

Which Bible, Whose Text?

Biblical Theologies in Light of the Textual History of the Hebrew Bible

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The most important foundation of any biblical theology is the text of the Bible, both in principle and in detail. At first glance, this basis seems to be a very firm and well-defined one. Looking more closely, however, the ground turns out to be rather shaky. Which text should be or has to be regarded as the basis of a Christian biblical theology?

Of course, this question is not a new one. As is well-known, the problem, which biblical text the Church and theology should draw on, was one of the central controversies in the theological conflicts between Roman Catholics and Protestants already in the 16th century. Thus, with respect to the Old Testament, Protestants insisted on the *hebraica veritas*, while Roman Catholics gave the highest authority to the Latin text of the Vulgate. Apparently, the Protestant approach could be justified by the fact that most books of the Old Testament canon were originally composed in Hebrew, while the Vulgate was only a translation. However, the Roman Catholic side quickly became aware of this position's Achilles' heel: while it hardly could be denied that Hebrew was the original language of most Old Testament compositions, the question as to whether the Masoretic text was indeed identical with the original Hebrew version proved to be a very effective weapon, as can be seen in different developments throughout the 17th century:

– On the one hand, the impact of these challenges can be well observed in the dogmatic writings of Lutheran orthodoxy in the 17th century. Thus, for instance, Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) expounds in the first part of his *Loci theologici* (Locus primus: De scriptura sacra), one of the most important accounts of Lutheran orthodox dogmatics, which appeared 1610–1622, that the Masoretic text is in a state of perfection and that the Masoretic vowels have the same divine origin as the consonantal framework.¹

¹ J. GERHARD, *Locorum theologorum cum pro adstruenda veritate, tum pro destruenda quorumvis contradicentium falsitate per theses nervose, solide & copiose explicato*

– On the other, Christian scholarship became acquainted with the Samaritan Pentateuch, when the Italian traveler Pietro della Valle (1586–1652) brought the first manuscript from Damascus to Europe in 1616. The immense impact this manuscript had on the development of textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible is especially due to the works of Jean Morin (1591–1659), a converted Calvinist, French Oratorian priest and maybe “the most learned Catholic author of the seventeenth century”.² The Samaritan text of della Valle’s manuscript was published by Morin in the Paris polyglot (Guy Michel Le Jay, 1645) and included in the widespread London polyglot (Brian Walton, 1657), enabling comparisons between the different textual traditions of the Old Testament, both Hebrew and translations. Already in his “Exercitationes ecclesiasticae in utrumque Samaritorium Pentateuchum” (Paris, Vitray, 1631), Morin had challenged the view that the Masoretic text was the original and best text of the Pentateuch, and at least successfully demonstrated that the Hebrew language alone is no sufficient criteria for regarding one biblical text as the original.

Most obviously, this view that the Masoretic vowels and accents were already part of the Torah given to Moses at Mount Sinai draws on the respective Jewish-Rabbinic myth. Johann Gerhard, like many of his learned Protestant contemporaries, knew that literature very well.³ But this alone provides no sufficient explanation for his affinity to the Rabbinic view that the Masoretic signs are holy and of divine origin, all the more so as this view faced severe opposition from the famous composition “Masoret ha-Masoret”, written by the Jewish Hebraist Elias Levita (1469–1549) and published already in 1538. Analyzing the textual evidence, Elias had demonstrated that the Masoretic signs did not originate in Mosaic times, but in the post-Talmudic era. Given Gerhard’s broad knowledge in Hebrew studies and the status of Elias’ “Masoret ha-Masoret” as representing the state of the art of Masorah studies in his time, it seems hard to imagine that Gerhard was ignorant of it. Presumably, he decided to adopt the rabbinic myth instead of Elias’ critique, since the former seemed better to correspond with the primacy of the Hebrew text. Thus Gerhard disregarded the evidence of the Masoretic text itself, as analyzed in “Masoret ha-Masoret”, in favor of an *a priori* principle, namely that it is the Masoretic text which

rum tomus I. Jena: Steinmann, 1610: Cap XIV: De textus hebraici in V.T. integritate; Cap. XV: “De punctis vocalibus, an sint codici biblici coeva”.

² A.M.P. INGOLD, Article “Jean Morin”, in: C.G. Herbermann (ed.), *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 10, New York, The Encyclopedia Press, 1913.

³ See J.A. STEIGER, *Der Kirchenvater der lutherischen Orthodoxie: Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) und ein Forschungsprojekt*, KuD 43 (1997): 58–76. Here: 73 f.

is the basis for theology and Church.⁴ Of course, this did not solve the problem.

