses as telling Israel to worship at “the place where Yahweh has chosen,” alluding to Mount Gerizim.

Though many of the deviations from the Masoretic Text mentioned here are due to sectarian differences, most of the differences found in the *Samaritan Pentateuch* are neutral. That is to say, many of the differences were not for the purpose of altering the meaning of the text; rather, most were a result of attempts to popularize the text. The mere fact that the *Samaritan Pentateuch* followed the Septuagint and many of the Dead Sea Scrolls so closely attests to the claim that many of the differences with the Masoretic Text were not a result of sectarian differences. Scholars believe it is more likely that these textual variations are a result of the use of a different textual base that was widely used in the ancient Near East until well after the time of Christ.

It is no wonder that the *Samaritan Pentateuch* is considered a valuable text for its contribution to the field of Old Testament textual criticism. It offers a glimpse into a separate tradition of scribal transmission from an early period. Despite its alterations, the *Samaritan Pentateuch* is another witness to the reliability of the Masoretic Text. The majority of the Samaritan text follows the Masoretic Text tradition closely, with only relatively minor differences that are easily identified. The *Samaritan Pentateuch* also does much to illustrate the complexity that was present in the Old Testament textual tradition that existed before the authoritative textual standard of the Masoretic Text was established. It is in this way that the *Samaritan Pentateuch* can stand as a supporting witness to the Old Testament texts.⁸