1. Reading the Consonantal Framework of the Hebrew Bible

Most obviously, the background for Johann Gerhard's sanctification of the Hebrew vowels and accents was prepared by the debates with the Roman Catholics about the biblical text, and much less by his studies of the biblical text itself. Nevertheless, throughout his engagement with the vocalization and reading of the Masoretic text, Gerhard was aware of a fact which in contemporary exegesis has often been rather neglected: the consonantal framework of ancient Hebrew texts is in many cases polyvalent, enabling different ways of reading and understanding it. Therefore, additional information beyond the consonantal framework of the Hebrew text like vocalization, punctuation and paragraphing cannot be regarded as something like a "paratextual bonus", but is pivotal for creating the meaning of the text. Two examples should suffice to illustrate the importance of this assessment, the first regarding vocalization, and the second regarding punctuation:

1. In Gen 2:7, the Masoretic text reads as follows:

"Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being."⁵

According to this text, God creates the first man out of two components: an earthen body and a divine breath, which was blown into the earthen body by God himself. Now, it seems important to note that at least one word which is central to this understanding may be vocalized and read in a different way, and this different reading is indeed attested by the Samaritan reading of the Torah. The Masoretic vocalization reads *וַיִּפֶּחַ בְּאַפִּי נְשָׁמָה* – "and (God) *breathed* into his nostrils the breath of life", the verb *וַיִּפֶּחַ* being in the *Qal*-stem. The Samaritan text,⁶ however, reads *וַיִּפֶּחַ*,⁷ i.e.

⁴ That the term *hebraica veritas* was from the outset theologically founded, rather than philologically, has been demonstrated by J.A. LOADER, *Die Problematik des Begriffes hebraica veritas*, HTS 64 (2008): 227–251. It remained that way throughout the Reformation and the early Protestant tradition: "Die Zueignung des hebräischen Kanons durch Hieronymus war eine antijüdische Polemik, die Zueignung desselben in der reformatorischen Tradition eine antikatholische." (LOADER, *op. cit.*, 247)

⁵ Biblical passages in English translation are generally quoted from the New Revised Standard Version (1989). Occasional deviations from this rule follow the needs of my argumentation.

⁶ A. TAL/M. FLORENTIN (eds.), *The Pentateuch: The Samaritan version and the Masoretic version* (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv, The Haim Rubín Tel Aviv University Press, 2010.

it has the verb in the *Hif'il* instead of the *Qal*, and this difference in vocalization reflects a different meaning attributed to the text by the reading: “and God *let breathe* in his nostrils the breath of life”. Of course, in both traditions man is created by God, but according to the Samaritan version man’s breath is no longer the same as God’s breath. Instead, breathing here is a function of the earthen body, caused to work by God in the course of creation. Thus, the two different readings of this crucial passage are not only two possible options, but both are attested in actual reading traditions.

2. In Exod 19:23–24, the Masoretic text reads as follows:

“Moses said to the LORD, The people are not permitted to come up to Mount Sinai; for you yourself warned us, saying, Set limits around the mountain and keep it holy. The LORD said to him, Go down, and come up, bringing Aaron with you. But the priests and the people – let them not break through to come up to the LORD; otherwise he will break out against them.”

Thus, according to verse 24, Moses is commanded to bring up Aaron to Mount Sinai, while the priests and the people are forbidden to ascend Mount Sinai. A different version, however, is contained in the text of the Samaritan Torah, which reads as follows:

“[...] The LORD said to him, Go down, and come up, together with Aaron and the priests. But the people – let them not break through to come up to the LORD [...].”⁸

Thus, according to this Samaritan version, Moses is told to ascend Mount Sinai not only together with Aaron, as in the Masoretic text, but together with Aaron and the priests, while only the people are not allowed to. The difference is based on different punctuation:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה לְדָוִד וְעַלִּית אִתָּהּ וְאַתְּרוּ עִמָּךְ
וְהַכֹּהֲנִים וְהָעָם אֲלֵי־יְהוָה סוּ לְעֹלֹת אֲלֵי־יְהוָה פְּרִי־צִבְּבִים:

⁷ The word is pronounced *wyabba* in the Samaritan reading, which is the Samaritan Hebrew equivalent to Masoretic וַיַּבֵּא, see Z. BEN-HAYYIM, *The Literary and Oral Tradition of Hebrew and Aramaic Amongst the Samaritans*, vol. 4, Jerusalem, The Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1977 (= LOT 4), and S. SCHORCH, *Die Vokale des Gesetzes: Die samaritanische Lesetradition als Textzeugin der Tora. Band 1: Genesis*, Berlin/ New York, de Gruyter, 2004 (BZAW 339), 87.

⁸ This translation follows some of the most ancient manuscripts of the Samaritan Pentateuch (Mss. Cambridge University Library Add. 713 [before 1213], Add. 714 [1219], Dublin Chester Beatty Library 751 [1225], Manchester John-Rylands Library Sam 1 [1211], Leipzig Universitätsbibliothek Vollers 1120 [ca. 1345] etc. Other ancient manuscripts contain a different version, reading וְהַעֲלִית “and bring an offering” instead of וְעַלִּית “and come up”: Mss. Nablus Synagogue 6 (1204), Cambridge University Library Add. 1846 (12th century), Leiden Or. MS 6 (1350) etc. In fact, the reading as heard today in the Samaritan community has *wällita*, i.e. the *Hif'il* (= וְהַעֲלִית), compare BEN-HAYYIM, LOT 4.

The Masoretic text has an *Atnach* after וְאַהֲרֹן עִמָּךְ – “...and Aaron with you”, separating it from the following $\text{וְהַכֹּהֲנִים וְהָעָם}$ – “But the priests and the people...”. The Samaritan manuscripts, on the other hand, have no divider after עִמָּךְ , but a stop after וְהַכֹּהֲנִים :⁹

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יְהוָה לֵךְ רֵד וְעֲלִית אֵתָה וְאַהֲרֹן עִמָּךְ וְהַכֹּהֲנִים :

וְהָעָם אֵל יִהְרָסוּ לְעֹלוֹת אֵל יְהוָה פֶּן יִפְרֹץ בָּם :

Of course, the two versions may be connected with two different conceptions of priesthood, especially regarding the question whether priests are to be seen as part of the Israelite people or as a different entity.

In both examples, the consonantal framework alone is ambiguous and, most obviously, the exact meaning of the text is established only in the reading, be it due to differences in vocalization as in the first example (Gen 2:7) or due to differences in punctuation as in the second (Exod 19:24). If, however, it is the process of reading which creates the meaning of the text, most obviously the term “text” cannot be restricted to materially-written artifacts, but must also include the reader’s engagement with it. And if so, the literary and textual history of the Hebrew Bible cannot be understood solely as a process of creating and copying manuscripts, but has to include a history of the reading of those Hebrew manuscripts as well. It seems to me that this change of perspective leads to important consequences, and I would therefore like to outline in the following at least

⁹ Most manuscripts have at this place an *Afsaq* – “Full stop” (:); among the manuscripts mentioned above in note 8 only Ms Cambridge University Library Add. 713 has a different stop, namely *Arkenu* (/). The apparatus of punctuation variants in von Gall’s edition lists two mss. with a *Turu* (1:), which is yet another stop sign (A. FREIHERR VON GALL [ed.], *Der samaritanische Pentateuch der Samaritaner*, Gießen, Alfred Töpelmann, 1914–1918). Note however, that there is at least one ms. without a stop sign, Leiden Or. MS 6 (1350). Possibly, this deviation may reflect a different reading, since today two ways of reading this verse are attested side by side in the Samaritan community, one with a stop after “and the priests” [וְהַכֹּהֲנִים:], as in the vast majority of manuscripts, and the other with a stop after “with you” [עִמָּךְ:], as in the Masoretic text. This phenomenon is even reflected in modern editions of the Samaritan Pentateuch, which were produced by Samaritans. The Torah edition of I. TSEDAKA (*Samaritanische Tora* [in Hebrew], Holon 1998) follows the “priestly” reading, having a stop after “and the priests”, while that of A. SADAQA/R. SADAQA ([eds.], *Jewish version/ Samaritan version of the Pentateuch with particular stress on the differences between both texts*, Tel Aviv 1961–1965) contains a stop after “with you”. It appears that the parallel existence of these two readings is the expression of a certain tension between the Samaritan priests and the Samaritan people, see S. SCHORCH, *Gemeindeopfer oder Priesteropfer? Die späte Deuteronomisierung des samaritanischen Passaopfers*, in: Rainer Voigt (ed.), *Und das Leben ist siegreich!/ And Life is Victorious: Mandäische und samaritanische Literatur/ Mandaean and Samaritan Literatures. Im Gedenken an Rudolf Macuch/ In Memory of Rudolf Macuch (1919–1993)*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2008 (*Mandäische Forschungen* 1), 237–246. Here: 244–246.

some coordinates of a history of the reading of Biblical Hebrew, which has yet to be written.

2. The History of Reading Biblical Hebrew – Some Problems

As can be learned from the examples quoted above, Biblical Hebrew manuscripts contain a relatively high number of passages in which the written record of a given text is not sufficient to re-create it in the mind of the reader. Most obviously, in those cases the reader has to have knowledge which goes beyond the written record, in order to reproduce the text. As for ancient times, two scenarios should be considered:

1. The ancient reader did not know the actual text in its entirety or some of its parts, and he thus had to fill in the gaps of the written record by himself, be it by inferring from the context, be it from his acquaintance with the content of the document through an extra-textual or para-textual source. In this case, reading was obviously not a re-productive act, but a productive one: the reader created the text, even though this happened on the basis of a written record.

2. The ancient reader did know by heart the text which was recorded in the written document in front of him, and thus the written record served for him merely as a means of support. Within the framework of this second scenario, reading is conceived of as an act of re-production.¹⁰

Ad 1.) I will start with the first potential scenario, supposing a reader who did not know the text recorded in the written document in front of him. The paradigm for a reader like this can be found in the legends which tell the story of an unknown or forgotten book, which was found and read and which turned out to be of high importance. A prominent example is of course 2 Kings 22, the story about the discovery of a book in the temple of Jerusalem at the time of King Josiah's reign. Irrespective of whether such texts refer to historical events or not, they presuppose that it was possible to read a document without prior knowledge of its content, thus demonstrating that the ancient contemporaries of these texts could imagine such scenarios actually taking place.

Apart from these sources, which speak about readers ignorant of reading traditions and their immediate approach to the written record, the ignorance of such readers left clear traces in the textual transmission of the Old Testament. Most prominently, these traces appear in the Septuagint in cases where a certain Greek rendering is based on an obviously wrong vo-

¹⁰ The latter scenario is the subject of D. CARR's book, *Writing in the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2005; see e.g. pp. 8–9.

calization of the Hebrew *Vorlage*. Numerous examples for such missreadings are attested by the Genesis Septuagint from the 3rd century BCE, e.g. in Gen 47:31:

Gen 47:31

“Swear to me. And he swore to him. So Israel bowed himself on the head of ...”

הַשָּׂבָעָה לִי וַיִּשָּׁבַע לוֹ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל-רֹאשׁוֹ...

MT: הַמַּטֵּה – “...the bed.”
 LXX: (...ἐπὶ τὸ ἄκρον) τῆς ῥάβδου αὐτοῦ
 = *LXX: *הַמַּטֵּה – “...the staff.”

In this passage, the Greek translation is obviously based on the reading הַמַּטֵּה “the staff” as against the vocalization preserved in both the Masoretic and the Samaritan reading הַמַּטֵּה “the bed.” From the perspective of both the immediate and the broader context, the vocalization as read by the Greek translator produced nonsense, since the act of prostration (להשתחוות) can hardly be carried out on top of a staff.¹¹ Apparently, the Greek translator, lacking of an oral reading tradition as backup, simply chose one of the theoretically possible vocalizations of the consonantal framework הַמַּטֵּה. Incidentally, it was the wrong one.

The example of Gen 47:31 demonstrates that in those cases, where the reader had to make sense out of a written record with which he was not familiar, a highly arbitrary element entered the textual history of the Hebrew Bible, leading to the accidental creation of new texts, at times even absurd or weird.

Ad 2.) Let us now consider the second scenario, envisaging a reader who already knew the text he read by heart, and therefore used the written record only as a means of support. Within the framework of this model, which was developed in great detail by David Carr in his important book “Writing in the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature” (2005), reading is conceived of as an act of re-production. Obviously, the actual reader received the text in a given social setting (classroom, family, etc.), and this text, therefore, originates not in his own arbitrary endeavor, but in the shared knowledge of a community. Re-productive reading is thus an act of identification with this community and with their tradition: the actual reader identifies himself as part of a community of readers, a *communio lectorum*. With respect to the text of the Old Testament, the tradi-

¹¹ This was already observed by J. BARR, Vocalization and the analysis of Hebrew among the ancient translators, in: B. Hartmann et al. (eds.), Hebräische Wortforschung, Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Walter Baumgartner, Leiden, Brill, 1967 (VT.Suppl. 16), 1–11. Here: 3–4.

tions of at least two communities of readers have been preserved and survived: the Masoretic reading tradition and the Samaritan reading tradition.

3. Reading Biblical Hebrew and the Foundations of Biblical Theology

We can come back now to our initial question: which text can or must a Christian theology of the Old Testament be built on? On account of the textual evidence at hand, four possible options will be considered in the following: the Masoretic text, the Samaritan text, the Septuagint, and the supposed “*Urtext*”.

a) Biblical Theology and the Masoretic Text

Within the Protestant theological tradition, there is a strong tendency to regard the Masoretic text as the scriptural basis for theology. Moreover, and most naturally, the Masoretic text is the first choice for any scholarly approach to those books of the Old Testament which were originally written in Hebrew or in Aramaic: The Masoretic text not only preserves these books in their respective original language, but its actual attestation in manuscripts is amazingly uniform. Looking from within the Masoretic tradition, therefore, the need for textual criticism almost disappears. Moreover, the Masoretic text provides its reader with important data regarding its proper reading: it is fully vocalized, contains additional signs determining the reading of homographic consonants (especially \dot{v}/\ddot{v} , *dagesh*), and provides information about the syntactical structure of every textual passage (“accents” – *te’amim*). Additionally, it marks the delimitation of textual units (*parashot*). Thus, the Masoretic text embeds detailed reading instructions.

Nevertheless, in light of our analysis that any reading tradition of a Hebrew text must be understood in the context of the identity of a given *communio lectorum*, Christian readers who refer to the Masoretic text seem to face a delicate problem: the Masoretic text is not only today an important identity marker of Rabbinic Judaism, but seems to have had this role from the outset. Regardless of the fact that the Masoretic reading tradition of the biblical text to a large extent embedded and preserved old traditions, its final determination took place throughout the late 1st and the 2nd century CE as part of the creation of Rabbinic Judaism in the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 CE. Thus, no direct links connect

the Masoretic text and the Bible of the Church, either text-historically,¹² sociologically, not from the perspective of religious identity. Therefore, there seems to be no basis for the claim that the Masoretic text can determine the Christian canon of Scripture.

b) Biblical Theology and the Samaritan Text

As for the option to base a Christian biblical theology on the Samaritan text of the Torah, the situation seems to some extent similar to that of the Masoretic text: like the Masoretic reading, the Samaritan reading provides a Hebrew text with full vocalization and punctuation.¹³ However, the Samaritan text, too, cannot easily be separated from its context, which is the Samaritan community with its own distinct identity. The Samaritan reading tradition emerged and was fixed together with the establishment of the Samaritans as a distinct community at the end of the 2nd century BCE.¹⁴ By the time of the first Christians, the Samaritans had already created their own literary culture, which was independent from the Jewish context out of which Christianity was born.¹⁵ Thus, there is no direct link between the Samaritan text and Christianity, and the Samaritan text seems not to be therefore an option for the basis of a Christian biblical theology.

c) Biblical Theology and the Septuagint

At first glance, the Greek New Testament writings seem to suggest an easy solution to this problem: since they quote the Old Testament in Greek, one may ask whether a Christian theology of the Old Testament could possibly be based on the Greek Old Testament. However, this solution, too, faces severe problems. Apart from the fact that it is not always possible to reconstruct the textual history of the Greek Bible on the basis of the extant manuscripts, and the textual basis for a theology of the Greek Old Testament is therefore not much clearer than it is for the Hebrew text, some further observations should be mentioned:

¹² Most obviously, the Christian reception of what was to become the “Old Testament” started before the Masoretic text was in existence, as can be seen from the scriptural quotations in the writings of the “New Testament”.

¹³ Unlike in the case of the Masoretic text, however, the Samaritan reading was not fully codified, but was handed down mainly as an oral tradition, see BEN-HAYYIM, LOT 4, and SCHORCH, *Die Vokale des Gesetzes*.

¹⁴ See S. SCHORCH, *La formation de la communauté samaritaine au 2^e siècle avant J.-Chr. et la culture de lecture du Judaïsme*, in: I. Himbaza/A. Schenker (eds.), *Un carrefour dans l’histoire de la Bible: Du texte à la théologie au II^e siècle avant J.-C.*, Fribourg, Universitätsverlag/ Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007 (OBO 233), 5–20.

¹⁵ Compare for instance the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4.

1. Although the scriptural quotations in the Greek New Testament attribute authority to the writings of the Old Testament, they do so in a rather general way. Therefore, the New Testament does not sanctify a certain textual version of the Old Testament. This is rather clearly demonstrated by numerous pseudo-quotations, i.e. passages which are introduced as quotations but were textually modified in order to correspond as smoothly as possible to their new context, or even by fictitious quotations. An example for the first phenomenon, a pseudo-quotation, can be found in Ephesians 4:8:

“Therefore it is said, When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.”

The verse clearly refers to Psalm 67:19 (LXX), but there the text reads differently:¹⁶

“*You* ascended on high; *you* led captivity captive; *you* received gifts by a person [...].”

While the original text in the Septuagint is in the 2nd person singular, Ephesians quotes the passage in the 3rd person singular. Most obviously, the text was changed in order to fit into the new context and to create a reference to Jesus Christ (regardless of whether this change was carried out by the author of Ephesians or by one of his sources).

An example of the second phenomenon, i.e. a fictitious quotation from the Old Testament, is provided by 1 Corinthians 2:9:

“But, as it is written, What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.”

In spite of the formula καθὼς γέγραπται – “as it is written”, which serves to introduce a scriptural quotation, there is no such saying in the Old Testament, and Paul most probably just used the formula in order to attribute to the following passage scriptural authority, creating a fictitious quotation.

In sum, the possible impression that the writings of the New Testament canon mark the Septuagint as “Scripture” is erroneous, and although the Old Testament is of course regarded as Scripture by the authors of the New Testament, they certainly did not authorize one single textual version.¹⁷

¹⁶ The translation of the Greek is quoted from A. PIETERSMA, Psalms, in: A. Pietersma/B.G. Wright (eds.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint (= NETS)*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2009 (italics in the quotation set by the present author).

¹⁷ For more details see S. SCHORCH, *Verlangen die Schriften des Neuen Testaments danach, den Kanon des Alten Testaments an der Septuaginta auszurichten?: Vom Vorrang des Hebräischen*, ZNT 26 (2010): 55–59. Here: 55–57.

2. As already shown above,¹⁸ the text of the Greek Old Testament is at least partly to be considered the result of random and arbitrary effects on the translation process.¹⁹ This phenomenon seems difficult to accept for a canonical text. Moreover, the arbitrary influences on the Greek version of the Old Testament imply that at least some of its texts cannot be regarded as a medium which carries a coherent message from its sender to the recipient.²⁰

3. On account of the observation described in the previous paragraph, the Greek translation of the Old Testament cannot be seen as completely independent from its Hebrew *Vorlage*. Rather, in many cases the Greek text only makes sense when read against the background of the latter. This impression is even strengthened when we consider the case of Greek transliterations of Hebrew words which were unknown to the Greek translator, e.g. σαβεκ (Gen 22:13 for Hebrew סבך “thicket”) or αμαφεθ (1 Samuel 5:4 for Hebrew המפתח “the threshold”).²¹ The fact that the translator in these cases reproduced the original Hebrew text without translating it indicates that the Greek version is conceived of as an addition to the original Hebrew text, but not as its substitution. Thus, in referring to the Greek text, one still has to consider all the problems of the Hebrew text as described in this paper.

– In the prologue to the Book of Ben Sira, the Greek Bible itself contains a text which devalues the enterprise of translating Biblical Hebrew texts into Greek, contending texts which are from the outset inferior to the

¹⁸ See above on p. 7 regarding Gen 47:31.

¹⁹ Further examples have been compiled and analyzed by J. BARR, “Guessing” in the Septuagint, in: D. Fraenkel/U. Quast/J.W. Wevers (eds.), *Studien zur Septuaginta – Robert Hanhart zu Ehren, Aus Anlaß seines 65. Geburtstages*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990 (Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse, 3. Folge, 190 = Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens 20), 19–34, and by E. TOV, Did the Septuagint Translators Always Understand Their Hebrew Text?, in: E. TOV, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected essays on the Septuagint*, Leiden, Brill, 1999 (VT.Suppl. 72), 203–218.

²⁰ According to Konrad Ehlich, a “text” is conceived of as a linguistic means of transmission, “a device to overcome a dilated speech situation (a speech situation where speaker and hearer are not co-present)”, see K. EHLICH, *Textualität und Schriftlichkeit*, in: L. Morenz/S. Schorch (eds.), *Was ist ein Text? Alttestamentliche, ägyptologische und altorientalistische Perspektiven*, Berlin/ New York, de Gruyter, 2007 (BZAW 362), 3–17; 365–366. Here: 366 (English abstract; compare p. 11 for the German text).

²¹ Regarding the transliteration of Hebrew words in the Septuagint, see E. TOV, Loan-words, Homophony and Transliterations in the Septuagint, in: E. TOV, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint*, Leiden, Brill, 1999 (VT.Suppl. 72), 165–182. Here: 174–182.

original.²² In lines 21–22 of the prologue, the grandson of Ben Sira writes about his own translation as follows:

οὐ γὰρ ἰσοδυναμεῖ αὐτὰ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς Εβραϊστί λεγόμενα
καὶ ὅταν μεταχθῆ εἰς ἑτέραν γλῶσσαν

“For those things originally in Hebrew do not have the same force when rendered into another language.”

Thus, at least a theology of the Septuagint as a (canonical) whole would face the problem that the text presents itself as an inferior version of the Hebrew original.

On account of these problems, proceeding from the Septuagint hardly solves the question which text could be the basis of a biblical theology.

d) *Biblical Theology and the “Urtext”*

One further option should be considered, the quest for the “*Urtext*” of the Hebrew Bible, i.e. the assumed original version, which supposedly was the source of all subsequent manuscripts and textual traditions. Although this *Urtext*-theory has been very popular in Old Testament textual criticism since Paul de Lagarde (1827–1891), it appears to be beset by a basic failure: focusing solely on the written transmission of manuscripts, it completely disregards the role of the reader.

As was already shown, a given manuscript is not yet a text, but only becomes a “text”, i.e. a finite linguistic entity with a certain meaning, in the course of reading. Therefore, the “text” is not a point of departure, as the *Urtext*-theory implies, but an achievement. Moreover, different readers will produce different texts on the basis of the same manuscript, and this text will only endure when it is created within the context of a *communio lectorum*. Thus, although there is a Masoretic text, a Samaritan text, and traces of further ancient texts, there is no *Urtext*. And most obviously, on account of its fictitious nature, the so-called “*Urtext*” can hardly provide the fundament of a “Biblical theology”. Before the 2nd century BCE, the transmission of the Hebrew Bible did not take place in a single and uniform literary culture and we therefore have to reckon with the existence of several parallel texts. A good example for the parallel existence of different texts emerging from an identical manuscript basis is the case of the Book of Deuteronomy.

²² A detailed analysis of the exact meaning of this passage can be found in S. SCHORCH, The Pre-eminence of the Hebrew Language and the Emerging Concept of the “Ideal Text” in Late Second Temple Judaism, in: G.G. Xeravits/J. Zsengellér (eds.), Studies in the Book of Ben Sira. Papers of the Third International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Pápa, Hungary, 2006, Leiden, Brill, 2008 (JSJ.Suppl. 127), 43–54.

4. One Manuscript and Two (or More?) Texts: Deuteronomy's Chosen Places

The question of God's chosen place is one of the central issues with which the book of Deuteronomy is concerned. Thus, in chapters 12 and 14–18 Deuteronomy refers no less than 22 times to “the place that the Lord (your God) will choose” ([אלהיכם] יהוה יבחר אשר יבחר יהוה). Within the tracks of the so-called Deuteronomistic history in the Masoretic version, this “place that the LORD your God will choose (יבחר)” (e.g. Deut 12:5) is clearly identified as Jerusalem, “the city that the LORD had chosen (בחר)” (e.g. 1 Kings 14:21). Thus, there exists an obvious link between the two formulas, founded especially on the verbal forms יבחר and בחר.

We have to realize, however, that a different identification of Deuteronomy's chosen place works at least equally well – namely the Samaritan identification. First of all, the Samaritans do not have any biblical books beyond the Torah. Therefore, the characteristic link of the Deuteronomistic history does not exist in the Samaritan version. Since the Samaritan scriptural corpus is confined to the Torah, the chosen place seems to be clearly identified as the altar to be built on Mount Gerizim²³ by Deut 27:4.²⁴

“When you cross the Jordan, [...] you shall seek the place that the LORD your God chose out of all your tribes as his habitation to put his name there.”

(Deut 11:31–12:5)

“On the day that you cross over the Jordan [...], you shall set up these stones, about which I am commanding you today, on Mount Gerizim, and you shall cover them with plaster. And you shall build an altar there to the LORD your God, an altar of stones.”

(Deut 27:2–5)

Moreover, as is well-known, the Samaritan text of the centralization formula is different from that of the Masoretic text, reading “the place that the LORD your God had chosen (בחר)” instead of the Masoretic “will choose

²³ Although the Masoretic text contains the reading עֵיבָל “on Mount Ebal” as the location of the altar in Deut 27:4, this is not the original reading, but rather the result of a deliberate correction on the part of proto-Masoretic scribes. The original reading is “on Mount Gerizim” as preserved in the Samaritan Pentateuch, see A. SCHENKER, *Textgeschichtliches zum Samaritanischen Pentateuch und Samareitikon*, in: M. Mor/F.V. Reiterer (eds.), *Samaritans: Past and Present: Current Studies*, Berlin/ New York, de Gruyter, 2010, 105–121, here: 106–107, and compare already E. TOV, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press/ Assen, Maastricht, Royal Van Gorcum, ²2001, 95 note 67.

²⁴ A detailed treatment of the literary cross-referencing between Deut 11:31–12:18 and Deut 27 can be found in S. SCHORCH, *The Samaritan Version of Deuteronomy and the Origin of Deuteronomy*, in: J. Zsengellér (ed.), *Samaria, Samaritans and Samaritans: Proceedings of the 7th International conference of the Société d'Études Samaritaines*, Papa (Hungary), Berlin/ New York, de Gruyter, 2011 (*Studia Samaritana* 6), 23–37.

(יבחר)”. Thus, according to the Samaritan Pentateuch, the erection of the altar on Mount Gerizim in Deut 27:4–5 does not refer to the election of this place, but was rather the consequence of the election which had already taken place, when Abraham built an altar at Elon More near Sichem (Gen 12:7).

It was for a long time the scholarly consensus that the variant בחר “(he) had chosen”, the basis for this understanding, is a Samaritan secondary correction of the written framework. This view, however, can no longer be accepted. Adrian Schenker pointed out in two recent articles that the reading בחר is contained in the Old Greek text of the Pentateuch. Thus, we have to assume that the Old Greek translation of Deuteronomy as well as its Hebrew *Vorlage* read בחר, and בחר was therefore part of the oldest consonantal framework of Deuteronomy which can be reconstructed,²⁵ while the Masoretic reading יבחר is the result of a Jerusalem-focused correction most probably carried out around the middle of the 2nd century BCE.²⁶

Since the Book of Deuteronomy was obviously known and read both among followers of the Temple of Jerusalem and among followers of the cultic centre on Mount Gerizim some centuries before the 2nd century BCE,²⁷ these observations mean that until the middle of the 2nd century BCE, when the “Judean” text of Deuteronomy was changed, an almost identical written record of the Book of Deuteronomy, containing both בחר in the centralization formula *and* the reference to “Mount Gerizim” in Deut 27:4, was read in two totally different ways, in accordance with two different geographical and religious contexts: on the basis of this same document, Samaritan or rather proto-Samaritan readers identified the chosen place with Mount Gerizim, while Judean readers identified it with Jerusalem, even before the creation of the Masoretic text. – How can this be understood?

The Judean reading of the centralization formula prior to the ideological correction of the written textual framework from בחר to יבחר was determin-

²⁵ See SCHENKER, *Textgeschichtliches*, 113–116 and IDEM, *Le Seigneur choisira-t-il le lieu de son nom ou l’a-t-il choisi?: l’apport de la Bible grecque ancienne à l’histoire du texte samaritain et massorétique*, in: A. Voitila/J. Jokiranta (eds.), *Scripture in transition: Essays on Septuagint, Hebrew Bible and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of Raija Sollamo*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2008, 339–351.

²⁶ For a detailed justification of this view see SCHORCH, *The Samaritan Version of Deuteronomy*.

²⁷ The archeological excavations carried out by Yitzhak Magen on Mount Gerizim prove the existence of a cultic precinct “from the Persian period, continued in use until the third century” (Y. MAGEN, *Mount Gerizim Excavations*, vol. II: *A Temple City*, Jerusalem, Israel Antiquities Authority, 2008 [Judea and Samaria Publications 8], 143).

ed by the view that the election of Jerusalem had already happened. This can be learned from Neh 1:8–9:

“Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place at which I have chosen to establish my name (המקום אשר) שם (בהרתתי לשכן את-שמי שם).”

This free paraphrase of Deut 30:1–4 and the centralization formula clearly contextualize the latter within the lifetime of Moses and link it to Jerusalem. It presupposes, therefore, that Jerusalem was already chosen at the time of Moses, and thus any Judean or Jerusalemite reader familiar with this view would have understood the centralization formula in Deuteronomy as referring to the election of Jerusalem.

Yet a second view regarding the election of Jerusalem has left its traces in the biblical text, namely the concept of the succession of several chosen places. This concept is clearly expressed in Psalm 78:60–68:

“He abandoned his dwelling at Shiloh, the tent where he dwelt among mortals [...]. He rejected the tent of Joseph, he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim; but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loves.”

Following this succession theory, Judeans reading Deuteronomy could accept that Mount Gerizim was one of the chosen places of the past, while Jerusalem was the chosen place of the present and the future.

Both texts of Deuteronomy seem to have worked very well: In the context of the holy geography of Samaria, the chosen place was identified with Mount Gerizim, while at the same time, on the basis of an identical written record, but in the different context of the holy geography of Judah, the chosen place was identified with Jerusalem. The so-called Deuteronomistic history merely gave literary expression to this identification, which had previously existed.

The question of the “chosen place” in Deuteronomy is only one example illustrating the substantial differences between texts “created” from the same written basis throughout the course of transmission of the Hebrew Bible. Prior to the creation of a uniform reading culture (which in itself is an ideal construction, as there never existed a total uniformity), reading in a multitude of contexts created a multitude of texts. Thus, although it may be possible to reconstruct the “Ur-manuscript” of Deuteronomy, there was certainly no “*Urtex*” of this book!

5. Resume: Biblical Theology as Cultural History of the Biblical text

The biblical texts have been created in reading processes. These reading processes are determined either by random or by the shared identity of a given community, a *communio lectorum*.

This situation poses a serious challenge for Christian theology: although the New Testament authors and Christian circles of course used the Old Testament, they never did so in the context of one of the known reader communities, nor did the Christian circles or the Church ever establish their own, independent and uniform *communio lectorum* of the Old Testament. Therefore, unlike as in Judaism or in the Samaritan community, a firm and uniform Christian version of the Old Testament never came into being. And although Origen in the Hexapla and Jerome with his Latin translation of the Hebrew text tried to move in this direction, both enterprises were rather private and did not lead to a uniform Old Testament text for the Church as a whole.

Thus, the Old Testament of the Church can only be conceived of as an eclectic and sometimes random collection of different textual traditions which have to be deciphered in their respective cultural contexts. On this basis, in my eyes, biblical theology can only be interpreted as the cultural history of the biblical text.

In his *Loci theologici*, Locus primus, De scriptura sacra, chapter 15 “De punctis vocalibus, an sint codici biblici coeva” (“Concerning the vowel points, whether they are contemporary to the biblical writings”), Johann Gerhard wrote as follows:

“Sine supra et infra, hoc est sine accentibus et punctis vocalibus non potest intelligi Scriptura. Lutherus addit: Sine intra.” – “Without ‘Above’ and ‘Below’, i.e. without accents and vowel points, one cannot understand scripture. Luther adds: Without ‘Within’.”

For Luther and Gerhard, therefore, a theological reading of Scripture would not work in the absence of a reading tradition (“*sine supra et infra*”, i.e. the Masoretic accents and vowels), which establishes the text, and without inspiration (“*sine intra*”). In light of the above considerations concerning biblical theology as cultural history of the biblical text, a further addition has to be made: since the biblical text is shaped in the course of reading, a biblical theology cannot be written *sine extra*, i.e. without reference to a readership and its contexts.